Grant's Long Branch Cottage, circa 1868
President Ulysses S. Grant’s fondness for the seaside town of Long Branch, New Jersey brought the resort national attention in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Soon after Grant’s arrival there in 1869, Long Branch became the favored social gathering place of not only the wealthy leaders of society, but also a multitude of sightseers. Unfortunately however, the Tudor cottage that became known as “The Summer White House” on Ocean Avenue in the Elberon section of Long Branch, was first stripped of its whimsical character and charm, later fell victim to neglect and vandalism, and was finally demolished in 1963.

It is unclear exactly why the house became a target for vandals in the early 1960’s. At that time the house was uninhabited but was owned by a noted plastic surgeon who wanted to rent the building to the Elberon Surf Club. A superior court judge who lived on adjacent property south of the house objected to this proposed use of the house by the owner. Other objections came from the Elberon Voters and Property Owners Association, and the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Newark who occupied a retreat house on adjacent property north of the house. Perhaps these conflicts drew negative attention to the house and made it a target for vandalism. A report in the Asbury Park Evening Press of September 14, 1963 stated that the interior of the 19-room mansion had been reduced to a mass of broken glass, doors and furniture.

Several unsuccessful efforts were made to save the house. City councilman, Edgar Dinkelspiel, who was also the president of the Long Branch Historical Museum, appealed to the Ulysses S. Grant Association who at the time agreed that the structure should be saved, but unfortunately did not have the funds to use for the preservation of the building. Dinkelspiel also appealed to the Federal Government, but their response according to a Long Branch newspaper at the time was that “there already are too many shrines for
Several measures led to the demolition of the cottage. The city building inspector said the structure was in such deplorable condition that the cost of renovations and repairs would be exorbitant and would far exceed the monetary value of the building. The structure had deteriorated into a fire hazard and had actually been the target of several arson attempts as well as repeated acts of vandalism.

In the early 1940's the Sisters of Saint Joseph purchased and renovated George Child’s home, “Sea Cliff Villa” which stood next door to Grant’s summer cottage. The home was formally opened as a summer retreat for nuns in 1942 and continued to grow over the years. In 1963 they seized the opportunity to expand the retreat house further by purchasing the Grant Cottage site during the week of November 4, 1963. A week later on November 12 the house was demolished.

At the time of the demolition the mayor of Long Branch said that he would seek permission from the new owners of the property “to erect a marker on the spot denoting where the 18th President of the United States spent his summers.” It is unknown whether this request was ever made. As of this writing there is still no marker at the site. Today the chapel/conference center of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Newark stands on the grounds of Grant’s former home.

This lost landmark is included in the book titled Lost America: From the Atlantic to the Mississippi, edited by Constance M. Greiff, which documents the senseless destruction of American architectural heritage. In this situation however, the country has lost not only an aesthetic structure, but also one which had important and unique historical significance.
Window seat in northeast bedroom of Grant's Long Branch cottage showing destruction by vandals in September 1963.

Grant's Long Branch Cottage being razed by bulldozers in November 1963.
Some people ask why Ulysses S. Grant deserves honor and recognition today. Ulysses Grant Dietz addressed this issue in a speech given to groups of schoolchildren at Grant's Tomb on April 27, 2001, at a ceremony commemorating the 179th anniversary of Grant's birth.

Grant's Tomb, New York City, April 27, 2001

Why are we here today?

What brings us here to commemorate the 104th anniversary of the dedication of this Tomb, and the 179th birthday of the man for whom it was built?

Many of YOU are here, of course, because your schools sent you here—hoping you’d learn something new, and see something you might not have seen before. Others of you are here because you’re interested in the Civil War, and anything that might connect you to it in some way. Still others are here because you are interested in Ulysses S. Grant himself—as a general, as a president, as a national hero.

I am here, however, entirely by accident. I was never really interested in the Civil War when I was in school. I never really paid much attention to Ulysses S. Grant when I was a kid—or even as a young adult. I was born into this family—completely without my permission. I was given the name Ulysses to honor not the President and General, but to honor my grandfather, Ulysses S. Grant III. He had been named Ulysses to honor his grandfather way back in 1881. Even back then he was teased about his name in school. So, of course, my grandfather was both proud and a little horrified, because in 1955 when I was born, most boys were called Tom or Bill or Mike—anything but Ulysses. So, to compromise, I was always called Grant growing up—and for that reason I didn’t really have to think much about Ulysses S. Grant or why I was named what I was named.

It was really BECAUSE of this Tomb that I began to learn about the Civil War, and to learn more about my great-grandparents. When the National Park Service began to try to figure out how to fix up the Tomb about ten years ago, I began to think about this place a lot more. Why was it built? Who was my namesake, that people from all over the country would raise the huge amount of money needed to build a place like this over 100 years ago? What did Ulysses S. Grant MEAN to the people of this nation, to get THIS?

Now, I work in the art museum across the river in Newark, New Jersey. Right now we are installing our American art galleries, and there’s a whole section of painting and sculpture that is about the Civil War. There’s one painting in particular that I want to describe to you. It’s a very beautiful painting, by an artist named Winslow Homer. During the Civil War, Homer worked for a New York news weekly, and he sent back sketches of the battles and scenery, which were published in the newspaper. Unlike today, people didn’t have the incredible mass of electronic and printed images in front of them every day that we have today. For many Americans, Winslow Homer’s Civil War pictures were the only direct visual contact that they had with the war.
The picture I want to describe to you is called “Near Andersonville,” and Homer painted it in 1866—the year after the war ended, and the year after President Lincoln was assassinated. It is not a big picture, but it tells a very powerful story. Try to imagine it in your mind as I describe it:

In the middle of the picture, a young African-American woman stands on a little porch at the front of a rough cabin. Behind her, the inside of the cabin is very dark, but she is standing in the sun. She is a slave, and this is a slave cabin. She is wearing a red bandana on her head, and a plain long grey dress—an old dress, that probably belonged to the woman who owns her—and she has a white apron reaching down to her knees. To her right, over a fence, she can just see a group of Union soldiers in their blue uniforms, marching past—but with the Confederate flag held above them. It is hard to read the expression on the woman’s face—she looks a little sad, but also frightened.

The title of the picture, “Near Andersonville,” gives a very important clue here. Andersonville, Georgia, was the location of one of the most notorious prison camps during the Civil War. Thousands of Union soldiers died through cruelty and neglect in this camp, and it was a huge scandal in the North. The slave woman, standing at her cabin door, knows what Andersonville is, just as everyone who saw this picture in 1866 knew it. She knows that those Union soldiers represent her freedom, her future—and her future is being led away to prison.

At the slave woman’s feet are wooden planks, leading in two different directions. To her right three gourds are growing on a vine. These are two more clues to the meaning of this picture. This woman is standing on the threshold of freedom—she is coming out of the darkness of slavery—and yet the path before her isn’t clear. She does not know what direction her life will take—what will happen to her. The gourds growing on the vine would have instantly been recognized as symbols of escape, and the Underground Railroad—gourds were hollowed out and used as water dippers—and the Big Dipper in the night sky included the North Star—the star by which escaping slaves guided themselves North to freedom. So this young woman hesitates on the porch of her dark little cabin, not knowing whether freedom or slavery will be her future. The Confederate flag raised above the Union soldiers is, to her, the symbol of her enslavement, and the uncertainty of her future.

When I look at this incredible, beautiful, little painting by Winslow Homer that hangs in my museum, I begin to see why this incredible, beautiful, huge Tomb standing behind me was built. I look at that young woman in the painting, and I see the millions of enslaved African Americans whose lives were changed forever because of Ulysses S. Grant. When I look at that young woman, standing fearfully on the threshold of her own future, and I can understand what the Civil War was really all about.

Today, as many historic-minded southern people are romantically clinging to the Confederate flag, the old “stars and bars,” because of what it means to them and to their southern heritage, I take another look at the Confederate flag in the Winslow Homer picture. Seeing that flag raised above the heads of the Union prisoners, I remember what it meant to that young slave woman and to the northern soldiers in Andersonville Prison. And then I know why I come here every year. To remember what the Civil War was all about, and how Ulysses S. Grant made such a difference in its final outcome.

I guess, in the end, that means I am here today because I have to be. Accidental or not, this place is part of my family heritage—but also part of our shared national heritage. We all should come here more than once a year, to remember.

Ulysses Grant Dietz
THE GREAT COMEUPPANCE

[The editors wish to thank Ms. Louise Letts, age 86, who recently shared the following Grant story which has been cherished by her family for more than one and one-half centuries.]

John Robinson of Galena, Illinois was my mother's uncle. He lived with his two sisters and was a master carpenter. Over the years he acquired houses in disrepair, renovated them and then rented them out or sold them. In Grant's early years, he was one who rented from Uncle John.

After the Civil War, Grant’s fellow citizens presented him with a large and lovely home on a high hill overlooking the town. Then they held a huge public reception for the General to make a presentation suitable to the occasion.

Some years earlier, a fashionable widow in Galena set her cap for John Robinson who was "comfortably fixed." She made her interest evident by those means allowed a woman of that day. John responded in his taciturn way and the two "became an item" upon whom Galena folks kept an amused eye. The widow, however, felt John needed more civilizing and bent her effort to that end.

The reception for Grant was well underway when the widow corralled Uncle John to accompany her, but she was dismayed at his failure to dress up for the occasion – in fact, he was in overalls and at work, not especially thrilled at joining the mob downtown. But she persuaded him to go, and the two joined the long line seeking to shake the General’s hand. As they neared the magic moment, the widow pushed ahead and extended her hand. Suddenly Grant saw the man behind her, smiled and reached out. "Well, if it isn't my old landlord John Robinson!" he said enthusiastically, "HELLO!"

Somehow, to the amusement of those who knew the rumors and savored the moment, Grant missed the widow entirely. After that, the widow dropped off our family’s scope. And John remained a bachelor to the end of his days, a hero to those who enjoyed The Great Comeupance.

[Lloyd Lewis describes Grant's pre-war house in his book, Captain Sam Grant saying, "Some Galenians remembered that it had been rented from a man named Robinson for one hundred dollars a year."]
A MESSAGE FROM FRANK SCATURRO

I appreciate the opportunity offered by the Ulysses S. Grant Network to fill you in on current happenings at Grant’s Tomb, the final resting place of U.S. Grant in New York City.

First, we are pleased to say that Grant’s Tomb’s recent history of extreme desecration and deterioration is a thing of the past. In that sense, the hardest work is behind us. But more remains to be done. Two major goals remain priorities of the Grant Monument Association (GMA): (1) the completion of the monument’s restoration, and (2) the site’s ongoing protection so that improvements made at present are not permitted to be reversed in the future.

Few are aware of the lingering problems. Although the main plaza to the south has been restored, much of the area surrounding the Tomb, including stairways and paths leading to the monument from the north, remains in serious disrepair. Grant’s temporary tomb site, itself a memorial worthy of respect, is still in deplorable condition, as is the nearby overlook pavilion. The monument itself has never been completed. There is still no visitor center at the site to provide the interpretation that historic sites minimally require. The site even lacks public restrooms. The federal government, which administers the building itself, does not even own most of the land adjoining the Tomb.

This is where the Grant’s Tomb National Monument Act comes in. This bill, last introduced in the 105th Congress as H.R. 546, included provisions for perpetual 24-hour military
guards and a visitor center at the Tomb to satisfy long-term preservation and interpretive needs, along with the federal acquisition of adjoining land and completion of the Tomb. The bill died when the 105th Congress ended its session in 1999. It should be reintroduced during the current congressional term.

Expressions of support from concerned citizens to their legislators are needed. You can help by contacting your representative in the House of Representatives (Washington, DC 20515) and your senators (U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510) requesting that they secure the reintroduction of the Grant’s Tomb National Monument Act. All congressional offices may be reached through the Capitol switchboard: (202) 225-3121

Aside from this legislation, the GMA is pursuing other possible channels for the site’s needs – especially a visitor center with restrooms. On another front, the GMA recently commissioned the composition of a Grant fanfare by a Juilliard composer, which was premiered at the monument by the United States Military Academy Band. Future goals include organizing a fitting ceremony for the centennial of Julia Grant’s death in December 2002.

Such measures are particularly appropriate as this most underrated leader in U.S. history is finally being recognized as the central figure he was. For information on how to join the Grant Monument Association, you can write or email us at:

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Thank you very much for your help!