

GRANT

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**Invitations to
Grant Birthday
Ceremony**
and the first annual
Memorial Day Walk



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GRANT FOR CHILDREN

A Conversation with Dr. Marie Kelsey

Grant enthusiast and bibliographer Marie Kelsey says that the most reputable children's biographies and histories today start with primary sources (letters, notebooks, diaries, interviews, newspaper articles, and other original documents) that contain firsthand information that has not been sifted, filtered, and edited by another writer. These sources are incorporated into narrative to elucidate a person's life or a period of history. Such works should be authentic, accurate, factual, fully documented, and include an index. In that sense, history for kids and young adults should be similar to that for adults.



Marie Kelsey

Biographers should let young readers make their own judgments about what a subject says and does. That subject should not be glorified, but presented as a real person with strengths and weaknesses. Exploring this reality thoroughly takes good writing. Kids, like all general readers, are looking for vivid writing that makes the person they are reading about come to life.

Visuals are vitally important. Vivid, clear, and crisp illustrations, like good writing itself, bring characters and topics to life. Kelsey also notes that timelines are used often.

Publishers roll out Grant publications for kids at a relatively high rate. They market their wares to school libraries largely in thematic sets (much like toy marketers). Sets on presidents, military leaders, or other historic achievers are offered up in numerous volumes. A figure like Grant fits into a number of possible categories, so publishers like Lerner Publications, for

example, offered Kate Havelin's *Ulysses S. Grant* in its Presidential Leaders series in 2004 and came back in 2005 with Susan Biv in Aller's *Ulysses S. Grant* in its History Maker Bios series.

Such formulaic series tend to be panned by reviewers who see more of value in singularly inspired books. Two of the best stand-alone books, according to Kelsey, are Howard N. Meyer's *Let Us Have Peace: the Story of Ulysses S. Grant* (Collier 1966); and Albert Marrin's *Unconditional Surrender: U. S. Grant and the Civil War*, (Atheneum 1994).

Kelsey believes it would be valuable to survey recent biographies and compare how they treat topics such as Grant's mother, his wife Julia, drinking, Shiloh, the presidency, and scandals. Her general impression is that most of the recent books, unlike older ones, address the drinking issue.

Some Recommended Books

Kelsey cites some notable serial and stand-alone Grant books for young readers that she sees as well documented and presented. She says this is not a definitive listing, and that some of these have their weaknesses. Here is her list (alphabetical, not in order of preference):

Ashby, Ruth. *Lee vs. Grant: Great Battles of the Civil War* (Smart Apple Media 2002). Grades 3-5.

Gregson, Susan R. *Ulysses S. Grant (Let Freedom Ring: Civil War Biographies)* (Bridgestone Books 2002). Grades 2-3.

Marrin, Albert. *Unconditional Surrender: U.S. Grant and the Civil War* (Atheneum 1994) Grades 7-12.

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GRANT AND BASEBALL

On May 1, 1883, 15,000 fans filed into the original Polo Grounds in New York City for an opening day baseball game. Among them was the former president of the United States, Ulysses S. Grant—the first president (albeit retired) to attend a home opener.

The emergence of Grant had coincided with that of baseball. During his lifetime, baseball evolved from a boy's game, to a leisure activity of gentlemen's clubs, all the way to the big leagues and big commerce. Baseball's rules, standards, and positions were codified, refined, and specialized, and the sport was commercialized. Similar processes were occurring in an industrializing and urbanizing America.

Paradoxically, Grant watched a segregated ball game that day in 1883. The National Association of Base Ball Players in 1868 excluded "colored persons" from the sport, although some participated in 1878 and in 1884. Segregation would continue in the major leagues until 1946.

Grant had encountered baseball for years before enjoying the Polo Grounds game. He quite possibly played as a young man, and almost certainly saw his troops playing the game during the Civil War. Grant

biographers Geoffrey Perret and Jean Edward Smith noted that President Grant would take afternoon walks around Washington and often happen



Grant with family in 1883

upon pickup baseball games. Perret wrote that the president would occasionally take a swing of the bat and "test the pitching." It is likely that Grant's son Jesse was occasionally one of the players.

Jesse, writing in his memoirs decades later, recalled playing baseball on the grounds just south of the White House, near the Washington Monument. He and his friends called their team "the Potomac Base Ball Club," and idolized pitcher Billy Williams and outfielder and utility infielder Davy Force. Jesse also wrote that from his gang of half-pint baseball players grew a club of friends called the Kick, Fight, and Run Society that stayed in touch and held reunions

for decades.

On June 26, 1869, Grant became the first president to welcome a professional team to the White House. The Cincinnati Red Stockings, the first openly professional baseball team, was in town to play a game against the Washington Olympics—which, incidentally, would be rained out in the fifth inning. The Red Stockings, members of the National Association of Base Ball Players, would make history by winning 81 consecutive games from 1869 to 1870.

In 1876, late in Grant's presidency, the National League was formed. Baseball continued to grow at all levels nationwide through the 1870s and 1880s. The 1883 Polo Grounds game attended by Grant and 15,000 others was the first major league game of the Gothams (also known as the New Yorks or the New York Nationals), the franchise that would later be called the New York Giants. It was also the first at the newly opened Polo Grounds in New York City, which sat at the northern edge of Central Park between Fifth and Sixth Avenue, from 110th to 112th streets.

The stadium was the first of four in the city to be called the Polo Grounds, and was the only one where polo was actually played. The game in 1883 between the Gothams and the Boston Beaneaters was different from today's

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Joe Levy

Joseph E. Levy

In February, the GMA family lost one of its most delightful members when Joseph Levy succumbed to cancer. Joe, who reveled in his image as a nerdy computer wonk — mismatched clothing, stained tie, plastic pocket protector and all — was one of those technical magicians who volunteered his services to keep the GMA's computer database and records up to snuff.

No matter what hour of the day, day of the week, or nature of the crisis, Joe was always there for the GMA, including with his kind words, quick quips, easy laugh, and irrepressible smile.

A lifelong resident of Brooklyn, New York, Joe leaves behind his wife Sandy, daughter Debbie and son-in-law Michael, and granddaughter Samantha, who hopefully always will have warm memories of her wonderful grandfather.

Joe Levy will be sorely missed.

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version, including a flat pitcher's square instead of a mound; underhand pitching (it switched officially to overhand in 1889) a shorter distance to the plate; batters requesting a high or low strike zone; and just one umpire on the field, standing about 15 feet behind and to the right of the batter's box.

There were opening day festivities before and after the game, including a performance by (Claudio S.) Grafulla's Seventh Regiment Band, which played "See the Conquering Hero Comes." Grant did not make the first pitch; President William H. Taft started that tradition in 1910.

Grant and the others in the crowd saw what *The New York Times* the

following day called "A Fine Game at the Bat." The newspaper reported that the crowd was the largest "that ever assembled on a ball ground in this city." The story went on: "Among those present was Gen. Grant. He sat in the rear of the grand stand and apparently enjoyed the game, as he at times took part in the applause given the players." New York pitcher Mickey Welch "pitched

in capital style," while short stop Dasher Troy had a bad day, with five errors, but made up for it "with a splendid running catch" late in the game, the *Times* reported. New York jumped out to an early lead, and Boston narrowed the gap but came up short in the end, a scenario repeated many times over the next 120 years. New York won 7-5.

It is hard to imagine a more thoroughly American moment than a baseball game in New York City with President Grant. This is why Grant's interaction with the sport is interesting. It brought together one of the greatest Americans and the national pastime.



A game at the original Polo Grounds in New York City in 1886, three seasons after Grant's visit.

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The life and extraordinary public service of General and President Ulysses S. Grant is reflected in the grand monument in New York City that serves as his final resting place — popularly known as Grant's Tomb. The Grant Monument Association (GMA), the successor to the organization of the same name that built and administered Grant's Tomb until it was transferred to the National Park Service in 1959, was formed to ensure that this important part of our heritage would be preserved. To become a member of the GMA or renew your membership for 2006, fill out the form below. Contributors of \$50 or more will receive a signed copy of Frank Scaturro's *President Grant Reconsidered*.

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Check out www.grantstomb.org for new features on Grant, including an extended article on baseball, plus

- The influence of Zachary Taylor on Grant;
- The story of Grant's "summer White House" in Long Branch, New Jersey; and
- Teaching Grant, an extended exploration of how students today encounter Grant.

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Meyer, Howard N. *Let Us Have Peace: the Story of Ulysses S. Grant* (Collier Books 1966) Grades 7-12.

Schuman, Michael A. *Ulysses S. Grant (United States Presidents)* (Enslow Publishers 2004) Grades 5-8.

Williams, Jean Kinney. *Ulysses S. Grant*, (Compass Point Books 2002). Grades 4-6.

Marie Kelsey is Assistant Professor in the Education Department and Educational Media & Technology Program Director at The College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, Minnesota. She is the author of *Ulysses S. Grant: A Bibliography* (Greenwood Press 2005) and is also the author of the *Ulysses S. Grant Network website* (www.css.edu/usgrant).