A Little Girl's Dream for Her Future

When Julia Boggs Dent was about 12 years old she and her friends at the boarding school she attended in St. Louis named the occupations they hoped their individual future husbands would have. Julia, who had been reading a novel titled *The Dashing Lieutenant*, told her friends emphatically that she wanted to marry a gallant, brave dashing soldier. This little girl with an idealistic vision for her future little knew what awaited her as the wife of America's greatest soldier, Ulysses S. Grant. All of that was yet to come when Ulysses and Julia "shared one of the great, romantic beautiful loves of all American history." Bruce Catton

### Bibliography on Julia

1. *Grant, Julia Dent. The Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant.*
   New York: Putnam’s, 1975.


3. Briggs, Emily Edson. *The Olivia*

### Chronology

Julia Boggs Dent was born on **January 26, 1826**, the fifth child and first daughter of Frederick and Ellen Bray Wrenshall Dent, at White Haven, the family home near St. Louis, Missouri.

After attending a small rural school near White Haven, Julia, at age 10 years and 8 months, was enrolled in a boarding school run by the Misses Mauros at Fifth and Market Streets in St. Louis. She graduated from this school in **June of 1843** at about the same time her brother Fred graduated from West Point where he and Ulysses were roommates and good friends.

Julia spent the winter of **1843-44** with friends of her parents in St. Louis, Colonel John and Mrs. O'Fallon. Meanwhile Ulysses was stationed at Jefferson Barracks, an army post about five miles from White Haven. Fred, who was stationed further West in Indian Territory, encouraged Ulysses to visit the Dent family. He did so before Julia returned home, meeting her two younger sisters, Nellie and Emma, before meeting Julia.
Julia turned 18 in **January of 1844** and in February returned home from the O'Fallon's. Within a few days of her arrival Ulysses paid one of his usual calls at the Dent home and met Julia for the first time.

Julia and Ulysses were immediately drawn to one another and spent the spring months of **1844** together riding horses, taking walks, and exploring the countryside. In April Ulysses received a leave to go home to Ohio and visit his parents. Before he left he tried to give Julia his class ring. She declined to accept it and Grant headed home.

Ulysses returned to Jefferson Barracks from his Ohio visit on **May 20th, 1844** finding his regiment departed for Louisiana. Before joining his fellow soldiers he spent a week at White Haven during which time he escorted Julia to St. Louis to attend a friend's wedding. It was on the ride into the city that Ulysses proclaimed his love for her and proposed marriage. She told him she thought it would be charming to be engaged, but did not want to be married! Later that week she relented and accepted his class ring, giving him a lock of her hair in exchange for it. They agreed they were secretly engaged and would wait before broaching the subject with Julia's father. On **May 27, 1844** Grant joined his regiment in Louisiana.

**April 1, 1845** Grant was permitted a leave and returned to White Haven to obtain Julia's father's permission to marry her. Frederick Dent objected, saying that Julia was not suited for a military life. He gave his permission for them to correspond with each other promising that if, in a few years' time they had not changed their minds, he would reconsider. Ulysses stayed at the Dent home for about two weeks, a time that Julia related in her *Memoirs* as being exceedingly pleasant. She was not to see Ulysses again until **July of 1848**, after the conclusion of the Mexican War.

Grant returned to St. Louis on **July 28, 1848**. After setting the wedding date for **August 22**, Grant went to Ohio to visit his parents and tell them he was getting married. Jesse and Hannah declined to attend because their son was marrying into a slaveholding family.

**On August 22, 1848** Ulysses and Julia were married in the Dent home at Fourth and Cerre Streets in St. Louis. The ceremony was at 8:00 p.m. Julia wore a beautiful gown provided for her by Mrs. O'Fallon who had always taken an interest in Julia's life and well-being. The true details of the ceremony and party following are not known. Julia herself said in her *Memoirs* that descriptions of her wedding related years later after Grant was famous were obtained from persons who were not guests. The wedding service has been described in various accounts as being quite touching and very lovely.

On the day following the wedding service the couple began a trip on a riverboat to Kentucky and Ohio where Julia was introduced to Ulysses' family. They returned to White Haven in the middle of **October, 1848**. They left St. Louis in mid-November and went to Detroit where Grant joined up with his Fourth Infantry unit. Upon reaching Detroit, Grant was informed he was instead to report to Sackets Harbor, an outpost in Northwestern New York on the shores of Lake Ontario. While their surroundings in Madison Barracks were quite rough and the weather inhospitable, Julia created a homey atmosphere for her new husband and they spent a happy winter there.

In the **spring of 1849** they returned to Detroit and moved into a small rented house. In the fall Julia was pregnant and not feeling well, so the regimental physician recommended
that she return to White Haven. There on May 30, 1850 she gave birth to their first child, a boy, and named him after her father, Frederick Dent. Ulysses soon came to take her and their new son back to Detroit.

In the spring of 1851 Julia returned to White Haven after visiting the Grants in Bethel, Ohio. Ulysses, in her absence, was transferred back to Sackets Harbor. Julia rejoined him there around the end of August.

In the spring of 1852 Grant received orders that he along with the Fourth Infantry was being sent to the West Coast. Julia believed she would go with him (see her Memoirs), when the time came, Ulysses quietly told her she could not come. The trip would be too strenuous and dangerous, particularly because she was going to soon have their second child. Grant left on July 5th and on July 22, 1852 Ulysses S. Grant, Jr. was born at the home of Grant's parents in Bethel, Ohio.

In August of 1854 Grant returned to White Haven where Julia was living again, this time with her two small sons. For the next five years and 9 months she and Ulysses would try to make a go of it in various enterprises in and around St. Louis. They lived for awhile in Julia's brother's home (Wish-ton-Wish) and it was there on July 4, 1855 that their third child, a daughter they named Ellen (called Nellie) was born.

In the summer of 1856 the Grants built their own home, a log cabin they ironically named "Hardscrabble." They lived there approximately 3 months in the fall of 1856.

In January of 1857 Julia's mother died and her father persuaded the Grants to move back to White Haven. Grant now had to supervise the farming operations on all the Dent properties, a huge undertaking. The Panic of 1857 and the following depression contributed greatly to the end of his hopes of making a go of it in farming.

On February 6, 1858 Julia gave birth to their last child, Jesse Root Grant, named for Ulysses' father. Ulysses was sick with "fever and ague" during this year, adding to the difficulties of running a farm. In the fall of 1858 he sold his farm accoutrements and gave up the occupation.

On January 1, 1859 Grant went into partnership with Julia's cousin, Harry Boggs who ran a small real estate, loan and rent collection business. Julia stayed at White Haven while Grant lived in a small room at 209 South 15th Street in St. Louis, returning home every weekend. In the spring Julia and the children moved to the city and the family moved into a small rented house on Seventh and Lynch Streets. Subsequently there was not enough work at the Boggs business to keep both Grant and Boggs busy. Ulysses was not suited to collecting rents, feeling sorry for the debtors, as he knew himself how difficult it often was to make ends meet.

Around the end of the summer of 1859 Ulysses and Julia traded Hardscrabble for a comfortable house in St. Louis at 1009 Barton Street. Grant landed a job at the Custom House, but lost that position within two months when the person who appointed him died. Julia was sympathetic and practical, helping Ulysses in trying to devise a new plan for their future. Meanwhile, Julia's father, who had objected to the marriage years earlier, was now quite scornful of his son-in-law.

In March of 1860 Julia encouraged Ulysses to go to Covington, Kentucky, where his parents were now living and ask his father for a job. Grant did so and his father, concerned that one of his other sons was too sick to continue in the family business in Galena, Illinois,
told Grant he could move his family there and learn the leather trade. Ulysses and Julia packed up and left the South where talk of war was becoming contentious, a war that would ultimately remove them from dire straits, propelling them into the White House and a place in history.

April of 1861 found the Grants comfortably situated on the hillside of Galena, Illinois in a rented house at 121 S. High Street. Ulysses descended the hill every morning to work in the family leather store on Main Street. When Fort Sumter was fired upon, Grant volunteered his services to the Union and was appointed Colonel of the Illinois Seventh District Regiment, later renamed the 21st Illinois. Julia stayed behind in Galena where she welcomed a visit from Grant's mother and brother Samuel during the summer of 1861. Samuel died in St. Paul, Minnesota on September 13. The family gathered at the Grant home in Galena at this time and Julia was happy to see them. Samuel is buried in the Galena Greenwood Cemetery.

Shortly after Grant's narrow escape at the Battle of Belmont, November 6, 1861, Julia and the children made the trip to his headquarters at Cairo, Illinois to visit him. They stayed there through the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson (February 6th-17th, 1862). Grant then asked her to take the children and go to visit his parents in Covington, Kentucky, which she did. It was here that she read the extremely negative accounts of her husband's actions at Shiloh. Near the end of June Grant sent for his family to visit him at Memphis, Tennessee.

Grant was moved to Corinth, Mississippi on July 15, 1862 to take command of the army. It is not entirely clear from Julia's Memoirs and other sources what her movements were during this time. She spent time with him at both Memphis and Corinth. She also visited the Grants in Covington, spent time with an aunt in Louisville, and saw her father in St. Louis. While in Corinth the family lived together in the home of Francis Whitfield, a Confederate sympathizer who Grant sent north to a prison. Julia and the children left in the early fall and went to St. Louis. Grant was engaged September and October, 1862 in the battles of Iuka and Corinth.

In early November, 1862 Grant again sent for Julia who traveled first to Jackson and then LaGrange, Tennessee. They stayed at LaGrange throughout November. Headquarters then moved to Holly Springs, Mississippi, and Julia went there where she stayed in a lovely home occupied by the wife of a Confederate officer. Confederate women visiting the home insisted on singing Confederate war songs to Julia. She told them she would listen once, but never again, because to do so would brand her as a traitor. Grant meanwhile had moved on further south to Oxford, Mississippi and because of traveling difficulties, Julia could not follow immediately. Julia remained in Holly Springs until nearly the end of December, 1862. She had Jesse with her, but the older children were back in Covington, Kentucky with Grant's parents.

Right after Julia left Holly Springs around December 20, 1862, for Oxford, Confederate Officer Earl Van Dorn raided Holly Springs where Union troops were posted. Van Dorn sent some of his men to the house where Julia had been living where they asked for her with the apparent intent of capturing her. That was the closest call with personal disaster that Julia had throughout all her trips into enemy territory. Paper by MState about Walter Place, the home …

A few days after Julia's arrival at Oxford, Grant went right back north to Holly Springs and she returned there with him. After spending Christmas and the first 9 days of the new
year, 1863, there, Grant and Julia moved on to Headquarters of the Department of the
Tennessee in Memphis. When Grant began moving down the Mississippi toward
Vicksburg at the end of January, Julia stayed behind in Memphis in the Gayoso House, a
hotel, now having Ulysses Jr., Nellie and Jesse with her. Fred left to join his father
on March 30, 1863.

Julia mentions in her Memoirs that Grant came up to visit her in Memphis from
Milliken's Bend, Louisiana some time during that winter or early spring. In one of his
letters to her (March 27th, 1863) he referred to her making a visit to Cincinnati. In mid-
April, 1863 he sent for Julia and the children to come to Vicksburg. Julia arrived just in
time to witness the thrilling nighttime transport of the troops and ships past the Vicksburg
batteries on April 16th. On approximately April 23rd Julia left Vicksburg with the three
children and went to St. Louis where she stayed with her father at Wish-ton-Wish.
On April 28th Grant wrote to her that he did not want her to return to Memphis or the
Gayoso House without him, presumably because of Confederate unrest in the city.

Julia spent the summer of 1863 on the family property in St. Louis. She said it was not
a happy time for her as her neighbors were all Southern in their sympathies. After
Vicksburg fell (July 4, 1863) Julia traveled there to visit Grant. On August 23 he
accompanied her on her way back to St. Louis where, he said, she would be placing the
three oldest children in school. They stopped at Memphis where Grant was honored by the
citizens at a public reception. From there, Grant went down to New Orleans where, in the
early part of September, he was severely injured by a difficult horse that went down and
rolled over on him. He was taken to Vicksburg to recover and Julia came to stay with him.

In the fall of 1863, after Grant recovered from his injuries, Julia left to visit various
relatives. Following Grant's victory at Chattanooga, she joined him in Nashville
in December, 1863. In mid-January, 1864, Julia was called to St. Louis to the bedside of
Fred who was very ill from the unsanitary conditions of Vicksburg. He had contracted both
dysentery and typhoid fever. On her way to his bedside, while passing through Louisville,
Kentucky, Julia's black attendant (called her "nurse") ran away. Upon finding her oldest
son close to death and the doctor having no solutions, she found a second doctor who
changed Fred's medicine. Fred was almost instantly on the road to recovery just as his
father was arriving from the campaign in Tennessee. It was not long until both Fred and
Julia accompanied Grant back to Nashville. In March 1864, Fred accompanied his father
to Washington, D.C. when Grant was summoned by President Lincoln to receive his
commission as lieutenant general.

Shortly after Grant received his commission, Julia accompanied him on a return trip to
Washington where she was introduced to the Lincoln's at a White House reception. She
then traveled to New York City where she visited with her friends the Hillyers. It was here
that Julia was involved in a fund raiser for the Sanitary Commission. Votes were cast at
$1.00 each for the "most popular general," McClellan or Grant. McClellan was ahead until
the last few minutes when the Union League of Philadelphia paid for 500 votes for Grant,
who won the sword. Julia voted with a dollar herself, but she voted for McClellan, feeling
that proper etiquette did not permit her to vote for her husband. From there she returned to
St. Louis where she spent the summer of 1864 with her father and children.

By the fall of 1864 Grant was situated with the Army of the Potomac and Julia and the
children moved east, first trying to find a suitable home in Philadelphia. When nothing was
available, she went across the Delaware River to the little town of Burlington, New Jersey,
where she found a nice home at 309 Wood Street, and put the children in school.
Nellie's wedding.

**27.** Winkler, Nancy, ed. "Julia's Wardrobe." *Grant Network Newsletter* 8, no. 4 (Fall 2002), p. 3. In San Francisco, following the tour around the world. Sources listed above available full-text in Google Books, Internet Archives, or Hathitrust, are titles from the above list that are now in the public domain: Briggs Holloway Logan McCabe Singleton Willets

Arriving late at night on November 18th, 1864 Grant came to visit his family in Burlington. Mid-morning on **November 19th** Julia accompanied Grant when he left for New York City. Mobs of adoring citizens followed her husband everywhere, making casual shopping and enjoyment of the city an impossibility. In December Julia allowed Fred to take up residence at Grant's Headquarters at City Point. It was during this time that he went hunting on the river with a black servant. Dressed in his gray school uniform, the Naval pickets believed Fred to be a Confederate spy. Fred had a difficult time convincing them he was the son of their commanding general, but eventually they set him free. Julia stayed at Burlington until after the New Year.

In early **January of 1865** the Grants were presented with a house at 2009 Chestnut Street in Philadelphia, purchased for them by the Loyal Citizens Philadelphia. They were thrilled with this gift and Grant advised Julia to move there at once. She did not do this, but rather chose to spend the winter with her husband in a two-room cabin at **City Point**. This cabin became famous as Grant's headquarters. Here Julia heard many discussions concerning the War as various officers conferred with her husband during the **winter of 1865**. Meanwhile, her sister-in-law, the wife of General Frederick Tracy Dent, stayed with the children in Burlington, except for Jesse who stayed at the cabin during this time.

Julia had a number of unfortunate encounters with Mary Lincoln in March, right before the end of the War. On **March 24th, 1865**, the Lincolns arrived at City Point. On **March 26th** the Lincolns and Grants set out to review General Ord's army. Mrs. Lincoln happened to catch sight of Mrs. Ord riding a horse alongside of President Lincoln's horse. When Mrs. Ord saw Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Grant, she immediately left the column of soldiers and the president and rode over to the wives. But Mrs. Lincoln was not appeased. She was infuriated that some other woman had ridden alongside of her husband and let loose with an insulting tirade against Mrs. Ord. Julia was mortified and thereafter found excuses not to be in the company of Mrs. Lincoln. This humiliating experience may have saved General Grant's life.

Lee surrendered to Grant on **Palm Sunday, April 9th, 1865**. On April 14th, Grant attended a cabinet meeting. As the cabinet members left the meeting, Lincoln spoke privately to Grant, inviting the Grants to attend a play at Ford's Theater that evening. When told of this invitation, Julia quickly had an excuse to decline it, having suffered enough embarrassment brought on by Mrs. Lincoln. That afternoon the Grants, with little Jesse, took a train to Burlington. In Philadelphia, Grant was told of the shooting of President Lincoln. Earlier in the day Julia, while dining with Mrs. Rawlins, observed four strange acting men watching her intently as she had her luncheon. One of those men followed Grant and Julia later that day as they were bound for the train in a carriage. This man was John Wilkes Booth (*Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant*, p. 167, footnote 6).

With the War over, the family settled down in Washington, DC., where Grant was the head of all the armies of the United States. In **October of 1865**, they purchased a house at 205 I Street (McFeely, W.S. *Grant*, p. 245) and, at the insistence of the Philadelphians who gave them a house in that city during the War, it was furnished with the items from it. The Grants entertained in this home and Julia thoroughly enjoyed herself as the wife of the general-in-chief of the armies.

In the **summer of 1868** Grant was unanimously nominated by the Republican party to be its candidate for the presidency. Grant was elected in the fall election. Julia was not happy with this. She said "A soldier had always been my ideal, and I could not bear the
idea of giving up his military office for a civil one." (Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant, p. 171). Once in the White House, however, Julia embarked on a massive redecoration project to restore the glory to the mansion that had been neglected during the War years. She also entertained on a grand scale, hosting receptions and state dinners regularly. On May 21, 1874, the Grant's only daughter, Nellie, was married in a spectacular White House wedding.

In 1877 Grant left the presidency. By that time, Julia had grown to enjoy her role as First Lady and did not want to give it up. She was very upset with her husband when he told her he would not run for a third term. Upon leaving the White House, they traveled about the country visiting old friends. On May 17, 1877, they embarked on a trip around the world, sailing from Philadelphia, bound for England. This trip lasted 28 months. On September 20, 1879, they returned to American soil, docking at San Francisco. From there they traveled east across the United States, ending in Philadelphia on December 16, 1879.

In early June of 1880, Grant lost the nomination for a third term as president. In the spring of 1881, a group of several of Grant's influential friends raised enough money for the Grants to buy a house. Julia claims that they gave the money to her, not to Grant (Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant," p. 323. She and the general chose a four-story "mansion" at 3 East Sixty-sixth St. They began a round of socializing that lasted for several years. On Christmas eve, 1883, Grant slipped on ice outside his New York home, injuring his hip. He spent the winter recovering and ever walked without a limp again.

In the spring of 1884 Grant was swindled out of his investments, plunging himself, Julia and other family members into debt. They owed William H. Vanderbilt $150,000, and, feeling the burden of this debt, delivered to him the deeds to all their property and all the items of historical interest relating to Grant's military career and travels. This was very embarrassing to Vanderbilt, who tried to return the items. When Grant said no, he must keep them, he tried to use their value to set up a retirement fund for Julia. Grant agreed to that. A few hours later, when Julia found out what he had done, she told Vanderbilt that she could not accept this gift. She did, however, consent to give the historical memorabilia to the Smithsonian, where it resides today.

Julia's dear Ulysses died at Mount McGregor, just north of Saratoga Springs, New York, at 8:08 a.m., July 23rd. He left behind a poignant note for Julia that was found upon his body. Julia was grief stricken, a state from which she never completely recovered. She did not attend the funeral in New York. She received nearly a half a million dollars from the sale of her husband's Personal Memoirs, making a comfortable life for her in her later years. She traveled and spent much time with her children and grandchildren. She was the first First Lady to write her own Personal Memoirs, but they were not published until 1975. Julia died on December 14, 1902 was entombed in her own sarcophagus next to that of Ulysses in his Tomb at 122nd Street and Riverside Drive, New York City. Her obituary appeared in the New York Times on December 15th.

The final words of Julia's autobiography show the depth of her feelings for Ulysses S. Grant and the profound effect he had on her even after he had passed away. "For nearly thirty-seven years, I, his wife, rested and was warmed in the sunlight of his loyal love and great fame, and now, even though his beautiful life has gone out, it is as when some far-off planet disappears from the heavens; the light of his glorious fame still reaches out to me, falls upon me, and warms me."
The note that Ulysses left for Julia: "Look after our dear children and direct them in the paths of rectitude. It would distress me far more to hear that one of them could depart from an honorable, upright and virtuous life than it would to know that they were prostrated on a bed of sickness from which they were never to rise alive. They have never given us any cause for alarm on this account, and I trust they never will. With these few injunctions and the knowledge I have of your love and affection and the dutiful affection of all our children, I bid you a final farewell, until we meet in another and, I trust, better world. You will find this on my person after my demise."

This chronology of Julia's life was written by Marie Kelsey and is based upon several sources. They are:


If you know of any additional information or corrections to the chronology, please email Marie Kelsey: mkelsey@css.edu

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