In the following pages it has been my aim to present as faithfully as the material at my disposal made it possible, a brief sketch of General Grant's daily life here. That the task has been but imperfectly performed I am aware; and this, I may add, and I think, too, without egotism, not wholly from lack of ability better to perform it. As one, painting from a copy made by other hands and amid the scenes it portrays, must fail to catch something of nature's touch, so one writing of events seen only through the eyes of another; something must be lacking. If the reader catch a glimpse only of one meeting death calmly, fearlessly, his hands busy to the last with the task he has set himself to do, and so gather fresh hope and courage to himself, my labor will not have been wholly in vain. O.P. Clarke, Mount MacGregor, May 20, 1906.

Mount MacGregor

This mountain is one of the peaks of the Palmertown range of the Lauretanian Adirondacks. It is eight and one-half miles almost directly north from Saratoga Springs, and is located in the towns of Corinth, Moreau and Wilton in Saratoga County. It is 1,040 feet above tide-water. The name it bears was conferred many years ago in honor of its then owner, Duncan MacGregor; this was on the occasion of a large gathering here of Mr. MacGregor's neighbors and friends. The railroad formerly connecting with Saratoga Springs was begun in March 1882, and completed the July following. This road, by reason of the circuitous route it necessarily took to reach the summit of the mountain was nearly eleven miles long. It was abandoned in 1899 owing to the burning of Hotel Balmoral.

The Grant Cottage

As Mount MacGregor gradually became a place of resort for social gatherings of the people of the surrounding towns and villages, Mr. MacGregor conceived the idea of erecting here a house of entertainment. What is now known as the Grant Cottage, and by some as the Drexel Cottage, was the outcome. Many, in days past, were entertained beneath its hospitable roof. It formerly stood on the site of the Hotel Balmoral. When the erection of that structure was begun it was moved to its present location; this was in the fall of 1883. During the building of the hotel it was used as a boarding house.

In the early summer of 1885 Mr. Joseph W. Drexel, of New York, purchased this cottage, thinking to occupy it during a portion of the summer months himself; but learning that Dr. Douglass, [i.e., Douglas], General Grant's physician, was looking for some place 'in the hills about Saratoga Springs,' in which his distinguished patient might spend the heated days of the coming summer, and so escape the humid atmosphere of the coast, he placed the cottage at the General's disposal. This generous offer was accepted; and immediately preparations were begun for General Grant's reception. To fit the cottage for its expected guest it was necessary to repaint, paper, and furnish it throughout; not only the rooms now open to the public, but six sleeping rooms on the second floor. The fireplace in the reception room was also then constructed. But all of this was speedily accomplished and when General Grant and his family arrived here on the afternoon of June 16th, they found everything in readiness. The rooms open
to the public remain today substantially as they were then, and at the date of the General’s death, five weeks later.

In July, 1887, Mr. Drexel offered the cottage and its contents to the Grand Army of the Republic. This offer, after some delay, caused partially by Mr. Drexel’s death, was accepted. An association, known as the Mount MacGregor Memorial Association was incorporated by the Legislature of this state, and to this body the title was transferred by Mr. Drexel’s executors on the 19th day of February, 1889. The Trustees of this association are James M. Snyder, Commander of the Department of New York, Grand Army of the Republic, General Nelson M. Henry, Adjutant-General of the state and their successors in office, William J. Arkell, Hon. Watson T. Dunmore and Robert F. Knapp. Mr. Arkell is at present president of the board.

The expense of the care and maintenance of this cottage is now borne by the State of New York, the legislature making an annual appropriation for that purpose.

*General Grant’s Illness*

It is difficult to fix the exact date at which the illness from which General Grant finally died had its beginning. Mrs. Grant related to me this incident: In the early summer of 1884, I think in the month of June, while they were all at dinner one day, General Grant took a peach and began to eat it; suddenly he rose from the table and began pacing the floor, complaining that the peach had hurt his throat. He seemed to be suffering acutely. The family were then at Long Branch. Subsequently to this Dr. de Costa, who had stepped in for a friendly call, made an examination of the General’s throat, which resulted in his advising that some eminent physician be consulted at once. Dr. Fordyce Baker [i.e., Barker] was first seen; and upon his advice Dr. J. H. Douglas, of New York, was consulted. Whether Dr. Douglas then knew the fatal truth, and whether he communicated it to his patient, I do not think is known. General Grant reported to his family the general phrase, doubtless used by his physician, ‘a complaint with a cancerous tendency.’ The date of this first examination by Dr. Douglas was October 22, 1884.

Subsequently to this General Grant had begun work on his Memoirs; but the pain, which at times was excruciating, and the anxiety and disappointment seemed for a time to unfit him for the task. This was especially true as the cold, damp November weather came on. The book was put aside. He had no present relish for the work. Why should he write? What had the future for him? Only pain today, tomorrow, death.

But this passed after a time, and work was resumed. General Badeau who was with him at the time, relates how the General enjoyed having his pages read aloud to his family and listening to their comments. So the remaining days of autumn passed and winter set in.

Some time in January there was a consultation of physicians, Drs. Sands, Markoe and other participating. A piece of the diseased tissue was also submitted to Dr. G. R. Elliott for microscopic examination. ‘Malignant cancer’ was the verdict. It does not appear that this was immediately communicated to General Grant or his family; but the knowledge came later, and it came with well nigh crushing force. A few days, a few weeks, a few months longer, pain running
through them all; and then, the end. It must be a strong heart, indeed, that could face all this and not quail.

Speaking of this period of General Grant’s illness, General Badeau, in an admirable article under the title of “The last Days of General Grant,” published in the October, 1885, Century, says: ‘Yet it seemed to me after the first shock that General Grant still had not given up. His unconquerable nature rebounded. He looked at the physicians with an anxiety that could not have been so acute, unless the possibility of hope had been mingled. He submitted to every operation, he carefully attended to every injunction, and sustained the long siege of disease with the same determination and tenacity he had displayed in other sieges and campaigns with other enemies. But now he was on the defensive, it was the first time.”

As the winter days passed it was evident the disease was making progress; this was shown by the General’s appearance and his increasing weakness. He had ceased longer to take his meals with his family. His days were spent in his room. At one time it was thought he was dying and the family were summoned and farewells said; but the end was not yet. A hemorrhage occurred subsequently to this and again the family were called about him. This hemorrhage, however, instead of terminating fatally, as it was supposed it certainly would, resulted beneficially. The pain became less severe and the progress of the disease for the time seemed to be arrested. The General’s strength returned. By the 27th of April, his sixty-third [i.e., 63rd] birthday, he was able to rejoin his family at dinner. Many now living recall the thrill of joy that possessed the nation’s heart when it was announced that the General was again able to be out. This was in May. In June the transfer was made to Mount MacGregor. Touching the purpose of this transfer and how it came about I shall let Dr. Douglas speak:

‘I had intended,’ he said, ‘to have General Grant taken to a place where the air was clear and pure and dry. The family spoke of moving him to his cottage at Long Branch, but I said that I did not think that the humid atmosphere about the sea coast would be well for him. One day I made the remark that, if I could find a place somewhere around Saratoga, where he would be comfortable that above all others would be my choices for a summer home for General Grant. I go to Saratoga every season, drink its waters, and enjoy the pure, dry air. They say that Saratoga is a hot place, but it is not so. Of course, when we have a very warm spell it may be warm in Saratoga, but the air there is always dry, and it is cooled by the balsamic breezes from the Adirondacks.

One day, when I called on the General, Colonel Grant said that he had an invitation to a place near Saratoga on some railroad. I could not imagine where the place was. I thought it must be either on the Rensselaer and Saratoga road, or on the Adirondack Road, and I said I didn’t believe that that was the place for him. On the same evening, when I called at the house, they told me that it was Mt. MacGregor and described it to me. Of course, I knew where Mt. MacGregor was, and said at once: That is just the place I have been looking for. There is little heat there; it is on the heights, it is free from vapors, and above all, it is among the pines, and the
pure air is especially grateful to patients suffering as General Grant is suffering.' So it happened that just what we wanted we had.' See Oliver Clarke, Part 2 for more.