An anecdote is related by General Grant’s father concerning young Ulysses which aptly illustrates the “grit” of the “coming General,” as well as the faculty of adaptation of circumstances.

Mr. Grant, who had a contract for building the Brown County jail, had need of a number of logs some fourteen feet in length, and Ulysses, then in his twelfth year, volunteered to drive the team until the logs were hauled, if his father would purchase a certain horse which he thought an excellent match for another which he then owned.

His father consented and young Ulysses began work.

One cloudy April morning when rain was threatened, Ulysses went as usual for his load. After a long trip, he came back with his logs, and as Jesse – his father – and the hired man were unloading them, he remarked:

“Father it’s hardly worth while for me to go again today; none of the hewers are in the woods. There is only one load left; if I get that now there will be none for me to haul in the morning.”

“Where are the hewers?”

“At home, I suppose. They haven’t been in the woods this morning.”

“Who loaded these logs?”

“Dave and me.” (Dave was the name of the horse)

“What do you mean by telling me such a story?” asked the clear-headed father.

“It is the truth. I loaded the logs with no help but Dave’s.”

It was the truth. For this hauling, the body of the wagon had been removed and the logs were carried upon the axles. It was a hard job for several men to load. They would take the wheels off on one side, let the axles down to the ground, lift on the squared logs with hand spikes, then pry the axles up with levers, and put the wheels again. That a mere boy could do this alone was incredible, and Jesse inquired:

“How in the world did you load the wagon?”

“Well, Father, you know that sugar tree we saw yesterday which is half fallen, and lies slanting, with the top caught in another tree, I hitched Dave to the logs, and drew them up on that; then backed the wagon up to it and hitched Dave to them again, and one at a time, snaked them forward upon the axles.”

The ingenious lad had used the trunk of the fallen tree, as an inclined plane, and after hauling the logs upon it, so that they nearly balanced, had drawn them endwise upon his wagon underneath with little difficulty. The feat made him quite celebrated in the neighborhood.
It indicates a tendency to supplement physical weakness by head work. It is one of the most significant incidents related of his boyhood. It strongly foreshadows a disposition not to be thwarted by trifles; a precocious superiority to mere obstacles, which, when fully developed, might be expected to overcome those difficulties which are pronounced insurmountable.
THE GENERAL WINS A SWORD

The following narrative tells the story of how General Grant was awarded an ornate sword as a result of a contest that served as a fundraising event at the Sanitary Commission Fair during the Civil War. The account was transcribed by Marie Kelsey from the book, Reminiscences of an Army Nurse during the Civil War, written by Adelaide Smith in 1911.

The Arms and Trophy Department of the Sanitary Commission Fair was beautifully draped with bunting, Revolutionary, Mexican and other old war flags, and also a few Confederate flags, captured by regiments, still in the field, that had yet many a bloody battle to fight. A number of distinguished, elegantly-gowned women toiled here indefatigably, brimming over with excitement and patriotism, quite regardless of the unusual fatigue of standing and working so many hours daily, in their anxiety to allow no one to pass without contributing in some way to the fund, now reaching thousands of dollars.

Here was to be decided the "sword test," that would indicate the most popular general, by the number of votes cast at one dollar each. The sword was to be presented to the winner of the largest number of votes. How these attractive ladies worked for their favorites! A magnetic thrill pervaded this room, where men of fashion and reputation crowded, ostensibly to learn how the vote was going.

Mrs. Grant, a noble-looking woman, accepted graciously, but without solicitation, all who offered votes for General Grant, of whom she invariably spoke as "Mr. Grant." Mrs. McClellan, with elegant society manner, lost no opportunity in gaining a vote for General McClellan; her vivacity, personal charm, and courteous flattery won many a vote for her husband. I think if her son, our ex-mayor, could have seen his mother at the height of her matured beauty he would have been justly proud.

The polls were to close at midnight on the last day of the fair. Excitement ran high as the hour approached. At ten minutes before the hour the McClellan vote was far ahead, and that party was already exulting, confident of success; but at five minutes before the final closing of the polls, the Union League of Philadelphia, telegraphed, ordered "five hundred votes for Grant," and the sword was his.

Indignant Democrats pronounced this an act of treachery; an ominous dissent spread over the restless crowd, and for a time it seemed as if there might be some dangerous demonstration. Only the general refinement and restraint of the surging, self-respecting crowd prevented an outbreak.

Mrs. McClellan was pitifully disappointed, as her vision of the White House grew dim; and after the popular election of Grant, and the defeat of McClellan, she indignantly declared that she would not live in such an ungrateful country. She actually lived abroad
for some years but, like all good Americans, she was happy to return to enjoy the freedom of her own native land.

In the month of February, 1909, I had the pleasure of seeing again, in the Smithsonian Museum of Washington, the veritable sword of that memorable contest, which had been presented in April, 1864. Other swords and equipment of General Grant were preserved in a large glass case. A silver head of Liberty formed the handle, set with diamonds, garnets and turquoises, the hilt and shield in bas-relief of a helmeted knight, the blade and scabbard highly wrought in oxidized silver and gold.

The New York Sword – Presented to General Grant by his friends, through the Metropolitan Fair April 23, 1864. Blade straight, beveled edges, etched with military trophies and other designs; pomme1 of gilded silver inlaid with rubies, diamonds and sapphire; the grip of oxidized silver decorated with bas-reliefs; scabbard of sterling silver, polished and gilded, and engraved with Grant’s name and date of presentation. (The American Civil War Book and Grant Album. Boston, 1894.)

Julia Dent Grant attended the Sanitary Fair and when asked if she wanted to cast a vote, promptly paid the dollar fee and voted for General McClellan. In her memoirs she explained the precedent upon which she voted. “Of course I wanted my husband to get the sword … but it would not be in good taste for me to vote for my husband, would it? I never voted, save for at school for our May Queen, and I am sure the etiquette on such occasions should be that the rival queens vote for each other. Any other course there would have been looked on as selfish and dishonorable.” (Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant. Ed. John Y. Simon. New York, 1975.)

Ulysses S. Grant had his own opinion about the whole affair and modestly wrote to Julia, “A telegraph dispatch announces that the sword has been voted to me! I am rather sorry for it, or rather regret that my name has been mixed up in such a contest. I could not help it however and therefore have nothing to blame myself for in the matter.” (Papers of Ulysses S. Grant. Volume 10. Ed. John Y. Simon. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982.)
MRS. LOGAN REMEMBERS

Mrs. John Logan wife of General John Logan recollects life in the White House during the Grant administration. These remembrances are taken from her book Thirty Years in Washington.

Life at the White House under the administration of President Grant was a purely domestic one. It was the remark of all who had known its past that the White House never looked more home-like. It took on this aspect under the reign of Martha Patterson. Afterward, pictures and ornaments were added, one by one, till all its oldtime stiffness seemed to merge into a look of solid comfort. Its roof might leak occasionally—and it certainly was built before the day of "modern conveniences"—it might be altogether inadequate—to be the house of the President of a great Nation; nevertheless, that Nation had no occasion to be ashamed of its order or adornment during President Grant's administration. The house was greatly improved by Mrs. Grant's suggestions. Many plants and flowers were added to the conservatories, and were used with much taste in the adornment of the rooms.

President and Mrs. Grant entertained more distinguished people and scions of royalty than any other occupants of the White House. Among them were the Duke of Edinburgh, the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia; King Kalahaua; and the first Japanese and Chinese ministers after the signing of the Burlingame treaty. I was present at the state dinners and receptions tendered these celebrities, and have since sat at the tables of royalty more than once, and I can aver they in no wise surpassed in bounty, elegance, and good taste the entertainments of President and Mrs. Grant.

While neither the President nor Mrs. Grant could ever have been considered fine conversationalists, no one partook of their hospitality who was not charmed by them both because of their sincere and unpretentious cordiality. General Grant was full of quiet humor, and particularly enjoyed a joke at Mrs. Grant's expense, her frankness and pronounced opinions frequently giving him opportunity to turn what might sometimes have proved embarrassing, particularly when those opinions were in contravention to those of a guest. Mrs. Grant never remembered individual characteristics or histories. Her kindly nature would never permit her purposely to wound any one, but she often failed to remember those personal circumstances, tastes, or opinions which make it dangerous, sometimes, to express oneself to frankly. The absolute harmony of their domestic lives was ideal. The boasted domestic bliss of our ancestors in the early days of the Republic furnishes no history of a happier or more united pair.

The latter part of General Grant's second term was full of sorrow, and yet no one could have imagined Mrs. Grant's distress over the vituperation poured out upon her husband,
so careful was she not to gratify his enemies by betraying her unhappiness. In their wonderful journey around the world no woman could have borne herself with greater dignity and self-possession than did Mrs. Grant on all occasions, many of them most unusual, her kind heart and unaffected manner then, as ever, winning hosts of friends.

I had the pleasure of being one of the party who went to Galena to meet them in their old house in that city on their return from abroad, and can never forget that occasion, when, as if the wheel of Time had been turned back, we were again under their hospitable roof, with all the changes and scenes of the intervening years lingering only in memory like dreams of the past. Their friends of yore had replaced everything, as nearly as possible, as it was twenty years before; many of their old neighbors sat round the dinner table that night, and but for the touches of the finger of Time no one could have believed the fifth of a century had rolled away since their last home-coming. Both the General and Mrs. Grant were very merry that night, telling without restraint of the incidents and experiences of their travels around the globe. After a short stay in Galena they went on to Chicago, where such a reception awaited them as had never before been extended to anyone.

THE NORTH FRONT OF THE WHITE HOUSE.
GRANT VISITS PULLMAN ISLAND

The now world famous Thousand Islands of the St. Lawrence River in New York State began to develop as a popular attraction shortly after the Civil War. The area quickly became known as a sportsman’s paradise because of its excellent fishing, and many renowned people of that era vacationed there. George Pullman, who became famous for his railroad sleeper car, was one of the prominent citizens of the day who built an estate on one the islands.

In the summer of 1872 President Ulysses S. Grant and his wife had occasion to visit the Pullmans at their island resort. In January of that year Pullman and his wife had been the guests of President and Mrs. Grant at the White House, and in August the Pullman’s reciprocated by inviting the Grants to spend a week at their estate on Pullman Island. At the time Grant’s visit aroused much public excitement and was the cause for many celebrations.

According to the New York Herald, “During their visit, some brilliant entertainments were given and people around flocked by the hundreds while others came from afar.” An elaborate dinner was held at the Crossman House at Alexandria Bay, and another reception took place on Pullman Island. One local woman, Lillie Babcock Herrick, wrote the following account of the Pullman Island reception in her memoir titled My Yesterday’s:

My early recollections of Alexandria Bay would not be complete without mention of President Ulysses S. Grant’s visit to the Thousand Islands. President Grant, together with his party which included Mrs. Grant, their son Fred, General Sheridan and Brigadier General Horace Porter were guests of George M. Pullman of Pullman Palace Car fame. I attended a reception there given by Mr. and Mrs. Pullman in honor of the President.

The Pullman Island was always beautiful, but it was especially attractive that night. It was one of those calm, still nights with the moon shining down on the quiet waters of the majestic St. Lawrence. Around about were other islands with many and varied light displays, mirrored in the dark waters making it a fairyland. A large platform covered with an awning and lighted by Japanese lanterns had been erected for the dancing.

The island was illuminated with the large Pullman car lamps. The receiving line was formed in front of the cottage and the visitors passed slowly along to be introduced to the honored guests. President Grant appeared to me to be serious. He was courteous, but he didn’t smile much. However, I was very proud to shake hands with him, but I didn’t think of anything to say. Most of the people stopped long enough for a bit of conversation. I recall that an elderly man who shook hands with him just ahead of me expressed the hope
Postcard of Pullman Island where Grant visited George Pullman in 1872. Castle Rest, the palatial mansion shown in the picture, was built several years later in the late 1880's and was razed by the Pullman family in 1958.

GRANT AT THE MET

On November 13, 2003, the Metropolitan Museum of Art will present a lecture titled "Ulysses S. Grant: Seen and Heard." The Lecturer will be Harold Holzer, vice president for communications at the Museum, who will present many pictures of Grant in all media. Since Grant was such a famous figure – Civil War hero, President, and prolific writer – he was frequently the inspiration for artists, photographers and printmakers. The program reintroduces the complex figure of Grant through his own words as performed by the actor Richard Dreyfuss. The event will take place at 6:00 p.m. at the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium. The lecture is currently sold out; however for information on standing room call 212-570-3949.
that he would be re-elected to his office that year. President Grant gravely answered, “We can never tell.”

General Sherman, in contrast, was always smiling and seemed to be enjoying himself immensely. He was continually joking, and the people responded to his personality. In fact I thought that they responded too much in some instances. Mothers were continually lifting up their babies for a kiss from him. The General must have grown tired of it, and said, after one mother had presented her offspring, “I’ve kissed the baby, now for the mother,” and amid much laughter, he kissed her. That ended the baby kissing.

After the receiving line broke up, President Grant retired to a large veranda facing the River. I had been standing in a secluded corner of this veranda, watching everything that went on. There were only two or three other people on the porch when the President came to sit down there. Seeing me alone, something prompted him to come over and talk to me. I tingled with excitement, and I still remember some of that conversation. He began questioning me about the River and the fishing around about. I managed to answer him calmly and coherently. Feeling more at home in his presence, I felt I should say something other than replying to his questions, so I asked him if the handshaking didn’t tire him. He replied, “Yes, I am quite tired.” I asked him if his son Fred was at the party. He said, “Yes, here he comes up the steps now.” He quickly asked me my name, motioned for his son to join us, and introduced him.

Soon after this the guests assembled for the dance which turned out to be a masquerade. There were many lovely costumes, and everyone seemed to have had a grand time. President and Mrs. Grant did not dance, but General Sheridan and General Porter’s daughter danced together much of the time. It was seventy-seven years ago when I attended that gala affair, but it is still clear in my memory.

This presidential vacation advertised the Thousands Islands to the country thereby turning it into a resort for more than just the sportsman or the wealthy. According to North Country Life, a 1959 New York State publication, “The area became known to thousands because their President came fishing.”

Sources:


WILBUR WRIGHT VISITS GRANT'S TOMB

On October 4, 1909, Grant's Tomb served as a landmark for Wilbur Wright. That fall the State of New York was commemorating the 300th anniversary of the discovery of the Hudson River by Henry Hudson in 1609. As part of the celebration, Wilbur Wright made a 20 mile round trip up the Hudson River from Governor's Island to Grant's Tomb and back. With two American flags fluttering from the plane Wilbur Wright flew over a vast fleet of ships from all over the world. A canoe was lashed to the landing gear of the aircraft in case of engine failure. According to the Official History of the Hudson Fulton Celebration, "The daring aviator was gazed at in wonder and admiration by the men-of-wars men who saluted him with flags and steam whistles." Crowds cheered as car horns were honked, and trolleys clanged. It took 20.5 minutes to fly the ten miles to Grant's Tomb against the wind. With the wind at his back Wright made the return trip in 13 minutes landing 33 minutes and 33 seconds after taking off. The flight was witnessed by an estimated one million New Yorkers, most of whom had never seen an airplane in the air before.

Sources:
