General Grant and Mount McGregor

by Martha J. Clarke, Custodian of the Grant Cottage May 1917-August 1941.

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Duncan McGregor and the Mountain

About the year 1870 this place known to us as Mount McGregor, was an uninhabited spur of the Palmerton range of the old Laurentian Adirondacks. It was loved by picnickers who would leave their teams at the foot of the Mountain and walk up. There were no roads to the mountain top, only trails. With one of these picnic parties came Duncan MacGregor who was then living on a farm located on what was originally an Indian trail, but now known as the old Glens Falls road. This farm is situated at the foot of the Mountain below the Eastern Outlook. Mr. MacGregor so liked the mountain that he began buying parcels of it, some from tax sales, until he acquired nearly a thousand acres.

Duncan MacGregor sometimes spelled his name MacGregor, sometimes McGregor, but the ancient territory of the MacGregor clan was in the vicinity of Loch Tay Scotland. The MacGregors claim descent from Alpin, King of Scotland, about 787. An untamable and warlike tribe, the MacGregors were called the Children of the Mist. Their war cry was 'Ard-Coille' (Woody Heights) and their badge 'Pine Tree'; their crest a pine tree crossed by a sword; their tarleton was red, black and white.

John MacGregor and the MacGregor Family

John MacGregor came to New York in 1781 from Thon Hill, Scotland near Loch Tay together with his family of four sons and one daughter. The names of the sons are James, William, John, and Alexander, and the daughter's name was Margaret. In 1787 James and William MacGregor settled in Wilton, then known as Palmertown, so named after the Palmertown Indians. James MacGregor settled on a farm at the foot of the Mountain, now called Mount McGregor, below the Eastern Outlook, with the home buildings standing a little to the northeast. There Duncan MacGregor was born.

Margaret, the sister of James, married William Sprott and settled in the town of Palmertown, on what is now the Ganservoort road. John settled near Fort Edward, while Alexander went to Iowa.

Duncan MacGregor and the Mountain

Duncan McGregor, son of James, built the original dirt road up which we drive, and he built what was known as a reception house, on the highest point overlooking the Hudson valley at the northeast. the summer kitchen and dining room were entirely separate from the main building and the dining room was enclosed in glass. this house was begun in 1871 and finished
General Grant and Mount McGregor by Martha J. Clarke

for occupancy in 1872. The lumber for his house was sawed in a mill owned by Mr. McGregor and built by him in a field part way down the Mountain. This lot joins Corinth road and later was crossed by Saratoga, Mount McGregor and Lake George Railroad.

The drive up the Mountain built by Duncan McGregor is the same now used by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company diverging to the left, the original road coming to the right to the buildings put up by Mr. McGregor. It was probably later that the road was extended to the Eastern Outlook where the finest view of the Hudson Valley is obtained. A part of this road has been abandoned. This portion of the road was always steep from where it now leaves the main road, but is steeper than formerly as the road at that point was graded when rebuilt. A part of the old railroad has been utilized as a driveway in place of this pieces of old road, and a garage has been built over the old road where it met and crossed the railroad. The road to and from the outlook has also been abandoned as a driveway.

Letter From Rev. Robert G. Adams

In the letter written by Rev. Robert G. Adams to his grand-niece Edna D. Newton (Mrs. William C. Newton, Hyannis, Mass.) and dated from Lake Pleasant, N.Y., Sept. 28, 1915, Mr. Adams says: ‘While stationed at Wilton as pastor of the Methodist Episcopal church during the years 1871, 1872, and 1873, I had a great revival at all three of the appointments, Emersons, now called Kent, Does Corners, now called Wilton, and South Wilton. I built a new church at Does Corners near the base of Mount McGregor which was then simply known as land belonging to Mr. Duncan McGregor. During the spring and summer of 1872, Mr McGregor was engaged with a squad of men in cutting a road up the Mountain side from the highway to summit where a clearing had been made I think the summer before where a Town Pic Nic was held.

My 3 appointments had each a Sunday School, Gansevoort, Methodist, Wilton Baptist, and a band and delegation from Glens Falls with a small artillery piece and a large number of citizens. I was the originator of the plan for the Pic Nic and much of the arrangement was left to me. I had to see Mr. McGregor for his consent to hold the Pic Nic on the summit of the mountain. I found him on the side of the mountain engaged in preparing a road as mentioned before. He very readily gave his consent and said he would be very glad and happy for us to hold the Pic Nic there and would have a roadway made passable by the date of the Pic Nic.

In our conversation I asked him what name he was intending to give the mountain. He said he had not yet thought of that, and I asked if I might have the privilege of naming it. He replied that I would just as soon you would name it as anybody in fact I had rather you would. Then he said to me what would you call it? I replied Mount McGregor. He said ‘I am pleased with that and that shall be the name unless a few capitalists from New York who are interested in the enterprise should desire to name it.

They did not, were all pleased with the name and the name has always remained. I little thought then that it would be the Mount of Ascension for the soul of one of America’s greatest Generals and most royal and loyal sons, General Ulysses Grant.’

The Railroad
Later on Mr. McGregor sold to a wealthy company from New York and on March 17, 1882 a narrow gauge railroad was begun and formally opened to the public on July 17 of the same year. An electric railroad (?) had been begun but abandoned. This road was called the Saratoga Mount McGregor and Lake George R.R. but never extended further than Mount McGregor. The Saratoga station was located just back of the waverly House that faced North Broadway and the Mount McGregor road ran beside the D&H tracks out of Saratoga over the bridge crossing East Avenue and coming into Wilton above the little hamlet and crossing the Corinth road and forming an S in climbing the mountain.

It was a lovely trip from Saratoga to the summit of the mountain and tourists were delighted with the view of the valley from the car windows and which was sometimes on one side of the coach and sometimes on the other. There were five coaches and an observation car. The engines were called John Brill and Henry Denton. W.J. Arkell ² of Canajoharie was the prime mover in building the railroad. And Joseph W. Drexel of Drexel, Morgan & Co of New York was one of the owners.

"The New Company," Balmoral Hotel and the Grant Cottage

The new company owning the mountain wanted the same site that Mr. McGregor had used for building on which to erect a large hotel so the main building, now called Grant Cottage, was moved to its present location in the fall of 1883, and used as a boarding house while the new hotel was being built. Mr. McGregor’s summer dining room was entirely separate from the main building and enclosed in glass. The summer kitchen also was entirely separate but the winter dining room and kitchen were in the basement of the main building (Grant Cottage), and the remains of these rooms still show in what is now a basement cellar.

The new hotel was called Hotel Balmoral and as advertised by the company held about one hundred and fifty nice rooms, many of them with fireplaces. The new hotel was called Hotel Balmoral and as advertised by the company held about one hundred and fifty nice rooms, many of them with fireplaces. The new hotel was four stories high with wide verandas said to have been twenty-two feet wide and two hundred and forty feet long. The rooms were lighted by gas and the verandas by electricity and there was sixteen hundred candle power light on the top of the hotel that could be seen for miles around. From the tower of the hotel was a magnificent view all around—east, west, north, south. The grounds were lighted by electricity as was also the little station and the Arkell Cottage.

The Arkell Cottage was originally built for an art gallery and stood at the head of Artist Lake where many exquisite oil paintings were exhibited that I have heard described by people who saw them. The new company stocked Lake Bonita with bass and pickerel and had a boat house and fine boats like those used on the St. Lawrence river and there was a team to take any of their guests over to the lake who cared to go fishing or rowing. It was said that Lake Anna was also stocked with fish, but I do not know what boats were kept there. There was a drive made to the Western Outlook and seats and summer houses scattered about in many attractive places.

Artist Lake which was an artificial lake blasted out we were told by Mr. McGregor. That also had fish but smaller like sun fish and perch. When we (Mr. Clarke and I) came here in 1889
there was the remains of a well near Artist Lake. The curb was still standing but the well had been partially filled and there was no water. The new company had an artesian well near the hotel but that was in disuse in 1889 and the company brought all drinking water from a spring in the valley while the water from Artist Lake was used for all other purposes in the hotel, Arkell Cottage and Grant Cottage.

I have been told that Mr. McGregor had a wheat field where the white birches now grow on the Lake Anna road. The new company built the dearest little rustic building at the Eastern Outlook. Rustic seats ran all around the building and there were many rustic chairs and tables. It was a favorite place for guests and tourists. There were seats and swings in the open on the grounds near the hotel. The little station on the west of the railroad track had rustic seats and that was also an attractive place. The car sheds where the last train stayed over night was above the station at the terminus of the road.

At the beginning of the summer before the hotel was open for guests we had four trains a day-two in the forenoon each way and two in the afternoon. During the height of the season when the hotel was opened, we had seven regular trains a day, the last one staying on the mountain all night. There were many extras, often double headers, when the five coaches would be brought to the foot of the mountain, then the passengers would be packed into three coaches for the two little engines to bring up the mountain. It was always a gala crowd and memories of the old days are pleasant. The fare for the round trip was one dollar.

Mr. Drexel
Mr. Drexel who had a small summer cottage in Saratoga Springs liked the mountain so much that he bought the building built by Mr. McGregor planning to fit it up for his own use, we were told, but learning that Dr. John H. Douglas, General Grant's physician wanted to get General Grant out of the extreme heat of New York City, and that he had expressed a preference for the hills near Saratoga for the General, Mr. Drexel offered to fit this Cottage up for General Grant if he would come here. Dr. Douglas was pleased with this location and the offer was promptly accepted.

Having been used as a boarding house while the new Hotel Balmoral was being built it was necessary to repaint, repaper and refurnish the house throughout. The fireplace was built at that time and the house was wired for electricity. General Grant and his whole family were Mr. Drexel's guests so far as providing everything for the family was concerned, for the service was from the hotel everything being done that possibly could be done for their comfort.

General Grant's Arrival on the Mountain
At 2:39 on the afternoon of June 16, 1885 General Grant arrived on Mount McGregor. Accompanying General Grant were Mrs. Grant, their eldest son Col. Frederick Dent Grant with his wife and two children, Julia Dent Grant and U.S. Grant 3rd, Mrs. Nellie Grant-Sartoris, the beloved daughter, who came over from England in the spring (March) when her father was so ill, the youngest son Jesse Root Grant with his wife and little daughter Nellie, Dr. J.H. Douglas, Mr. Dawson, General Grant’s stenographer and Harrison Terrell General Grant’s colored valet and Henry McSweeney Gen. Grant’s nurse.
The second son U.S. Grant Jr. arrived on the evening of June 17, but he would come and go as his wife was not well so did not come here, Dr. Fordyce Barker, of New York, was General Grant’s family physician, Dr. John Hancock Douglas a throat specialist, Dr. Henry B Sands a ‘famous surgeon’ was one of the consulting physicians, as was also Dr. George F. Shrady, a surgeon. General Grant altho suffering intensely evidently felt greatly refreshed by the pure air of Mount McGregor and is quoted as saying “This must become a great sanatarium before many years.” Gen. Grant completed his Memoirs here at the cottage only a few days before his death on July 23, 1885.

General Grant lay in state in the Drexel Cottrage until August 4 when a religious service was held. Dr. Bishop Newman of the Methodist Episcopal Church officiated the service being held from the front veranda and the audience on the lawn. Dr. Mr. Newman was the pastor at the church in Washington D.C. which General Grant attended while he was President and the two were warm friends. I have been told that Mr. Dr. Newman was located in New York City and that while living at 3 E. 66th Street General Grant attended service at the church where Dr. Bishop Newman served. The latter had a summer house on Circular Street Saratoga Springs at the time that Gen. Grant was on Mount McGregor.

Grant Dies on Mount McGregor

General Grant was placed in the front room of the Cottage between the parlor and northern doors and for a while the public was permitted to pass thru where Gen. Grant lay under a rich purple canopy- the room banked in flowers, the observation car draped and full of flowers was used to carry the body down the mountain, and the John Brill drew the funeral train. At or near our little station in Saratoga Springs the casket was transferred to a car waiting on the D & H tracks the engine and tender of the D & H carrying the funeral train having been beautifully decorated for the occasion using three hundred and fifty yards of black cashmere. 

A photograph of this engine and tender hangs in Grant Cottage and was presented by J.M. King of Saratoga Springs NY retired engineer who at that time was fireman of this locomotive. The engineer was Willis G. Fisher. The weight of the engine was 75 tons. Many years later I met both of these men, genial and fine appearing as I believe railroad men generally are.


Making the Cottage a Memorial

It was Mr. Drexel’s wish that the Cottage where General Grant spent the last few weeks of his life be kept as a memorial to General Grant. I was told that Mr. Drexel first offered the place to the Federal Government but that the federal government cannot accept a gift from any state but can only buy. However that may be in July 1887 Mr. Drexel offered the Cottage and contents to the Grand Army of the Republic and after some delay this offer was accepted and the Mount McGregor Memorial Association was incorporated by the Legislature of New York State.
Meantime Mr. Drexel had died but the title to the property was transferred by his executors on the 19th of Feb. 1889. The trustees of the Association were the commander-in-chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, the Commander of the Department of New York, GAR the Adjutant General of the State of New York, the President of the Mount McGregor Railway Company, and Mr. W.J. Arkell. In the fall of 1889 at a meeting of these trustees held in New York at which General A.R. Alger, then commander-in-chief of the Grand Army Presided, a custodian for the Cottage was appointed and the transfer completed.

The Following is Mr. Drexel's Letter.

Saratoga Springs NY July 22, 1887


Dear Sir:

As the General Government has failed to accept my offer to it, in perpetuity, of the cottage on Mt. MacGregor, in which the savior of our nation Gen. U.S. Grant spent his last days, and which remains precisely in the same condition as when he there yielded up his last breath, I now beg to offer it to the survivors of those gallant men who served the country founded by Washington and his soldiers.

The conditions I would suggest are that the Cottage and its surrounding grounds be held in trust by the Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, the president of the Mount MacGregor Railway Company, and one person to be nominated by myself as my successor.

With great respect, dear sir, I am yours very truly Jos. W. Drexel

Referring to this offer General Fairchild, in his report to the Encampment says:

‘This proposition is made in good faith with the intent to honor the Union Veterans by placing partially in their charge that sacred cottage. I recommend that it be referred to the incoming Commander-in-Chief and the Council of Administration with Authority to accept the same if the details of trustee and management can be arranged to their entire satisfaction’

This recommendation was endorsed by The Encampment. The Association known as The Mount MacGregor 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.

Oliver Pendleton Clarke Appointed Custodian of the Cottage

Conditions on the Mountain
Oliver Pendleton Clarke, a veteran of the Civil War, then living in Utica, New York, was appointed Custodian of Grant Cottage. Mr. Clarke was in the rebel prison in Andersonville Ga at the close of the Civil War where he had been a prisoner for nine months. Anyone ever learning of conditions in that prison would know that no one could come out of it and ever again have good health. Altho Mr Clarke took up various modes of earning his living after the war and finally studied law, he was never a well man and in 1889 had been a semi-invalid for three years, unable to work at his profession or at anything to bring in any compensation. J.I. Sayles, a lawyer in Rome, N.Y. and a Past commander of the Dept. of New York G.A.R., told Mr. Clarke of this prospective appointment and urged him to take it. While Mr. Clarke did not want it he was finally persuaded to accept it, his friends and his physicians urging it, and here he remained until his death on the 13th of May, 1917.

Mount McGregor was in 1889 a summer resort, but the season was over. A special train was made up to bring to the new mountain Mr. Clarke and the officials who were to induct him into his new duties. I think this was in October 16th. W.D. Green was in charge of the property on Mount McGregor and with a number of men that he employed to work in the woods lived in a portion of the laundry- ‘shantying up’ as Mr. Green called it. Fred Thompson who had been a porter at Hotel Balmoral the previous summer and Mr. Green were the only people aside from Mr. Clarke with whom I had conversation on the mountain that winter, if I except one woman who came with her uncle who had business with Mr. Green and this woman came into Grant Cottage to stay while her uncle was engaged with Mr. Green. There was a Frenchman living with his wife and a son of perhaps eight years, in a small house of shack on the ridge between the Cottage and the barn. The barn stood where the Rest House now stands. One day Mr. Clarke brought the boy in to see me but he was shy and made only the one call. Fred Thompson came down on errands for Mr. Green occasionally, but I was not overrun with callers. But I must not overlook two faithful friends-two great black St. Bernards that Mr. Green was keeping for Mr. Arkell. They were my attendants wherever I went all winter. As there was no snow that winter, only ice, I could go anywhere, and Mr. Clarke and I investigated the mountain quite a bit considering that Mr. Clarke was a semi invalid and I was tired out with the work of breaking up one home and trying to build (install) another.

The Cottage at that time was in no condition for a family to live in with comfort. There was no water. All water had to be brought from Artist Lake until Spring opened and when water was pumped into the hotel and when we also had running water. There was no place where anything could be kept from freezing. The basement cellar was all open to the weather. There was no fuel. There was no place nearer than Wilton where we could buy anything and no way of bringing anything up the mountain except through the kindness of Mr. Green who had a team of horses on the mountain.

But as always we have found friends and gradually we were able to make the place habitable. Mr. Green was kindness itself and did everything he could to make life endurable under adverse circumstances. I remember as well the first day that the trains ran when the season opened. The first train brought only a few, but the next brought two (one!) hundred and fifty- and the Cottage was packed. It was an eventful day. One man in the crowd had with him a quantity of foreign water color paintings and a few of us went up on the higher point not far from Hotel Balmoral where this gentleman showed all these paintings. This was my first meeting with C. P.
Penfield of Saratoga Springs who was somewhat master of ceremonies at the time. Mr. Penfield had come up hoping to be on the mountain during a thunder storm that seemed in prospect but the storm did not break until after the train left.

There was a blue black cloud at the north which we were watching and which followed the Hudson towards the South. Mr. Clarke went down on the train to Wilton to procure a supply of milk so I was left alone on the mountain and went to the Eastern Outlook to better watch the cloud. Just opposite the dear little rustic building at the Outlook this blue-black cloud divided, one just curving towards the mountain while the other continued following the (??) and in between the sun was shining. It was a most beautiful sight. Realizing that home was the better place for me I reached it just in time to escape a drenching. In our earlier years here we experienced wonderful conditions in the atmosphere. Often we were in the clouds so that it looked as though the cottage and not more than half dozen trees were all that made the world. Then again there was one of those rare days when it seemed as though I had never before seen the view before me. Words cannot express my feelings of thrill one of those rare days brought.

Meeting People Who Knew the Grants
During the years that we have lived in the Drexel Cottage we have met many people who knew General Grant personally and have enjoyed many accounts of interest connected with his life here. General Grant’s nurse Henry McSweeny came several times during our earlier years here and always spent his whole time between trains in the cottage and Mr. Clarke had long talks with him about General Grant’s life here. Henry McSweeny was a tall fine looking well poised man and was without question very fond of General Grant. He told of the intense suffering of General Grant in his last illness and showed much feeling himself although it had been at least five years after the general’s death before we saw his nurse, we saw him here several times as he came year after year. Harrison Terrell the mulatto who I am told waited on General Grant many years visited the cottage once. While I saw him I had no conversation with him. Years later friends of his after visiting the cottage sent me a Washington paper containing a record of Harrison Terrell’s son who was a graduate of Harvard College and a municipal judge in Washington D.C for many years, appointed I believe by President Cleveland, and a man very much respected and honored.

One of General Grant’s sisters with friends at one time visited the cottage and I served tea out on the front veranda. I do not remember anything particular about her visit except that she was a quiet gentle ladylike personage. I remember well Mrs. Grant’s first visit here together with her daughter Nellie and two of Nellie’s children, Algernon and Vivian. Algernon was a tall stripling of perhaps sixteen or seventeen years while Vivian was a little younger than her brother. There were others with them and as it was after the season was over they had a special train to bring them up. Mr. Clarke had a long talk with Mrs. Grant and went down on the train with her as fas as Wilton. I did not meet any of that party but at another time Mrs. Grant came with a train load of tourists and I happened to be on that duty that day. I should not have know Mrs. Grant was here had not someone, her maid I think, asked me for a leaflet for Mrs. Grant. At that time leaflets describing the rooms were given to visitors entering the cottage.

I had a little talk with Mrs. Grant after the crowd left but I left her to herself until she chose to come out when she told me some things about the place that I had not known before. (Below
More About the Mountain
In 1889 the buildings on the Mountain were the rustic building at the Eastern Outlook, the little station on the west side of the railroad, open at the sides, with rustic seats all around, and rustic chairs. There was a long, wide platform extending down towards the road where there delivered things needed at the hotel. A little above the station at the terminus of the road was a large building where the train stayed overnight during the hotel season to take all guests who wanted to leave the mountain in the early morning. The Grant Cottage where it now stands and the Arkell cottage on the rise of ground above at the northwest, which was formerly an art gallery at the head of Artist Lake, but had been brought here and made into a dwelling house where W.J. Arkell’s family spent a portion of their summers.

On the highest point was the Hotel Balmoral where formerly Mr. McGregor had built the first building on the mountain. Back of the hotel was a bowling alley with sleeping rooms in second story for employees. That building stood about where the gardens now are. Near by and nearer the road was the gas house. Back of these buildings and about where the superintendent’s house now stands was the laundry and in the end of this long building towards the lake was the dynamo and all the machinery used in running the whole plant.

There was a barn about where the Rest House now stands and where Mr. Green kept his horses and where formerly the driving and saddle horses of the guests at the hotel had been kept. I do not recall that there were any extra horses after we came here except Margaret Arkell’s riding horse. There was an ice house at the foot of the lake and there were little summer houses scattered here and there in the woods, and to the north of the hotel buildings there were the remains of an old laundry. In the years gone by there had been a driveway to the Western Outlook on which were still rustic seats and now and then a summer house still in evidence though much of the roadway had become obscure from disuse and new growth so that I lost my way when I tried to go over it but finally reached my objective point. This was a continuance of the Lake Anna Road. This body of water now called Lake Anna was formerly known as Black Pond, but named Lake Anna by Mr. McGregor in honor of James Sprott’s daughter who was born in the McGregor home at the foot of the mountain and of whom Mr. McGregor was very fond. Mr. Sprott and wife were living in the McGregor home where this child was born and later James Sprott was in partnership with Mr. McGregor in his Mount McGregor enterprise having sold his big brick house in Wilton and put his money into the mountain property with Duncan McGregor. Duncan McGregor and James Sprott were second cousins.

Near Lake Anna there was evidence of a well that Mr. McGregor had built. The body of water now called Lake Bonita, as told me by an elderly gentleman whose people had lived in that vicinity for generations, was originally a stream large enough to run a mill which was called Webster’s Mill. It seems that beavers built a dam and thereafter was called Beavers Pond. This man who gave me the history seemed to think that at one time this water covered about one hundred acres and was in some places forty feet deep. Mr. McGregor bought land and built a
high dam on the same site the beaver dam was built. This dam had been dynamited before we came here.

In 1889 there were still platforms where tents had been used at the time of General Grant’s death and funeral. When spring opened the air was fragrant with the odor of arbutus which grew in profusion all over. The mountain at that time was a mass of wild flowers. I never saw anywhere else so much beauty. At all times of the year the air was fragrant with the pines. When Dr. Douglas was told that General Grant had an invitation to come here he is said to have remarked ‘It is not too high, the air is fine, and best of all it is among the pines.’ To Judge Hilton General Grant wrote (he was not able to talk) ‘I find the air very fine here. This must become a great sanitarium before many years.’

I was told that General Grant felt so much better in this atmosphere that the day following his arrival on the mountain he walked unaided up the grade from the Cottage to the grounds in front of the hotel. He would let no one help him. That I believe was the only time he tried to walk out on the grounds. Someone loaned him a wheeled chair and he was taken a number of times to the Outlook to get the view there of which he never tired. The last time he was taken there (afternoon of July 20) he was wheeled down one driveway but returned another way. It seems that the train was over this road at the time which necessitated General Grant’s leaving the chair and walking around the train. Some thought that too hard and that it hastened his death but from meeting so many who were here at that time and hearing so many accounts I feel sure that General Grant had compelled himself to live until he could call his Memoirs complete and then simply let go. He had told his physicians that they were prolonging his suffering by prolonging his life.

Footnotes

1 The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company built a tuberculosis sanitarium on the mountain for its employees to recover from the disease. The buildings, which opened in 1913, are the same ones being used now as a prison. (Frank Shorter, Historian at the Grant Cottage).

2 W. J. Arkell shamelessly intended to use Grant’s presence on the mountain to promote the Balmoral resort. This backfired when people began to treat the area as a shrine and tiptoe around instead of coming there to have fun. See his Old Friends and Some Acquaintances, 1927.

3 According to the New York Times articles of June 16th and 17th, 1885, this list of people who attended to General Grant during his trip to Saragota and then up the mountain is correct.

4 Cashmere is defined in the 19th and early 20th centuries was a closely woven, soft, fine and light dress fabric made with a single cotton or wool warp and fine botany wool weft (Fairchild’s Dictionary of Textiles, 1996). The Fashion Dictionary by Mary Brooks Picken, 1973, defines it as ‘soft formerly costly dress fabric, usually in a twill weave.’


Ben: Perley Poore, in his Life of U. S. Grant, 1885, describes in some detail the scenes at the cottage and the funeral in New York. He names the following as pall bearers: Generals Sherman and Sheridan, Joe Johnston and Buckner; Admirals Porter and Worden; Senator John A. Logan and ex-Secretary Boutwell; Mr. George Jones and Hon. Oliver Hoyt; Messrs. George W. Childs and Anthony J. Drexel.” This list agrees with Mrs. Clarke’s.

The following is an addendum that I believe was added by the adopted daughter.

Grant Cottage
Grant Cottage was the first house to be built on Mount McGregor. A man by the name of Duncan McGregor, who was born on a farm at the foot of the mountain, just below the Eastern Outlook, fell in love with the mountain on one of his visits with a picnic party, and bought off parcels of land, until he owned about a thousand acres up here. He thought it would be a fine place for summer visitors so he built this house on the highest point. When a Company of ‘capitalists’ from New York became interested, and a hotel on the site of Mr. McGregor’s house, that building was moved down to its present location. Joseph F. Drexel, of the Company, bought the Cottage intending to fix it up for summer home for himself, but when he learned that Dr. Douglas, General Grant’s attending physician wanted to have General Grant leave New York City during the hot summer months, and expressed a preference for a place near Saratoga Springs, Mr. Drexel quickly offered his home to the General. His offer was gladly accepted and Mr. Drexel furnished the rooms almost exactly as the visitor now sees them, bringing pictures and furniture from his home in Saratoga Springs. The large fireplace was built in for General Grant, and we have been told that workmen left by the back way as General Grant came in the front.

Grant at the Cottage
General Grant arrived on the afternoon of June 16, 1885, and died July 23, 1885. His illness made it hard for him to lie down for several months before his death, so he spent most of his time in two leather armchairs which he brought up with him from his New York home, or in a wicker armchair out on the veranda. He loved to be wheeled down to the Eastern Outlook to a rustic summer house, where he could sit for hours silently watching the ever changing beauty of the Hudson Valley, spread in lovely panorama before him. To the East he could see Pico and Killington and other ranges of the Green Mountains, Greylock in the Berkshires on clear days, and to the South the three sisters or (brothers) of the Catskill Mountains. He predicted that one day there would be a sanatarium up here.

The Cottage Memorialized
When General Grant died, Mr. Drexel wished to have the rooms used by the General kept intact as a memorial to General Grant. It was in 1887 that transactions were completed, the property was given to the Grand Army of the Republic and the Mount McGregor Memorial Association
was formed to take the deed. (This does not agree with the above material that says 1889, not 1887). According to Mr. Clarke’s little booklet, dated May 20, 1908, ‘the Trustees 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 thier successors in office, William J. Arkell, Hon. Watson T. Dunmore and Robert F. Knapp. Mr. Arkell is at present president of the board.’ (You have probably noticed Mr. Clarke’s phrase ‘and their successors in office’ after James M. Snyder and General Nelson M. Henry. Watson T. Dunmore was judge Dunmore of Utica, New York. I think one of his sons was Russell Dunmore, who was a member of the state legislature. He was living the last I heard, but that was some ten or fifteen years ago. Mr. Arkell died sometime ago, and Mr. Knapp about four or five years ago).

Custodian and Cottage Conditions
Mr. O.P. Clarke was appointed as Custodian in 1889. He came in October and Mrs. Clarke came in December of the same year. She found things in a crude condition. He was living in the northeast bedroom, with a little wood-stove on a platform, his bed in one corner. The cellar door wouldn’t shut, and he had a board braced against it. The cellar stairs were of such uneven height that she said her backbone was jerked out of place every time she went down to the cellar. Mr. Clarke kept promising to fix them, but as often, forgot, until one day her patience was exhausted and she said the very next time she went to Wilton she would hire a carpenter to come up and do the job. The stairs were mended right away, and by Mr. Clarke! There were no back veranda steps, and huge holes in the basement walls had to be filled in. I don’t know when the cistern was put in. When General Grant was here, and as long as the hotel was in operation, they had running water in the summer season. Mr. Clarke died on the thirteenth of May 1917, and Mrs. Clarke was appointed custodian in his place. She died on the eleventh of August 1941. Had she lived until November she would have been 93 years old. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company bought it in 1910, not from the old Company who owned the hotel. I forgot to say that the hotel burned down in 1897, and the railroad was discontinued in 1900. Then I think the property fell into the hands of lumber dealers and private owners, and the Metropolitan bought from them. They began building in 1911 and the first patients came in November 1913. I came in May 1914.

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The hotel burned in 1897. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company opened a sanitarium of 20 buildings to Tuberculosis patients in 1913. It closed in 1945. It was sold to the State of New York who used it as the Mount McGregor State Veterans Rest Camp, caring for ex-servicemen not ill enough for admission to VA hospitals. Early in the administration of Nelson Rockefeller (1959 to 1973) Mount McGregor became an annex to the Rome State School for the Mentally Retarded, later known as the Wilton School. Until July 26, 2014, it was the Mount McGregor Correctional Facility, a part of the New York State prison system. The Grant Cottage, being situated on prison grounds, enjoyed excellent security. Now, security and other conditions are a concern.

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Suggested Reading: