Elsie Porter Mende, daughter of Horace Porter, wrote that of all the heroic figures of the Civil War era the one that was the most real to her was General Grant. She attributed this to the fact that her father told her many more stories of Grant than of anyone else, and also to the fact that she knew General Grant personally. Later in her life she recorded that "the first time I spoke to General Grant my hands became quite cold and my tongue literally clung to the roof of my mouth." She also attributed her admiration of Grant to the fact that her father "talked to me so earnestly of what the great soldier had done for America."

In a biography of her father, titled *An American Soldier and Diplomat*, Elsie Porter Mende devoted an entire chapter to Ulysses S. Grant. The following excerpts were taken from that chapter titled, "The Chief," in which she fondly recorded her childhood impressions of Grant.

I was a tiny child when my father began to give me a share in his feeling for the Chief. Many a Sunday afternoon during the winter and spring of 1883-84, which is as far back as I can remember, clutching tightly my father’s forefinger, I marched with him up Fifth Avenue to a house on East 66th Street. [New York City] If the weather was bad we scrambled into a noisy, rickety Fifth Avenue stage. After alighting from the stage we entered a house a short distance from the Avenue. A dark wooden staircase brought us to the door of a good-sized library, lighted by one window. There, in an armchair by the fireplace, a cane and a table of papers and magazines at his side, sat an elderly man with head and shoulders drooping a little wearily.

If asked today how tall he was or whether his hair and beard were turning gray, I could not answer; I know only that his hair was still thick and grew well on his forehead. What I remember distinctly are his eyes, his voice, and his hands. He had a way of suddenly looking up and fixing his eyes upon you. They were the finest feature he had, true and searching but never hard; they were of a deep gray-blue, and had sometimes a questioning look almost like a boy’s. His voice had a clear, carrying quality which was agreeable to hear; it was never loud. He spoke very distinctly, and used such simple words that his talk was easy for me to follow unless it turned on subjects quite incomprehensible to a child. Sometimes he told a story or spoke of the days when he and my father first knew each other; he could be amusing, in his quiet, dry way. More often he listened to my father’s talk, leaning forward in his chair, his elbows on the arms, his cane held loosely in his right hand, his eyes fixed intently on Father’s face. As he sat thus, I used to watch his hands; they were well-shaped, with fingers somewhat long and tapering, and he had an expressive way of using the index finger of his right hand. Sometimes, in the midst of the conversation, he would draw me gently away from my father and hold me beside him, stroking my hands and hair.
When my first shyness had worn off, the General won his way to my heart by inquiring after my dolls, and the next time I came he even remembered their names. One day, leaning heavily on his cane, he took me to a large glass case and showed me the wonderful swords, medals, and trophies within. At first I did not realize that all these glittering objects had been presented to him personally. Then, on my asking him why those people across the ocean gave him such beautiful things, he laughed, said something about its being a “notion of theirs,” and referred me to Father. I was delighted; for of course that meant a new story for me during our walk home down Fifth Avenue. When Father told me that the General had commanded great armies, fought desperate battles, and had been President of the United States, a country so big that New York was only a speck on its surface, my awe and admiration increased tenfold.

At Elberon, [a section of Long Branch] New Jersey, General Grant’s summer place was not a half-mile from ours, and I frequently played there with his grandchildren. To a small piece of land on each side of the entrance from the main road he had given the appropriate name of “the Wilderness.” It consisted of a few hardy pine trees which in spite of salt winds and sandy soil had managed to reach a respectable height. The other trees were low and distorted, with branches at all angles and tangled bushes growing around their roots. A small clearing had been made at one end of the wood, where were erected the swing and the seesaw. Here we played for endless joyful hours.

Occasionally the General came down and watched the fun. When one child climbed too adventurously, he or she was peremptorily ordered to a lower branch. We were not to swing too high or to seesaw too hard. He always looked out for the little ones of the party. He made once a remark which immediately aroused my interest. Turning to General Badeau, he spoke about some other Wilderness. I heard my own name: something about Porter’s being a surprised man if any one had told him twenty years ago that ... What followed I didn’t understand, a remark about three hard days. “Glad to see it a children’s playground.” I dropped down from the low branch on which I was sitting and ran after the General’s retreating figure. I was no longer quite so afraid of him, and putting my hand in his, keeping well away from his bad leg, I asked, “Was there ever another Wilderness than ours?” An expression half comical, half sad, came into the General’s eyes when he heard my question. “Yes,” he answered, “There was another Wilderness many years ago. Your Dad had some pretty hard work to do in it. And I was glad he was along. You ask him to tell you the story of ‘our Wilderness.’ He’s a better story-teller than I am.”

So it was that my father began to tell me his stories of the war, in which the central figure was always the Chief – in other words, the kindly old man, leaning heavily on his cane, who watched our games and sometimes joined in our fun.

But as the weeks went by I realized that the General was graver and more silent than he used to be in New York and that for days at a time we did not see him at all. He seemed to be always writing; we children were told not to make too much noise. Once I heard him
say, "Oh, leave the children alone. Let them have a good time; they can’t bother me.” General Badeau was with him a great deal, and would often meet Father at the afternoon train, read over with him at our house endless, closely written sheets of paper, and then go off with him to the Chief’s cottage. It dawned upon me that all this was connected with an afternoon in the late spring, in New York, when Father had come home in a great state of excitement. I heard him exclaim to my mother, “He’s lost everything—gone, wiped away, not a penny left.” I remembered too, that General Badeau had come, his round red face and short-sighted eyes wearing a troubled expression. Then I remembered subsequent conversations between Father and Badeau, in the course of which I heard the words “the Chief,” “new memoirs,” “fine offer,” and “Century.” So, by putting two and two together, I gathered that something terrible had happened to General Grant, but that something good had been arranged with somebody by the queer name of Mr. Century, and this something was connected with General Grant’s preoccupied air and his continued writing.

His health already undermined by the terrible disease to which he succumbed, old and penniless, Grant sat stolidly day after day, at his desk or in his armchair on the piazza overlooking the sea. (I can see him now as I write), a little huddled figure, his pencil racing over his pad, writing against time. Each sentence meant a further reduction of his debts.

When winter came my father and I continued our usual Sunday afternoon visits to him. The visits were shortened; often I was not allowed in the room—a bitter disappointment. My father, on leaving the General, would take me by the hand and walk down Fifth Avenue without saying a word. He looked so troubled I hadn’t the heart to ask for a story. I squeezed his finger to express my sympathy, about what I didn’t know. When I again saw General Grant he had aged greatly; the face was utterly weary, and deeply lined. Only the eyes had not changed; they were still young and glad to see us when we entered the room. He made no attempt to rise from his armchair, but his eyes and the warm grasp of his hand told us how welcome we were. He had great difficulty in speaking. Instead of the funny old-fashioned white collar and little black tie which was always crooked, he wore around his neck a silk handkerchief. Sometimes he couldn’t raise his voice above a whisper. Father talked about every conceivable thing that he thought might interest him. The Chief listened for a few moments; then his face relaxed, his eyes lost all expression, and he leaned back in his armchair exhausted.

There were days when he was better, his voice clearer; then he would point to the pile of closely written papers lying on his desk or the big table, get up, shoulders and head forward, shuffle the papers until he found what he wanted, and sign to my father to read it. They would comment and talk, the General’s face for the time resuming its old expression of interest.

On one of the occasions when I was allowed in his room, he held out his hand to say goodbye. I mumbled something, looked up into his clear, kind eyes, tried to speak, and followed my father to the door. Turning around for an instant, I saw him sitting back in his armchair, head bent on his breast, eyes perfectly listless. I never saw him again.
More clearly than Father could tell me through stories or through explanation, I knew that Grant was the man who stood above all others in his affection and devotion. And I appreciated this regard more and more keenly as through the years of my girlhood I saw the time and energy that [my father] devoted to preserving, by means of the great monument on Riverside Drive, the memory of his Chief.
“One of the most vivid of my early memories is going Sunday after Sunday to Riverside Drive with my father, laying my flowers before the ugly brick vault, thrilling to the salute of the sentry, and listening to Father’s laments on the nations ingratitude to one of the greatest of its preservers.”

Elsie Porter Mende
The PBS American Experience program which featured Ulysses S. Grant proved to be a positive representation and good overview of Grant’s life. A comprehensive website augments the program and contributes further information about Grant. Visit the site at the following web address: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/grant/index.html

The site features a description of the film with a transcript, primary sources, lists of books and articles, a timeline, information relating to people and events in Grant’s life, a gallery of Grant political cartoons, activities and other special features. It also includes a comprehensive teacher’s guide complete with suggestions for active learning.

The site also provides a link for those interested in purchasing a video of the program.

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GRANT HOMESTEAD ASSOCIATION HOPES TO ERECT STATUE OF GRANT

The Ulysses S. Grant Homestead Association is working to raise money to erect a statue of Grant in his boyhood home of Georgetown, Ohio. Limited edition prints of Grant on horseback by the artist Kevin Miller are available exclusively through the Homestead Association. The artist’s painting depicts Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant riding along Main Street in front of the Brown County Courthouse in Georgetown. As a boy Grant rode down this same street and frequently raced his horse at full gallop while standing in his saddle. The 24” x 16” print, titled “Coming Home,” can be ordered for $100 until September 1, 2002 by calling 1-800-892-3586 or 1-937-378-4222. All profits from the sale of the prints will be used to support the purchase of the statue.
GRANT

Upon his couch at dead of night the dying conqueror lay,
Through the still watches of his sleep breathing his life away:
When from the shadows of the tomb with soft and stealthy tread,
There came a silent sentinel and stood beside his bed.
Poised in its bony hand there gleamed a keen, unerring dart,
The sleepless glitter of whose steel fell pointed at his heart:
The while as listening there he lay at midnight came a call,
"Surrender!" and the only terms, are, "Unconditional."
The stern old warrior started up from out his martial dream,
As if beyond the picket-lines he saw the sword's fierce gleam;
"Halt! Stand and give the countersign," he gasped with hollow breath,
The while the skeleton between its teeth ground hoarsely — "Death."
"Death?" cried the dauntless warrior with sudden burst of scorn,
As though he reined his battle-horse and heard the bugle-horn:
"Death? What care I for Death, that at his call my soul should crouch?
I've met him at the cannon's mouth, I'll meet him on this couch."

Ho, spectral! Drop that lifted hand and lay thy summons by,
I fling defiance in thy face, O Death, I will not die!
Give me that shaft of sleepless steel that round me once again,
From it may flash in words of fire the battle of a pen."
So spake the chief and from Death's clutch he plucked that pen of steel,
And traced in trembling characters each thunder-bolted peal,
Till from each answering mountain and from each echoing nook,
The valley of the shadow with the tread of armies shook.
Mounting his steed at midnight as when 'neath that dread sky,
He rode down in the dark alone to conquer or to die,
He sat the pale white horse of death affront the serried line,
He faced the leaden sleet that swept aslant the scarps of pine,
He saw his blades and banners flash far down the dark ravine,
Till, plunged in smoke, he seems to fade in fancy on the scene.
The ugly rents opened and closed about him, rank on rank,
The bullet left its breath on him, the steed beneath him sank,
The sharp command, the bristling charge, the fort, the sulphurous steeps,
The fiery trails, the knee-deep field, the trenches' gory heaps:
All, all once more before him passed as on his dimming eye,
The midnight sun of memory shone o'er him from on high.
He felt the shadows round him fold their chilly winding-sheet,
He felt the heart's soft drum-taps for the final roll-call beat,
He heard the night-watch on the wall ticking its low tattoo,
So soon to hear the reveille sounding the Grand Review.
He saw the shadow of his hand as with prophetic track
It fell across the disk of time and set the dial back;
Signing his death-warrant, the while with life he still must strive,
For that hand had crossed the dead-line while yet he was alive.
Cold as a dead king's coronet gleams out all grandly now,
Set with the jewels of his crown those beads upon his brow;
Cold as a figure carved in stone a throng the marts of men,
Propped up by that white pillow, that hero of the pen.
He wrote, but not as poets in the tropics of their youth,
For there was only time enough for him to tell the truth:
He told the story simply for future years to scan,
Too near the judgement of his God to care for that of man.
What though each stroke of that sharp pen was but a flash of pain?
What though each thought a bolt that struck a splinter from his brain?
What though the weary watcher slept? While Death bent sleepless by,
Where honor on misfortune called 'twere cowardice to die.
Ah! 'twas not of himself he thought as memory came and went,
For one there was who sleeplessly as death beside him bent;
And when at length his task was wrought as love's last glance he took,
Her image on his lifeless eye still kept its living look.
Heroic man of iron mould, this modest hero dies,
With only silence on those lips, that rarest of replies;
Too near our eyes to see as yet what time shall show at last,
His faults were but the shadows that his solid virtues cast.
Ignored, rebuked, maligned, displaced, through all that could oppose,
Up from the bottom to the top that great subaltern rose,
Till, with three armies in his grasp, he stood at last alone,
The monarch of the mightiest force that earth hath ever known.
Himself his own prime-counsellor, without one petty whim,
He knew how to use rules without letting those rules use him.
With but one bright ambition that fired his eager ken,
Where tyros of the topic art took places — he took men.
True to himself, true to his friends, and to his country true,
He struck to save that country, and where he struck, he slew.
In war as terrible as blood, yet tender as the child
On whom amid the battle-shock so lovingly he smiled;
For though he seemed with visage stern to pity grown apart,
Beneath that iron armor beat a soft and gentle heart.
And when the war was over and treason knew its fall,
He entered not in triumph the conquered capital,
But with a magnanimity that history shall record,
Victor, he took the vanquished hand, but scorned to take the sword.
A grand chivalric conqueror, he never could forget,
Where brothers fought as bitter foes they fell as brothers yet;
And when as comrades hand to hand they bore him on his bier,
The blue and gray lost color in the crystal of a tear.
Fair garden of the grounded arms, through thy lute-fingered leaves
The northern and the southern wind shall meet, as summer weaves
From many a willow’s muffled harp a chaplet wet with dew,
While heaven shall give its rosemary to whom earth gave its rue.
Cut off in that far country to which his soul hath passed,
Where the dead get no despatches and the wires are down at last;
No courier can call him back, no orders reach him now,
No martinet can pluck the stars that blossom on that brow.
O Dead Immortal! take thy crown; thy martial dream is done,
Thine was the greatest battle that was ever waged or won;
Wrought by indomitable will in lines of adamant,
Still there, as if defying death shall stand the name of - Grant.
OLD MAN BLIVEN

By Bill Grant

Every now and then an interesting or humorous scrap of information pops up relative to President Grant. Often, the tid-bit has little or no direct or connecting history. One such morsel comes from the Weekly Nevada State Journal, dated 14 August 1875. A bit sketchy, the following account gives a little twist to the issue of whether or not Grant should run for a third term.

"Mr. Blivens, an old bachelor of Rochester, who is much absorbed in politics, visited the Widow Graham the other day, just after reading Grant's letter, and asked her what she thought of a third term. Now the widow has been twice married, and in response to the question she made a rush for the astonished Mr. Blivens - and taking him tightly in her arms exclaimed, "O, you dear, dear man! What a happy woman I am!" At last accounts Mr. B. had locked himself in his wood house, and was endeavoring to explain things to the widow through the keyhole."

GRANT COTTAGE OPEN FOR THE SEASON

Ulysses S. Grant Cottage State Historic Site at Mt. McGregor, New York is open for the season Wednesday-Sunday 10-4 through Labor Day, and weekends through Columbus Day. On July 20th the Sons of Union Veterans will present a patriotic ceremony called “The Passing of the Sword” to commemorate Grant’s death. The program will be performed by men dressed in the uniforms of all United States wars, and will be accompanied by musical selections. “Julia Grant” will also be present and will talk about the sad days after her husband’s passing and how the family was affected. On August 4th the Friends of Grant Cottage will hold a memorial re-enactment based on the original funeral service held at the cottage in 1885. Those attending will experience a glimpse into the past when General Grant was recognized and mourned by the nation and the world as a great American hero. This program, which was first presented in 2000, has been brought back after many requests. For information on other programs and events call 518-587-8277.