

GRANT

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First article in a series

Plus Special Insert:
*Invitation to Grant
Birthday Ceremony
and
GMA Membership Form*



Grant Monument
Association

GRANT

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GRANT IN THE MEDIA

This issue of *Grant* considers how mass media have depicted U.S. Grant. There are at least two reasons to do so: 1) the ubiquity of mass media in our daily lives and 2) the evolution of the popular conception of Grant.

Print, photography, drawing, painting, and sculpture were the eyewitness media of Grant's day. Sound recording and motion pictures have proliferated since his death, increasingly creating depictions from collective memory as Grant's contemporaries passed from the scene.

One prevalent visage of Grant that took hold after his death is formidable and imposing. It includes the two most widely published images of Grant: the stylized portrait on the 50-dollar bill and the photo of

the General leaning against a tree on the battlefield in 1864. These images depict a grizzled, hardbitten human mountain, seemingly powerful enough to lend some sort of physical justification to a more abstract greatness.

At the opposite pole, a more mercurial, but perhaps more accurate image has also survived. It is exemplified by the series of fascinating, unposed, candid shots on the pews outside Bethesda Church in June 1864. Here a slight, unassuming, and pensive Grant blends in, reads a map over General Meade's shoulder, and sits quietly in thought amid the blurred movement of horses, equipment, and men in the background. Most visual or physical depictions of Grant lay somewhere be-

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CEREMONY COMMEMORATES JULIA GRANT

The GMA hosted a commemoration of the life of First Lady Julia Dent Grant at Grant's Tomb on December 14, 2002 -- 100 years to the day after her death. The ceremony was held indoors on a somewhat wet but mild day and was well attended by representatives of numerous groups, including the Daughters of Union Veterans, Sons of Union Veterans, the Longstreet Society, and the Girl Scouts of America. The ceremony was emceed by GMA President Frank Scaturro. Lesley Dean, national chaplain of the Daughters of Union Veterans, offered prayerful reflections on Mrs. Grant

from her own time as well as today. Chris Keenan, site supervisor of Grant's



Prof. Carole Adams speaking at the Tomb

Tomb, offered a warm welcome from the National Park Service and ex-

pressed his hope for future collaboration between the site staff and the GMA.

A message from First Lady Laura Bush prepared for the occasion was read by Julia Grant's great-great-granddaughter, Claire R. Telecki. Mrs. Bush's message praised Julia Grant as a "dedicated mother, devoted wife, and goodwill ambassador for the United States" who "continued to be active in the life of her country" after her husband's death. Representing Governor George Pataki was Lynn Rollins, Deputy Director of the New York State Divi-

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tween these two.

Many artists working after Grant's lifetime crafted stylized images by drawing from the great number of photographs taken of Grant as he aged.

The physical, formidable visage of this pool of images has become more popular than those of the slender, small-framed, unassuming man who sat on the pews near Bethesda Church.



Candid scenes of the historical Grant in action near Bethesda Church (1864)

Grant was more a man

of substance than of form — but of course, Hollywood and television are notorious for insight that is only skin deep. For the entertainment media, the course and rugged appear-

ance in the most popular Grant images swelled into a caricature of coarseness in character. Missing from these images is the sensitive and reserved personal-

ity who shunned much of the behavior that defines the theatrical Grant persona.

Mass media carries the power to entertain, exploit, and instruct with pervasive force beyond that of books. As the GMA works toward a fair accounting of the memory and legacy of Grant, it is appropriate to describe and interpret how this great American has fared in mass media. This issue begins that process with a look at Grant in motion pictures.



The most widely published photo of Grant (1864) offers a rugged image



GRANT IN FILM



U.S. Grant is depicted in the movies with a consistently inaccurate image. He's a short, rough, course man, usually scowling. The gruff demeanor is emphasized by a large cigar and by the implication that he's never too far from the bottle.

When he appears in a scene, he is rarely the main focus of the story being told. Rather, he seems thrust into the screenplay to serve as a supporting player, enhancing the seemingly more interesting lives of such real figures as Abraham Lincoln and General William T. Sherman, or such fictitious characters as the Lone Ranger.

Throughout his life, the historical Grant was a man whose values and character avoided the pitfalls that often face those who are given military and political

power, and who remained steadfast in both his beliefs and his modesty. His remarkable warlike resolve was combined with a deep compassion. Perhaps the traits that have been most conspicuously neglected by Hollywood's stereotypes of Grant were his sensitivity and compassion. General Horace Porter, Grant's aide de camp (and GMA president) once said,

"Inexorable as he was in battle, war never hardened his heart or weakened the strength of his natural affections. He retained a singularly sensitive nature, a rare tenderness of feeling, shrank from the sight of

blood, and was painfully alive to every form of human suffering."

Other than perhaps a handful of early films that depicted the General, none of the over 75 large- and small-screen depictions of Grant displayed these traits. The first movie that featured Ulysses S. Grant as a character is believed to be *The Days Of '61*, a 15-



Grant as depicted in D.W. Griffiths' *Abraham Lincoln* (1930), with cigar and bottle in the foreground

minute melodrama produced by Thomas Edison in 1908, less than a quarter-century after Grant's death. In this film, the General has a brief scene in which he refuses to hear the pleas of the sister of a condemned

Confederate soldier.

A year later, the 12-minute *The Old Soldier's Story* featured a Confederate veteran recalling how he tricked General Grant into carrying a secret message to a Confederate general in Fredericksburg.

Grant is shown sparing the life of a Confederate spy in *Lt. Grey* (1911) and in a similar vein commutes the death sentence of a Southern soldier in *The Littlest Rebel* (1914). In *A Question Of Courage* (1914), Grant again magnanimously issues a pardon, this time to a civilian mistakenly imprisoned for cowardice.

The first serious portrayal of Grant in a movie came in D. W. Griffiths' landmark but controversial epic, *The Birth Of A Nation* (1915). In a brief scene

FILM: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

depicting the surrender at Appomattox, an excessively casual Grant is seen arrogantly walking around the room, puffing a cigar as a grim but dignified Robert E. Lee mournfully signs the terms of surrender. The historical Grant treated Appomattox with the utmost dignity and sensitivity toward his defeated foe. None of that was evident in Griffiths' film, which was most notorious for its overt racism.

In *Abraham Lincoln* (1930), Griffiths' first sound film (a project he later described as "a nightmare of the mind and nerves"), the initial meeting between Lincoln and Grant is played out in a White House drawing room in which the General emits billows of cigar smoke that upset Mrs. Lincoln. The president appoints Grant supreme commander and asks him to visit him often so he can drive the first lady away with his cigars.

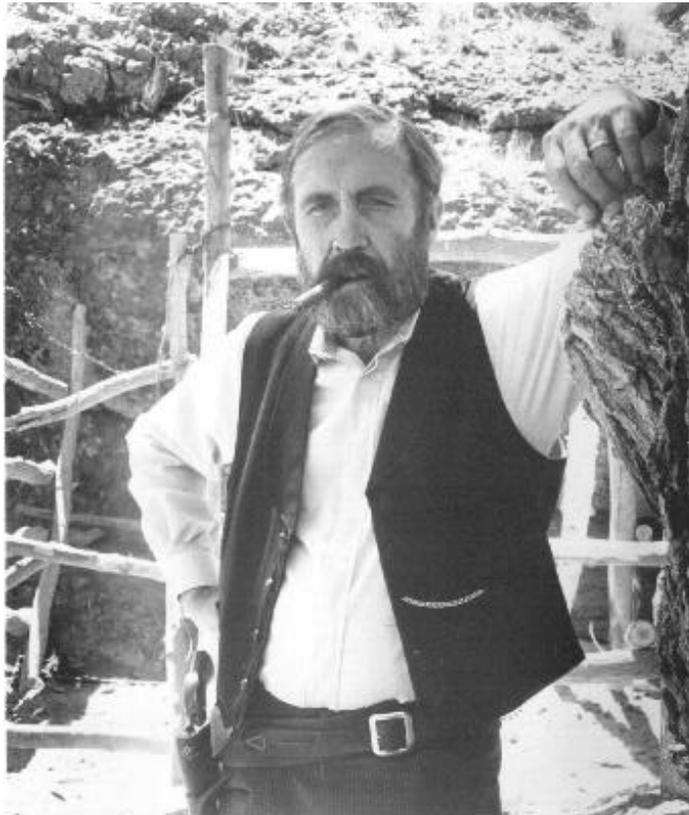
In a later scene set just before the end of the war, Lincoln, Grant, and Sherman are casually sitting around a table enjoying whisky and cigars. Here Lincoln emerges as an almost angelic figure imparting divine wisdom and magnanimous gestures toward his former enemies. Grant and Sherman become Griffiths' allegorical war-mongers who demand severe punishment for Lee and Jefferson Davis. When Lincoln rebukes these suggestions, he illustrates his clemency points by telling a joke that begins, "There once was a drunk..." As Lincoln utters the word "drunk," the camera cuts to

a close-up of a nervous-looking Grant. Neither the subtle inference nor the substance of the conversation among the characters bear resemblance to historical fact.

Cecil B. Demille's *Union Pacific* (1939), a sprawling epic of the building of the first transcontinental railroad, depicted Grant help-

even though he appears in only the first scene.

Ford took another try at depicting Grant in a short scene from the massive epic *How The West Was Won* (1963), and the result was a refreshing change from past treatment. Harry Morgan (Grant) and John Wayne (Sherman) beautifully underplay their roles in



ing robber-barons with crooked land deals in return for their influence in securing him the 1868 presidential election. This fictitious scene reflects no understanding of Grant's widely recognized integrity.

John Ford's *The Horse Soldiers* (1959) manages to depict Grant with the complete package of conventional stereotypes – coarse, gruff, unkempt, equipped with whiskey and cigars –

a post-battle scene in which Grant considers resigning over false press reports about his drinking. The scene is subtle and moving, but most remarkable in its rough resemblance to a conversation that actually occurred in history. Unfortunately, the scene is ruined when a rogue Confederate soldier attempts to shoot Grant.

The Legend of the Lone Ranger (1981) would finally

give Grant a larger (if not leading) role in an epic, but the movie turned out to be a cinematic bomb. President Grant appears nearly an hour into the movie on a train accompanied by famous legends of the Old West. His private car is hijacked by a gang of rebels led by Christopher Lloyd, who will only release Grant when his demand that part of Texas be allowed to become an independent nation is met. Grant is played by Jason Robards with gusto, but also the usual inaccuracies. Gruff and ornery, this Grant regularly uses phrases like "You're one diseased son of a bitch!" and "By the time the people in Washington get off their asses, I'll be dead!" When the Lone Ranger and Tonto (naturally) come to the rescue, the president effortlessly fires away at the bad guys with a pistol and sets off explosives. Putting aside the obviously fictitious back story, this is all a far cry from the historical Grant, who never used profanity and had an aversion to firearms despite the role that gave him his fame.

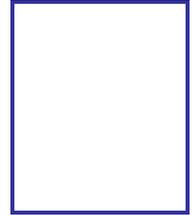
Grant was given the honor of delivering the movie's last line, "Who was that masked man?" The same may be asked of this recurring minor character in films that purported to be the nation's 18th president, but who bore little resemblance to him other than the beard and cigar.

Next issue: Grant on TV

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sion for Women, who presented a message from the governor expressing appreciation to Julia Grant for "supporting the women's suffrage movement and for defending the decision that New York City should be the site for Grant's Tomb." Another descendant, Ulysses Grant Dietz, offered reflections on his great-great-grandmother's underappreciated role as the woman behind a prominent leader.

The keynote address was delivered by Professor Carole Adams of the University of Central Florida. Prof. Adams is currently writing a biography of Julia Grant and spoke to the crowd gathered about her subject's journey from a St. Louis area plantation to the

White House to a storied tour around the world, where Mrs. Grant effectively represented her coun-



Floral tributes to Julia D. Grant beside her sarcophagus

try abroad. Following Prof. Adams' address, Linda Russell offered a musical tribute to the relationship between Mrs. Grant and her husband -- a performance on a hammered dulcimer of the period song *When You and I Were Young Maggie*. Wreaths were then placed in the crypt by representatives of the Grant family and several participating

Civil War groups. Commander John Portanova of the Sons of Union Veterans Capt. Oliver Tilden Camp #26 organized an impressive color guard from his organization along with the New York Guard, several reenactment groups, and Girl and Boy Scout troops from the area. The color guard opened the ceremony, and with the retiring of the colors, the ceremony was concluded.

The ceremony follows the recent restoration of the Tomb and a renewal of a commemorative tradition at the site. Prior ceremonies have focused exclusively on Ulysses S. Grant and his legacy. All in all, this first ceremony was dedicated to the other occupant of the Tomb showed an impressive turnout.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR: ON SATURDAY, APRIL 26, THE SONS OF UNION VETERANS OLIVER TILDEN CAMP #26 WILL HOLD THEIR ANNUAL COMMEMORATION OF ULYSSES S. GRANT'S BIRTH AT GRANT'S TOMB. CEREMONIES BEGIN AT 11:00 A.M. ALL ARE INVITED TO ATTEND.

The GMA Mission:

- To commemorate and perpetuate the accomplishments of Ulysses S. Grant and Julia Dent Grant and their memory.
- To undertake educational activities and ceremonies as they pertain to President Grant's service to his country.
- To cooperate with public and private parties to insure the repair, maintenance and upgrading of Grant's Tomb in New York City.

GRANT MONUMENT ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP

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, 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 Grant Monument Association or renew your membership for 2003, fill out the form below:

Membership Enrollment Form

You can join the GMA with an annual gift of \$25 or more (\$10 for students and senior citizens). Please indicate your gift below:

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