

2018

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Recommended Citation

Marszalek, John F. (2018) "Introduction: How Did the Grant Material Come to Mississippi?," *Journal of Mississippi History*. Vol. 80: No. 1, Article 2.

Available at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/jmh/vol80/iss1/2>

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Introduction: How Did the Grant Material Come to Mississippi?

by John F. Marszalek

During the American Civil War of 1861-1865, Mississippi was a leading state on the side of the Confederacy. It was one of the wealthiest states in what had become the fractured United States, and its wealth was only matched by its political power. For example, the president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, was a wealthy Mississippi slave and plantation owner.

Considering its wealth and its strategic location along the Mississippi River, it is no surprise that Union forces quickly turned toward the Magnolia State in their military quest to defeat secession. If the North could curtail the growth and sale of cotton and secure control of the Mississippi River, it could readily gain victory in the war.

Early in the conflict, northern troops began moving south along the river system that pierced the Confederacy and opened the way to controlling the state and the Mississippi River which flowed to its west. If Mississippi could prevent Union control of the river, its chances for survival remained possible. If the river were captured, however, Union forces would soon be able to exert their will throughout the entire state. Prior to July 1863, Mississippians did not worry. Certainly a state, as powerful as it was, had no cause for concern.

Yet there was a Union general destined to make it difficult for the Magnolia State to escape the travails of warfare: Ulysses S. Grant, an unimpressive individual from the Midwest. Grant was a graduate of West Point, it was true; he had fought in the Mexican American War; but he had not been successful in much else. He wanted badly to re-enter the Army from his self-imposed civilian exile when the Civil War

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began, but the Army did not want him. Finally he gained command over an unruly Illinois regiment and quickly turned it into an efficient unit. Slowly and thanks to his connections with a hometown congressman, Elihu Washburne, he rose in the ranks. He captured Forts Henry and Donelson in Tennessee; then resurrected his seemingly defeated army at Shiloh, only to have his commanding officer, Henry W. Halleck, strip him of his command as the army moved toward Corinth. Past this city lay the prize. Grant would soon arrive where no Union general had ever successfully ventured: the state of Mississippi, the Mississippi River, and the city of Vicksburg.

It was his victory at Vicksburg that launched Grant on his path to greatness. It was in Mississippi that he first was seen as the military hero of the Union cause.

The Grant story is well known to students of the Civil War, but most people do not connect the state of Mississippi with his sterling reputation. Once he captured Vicksburg, he did not tarry in Mississippi. He pushed forward to Chattanooga and then battled Robert E. Lee in Virginia finally vanquishing him at Appomattox. After the war, he served as commanding general of the entire peacetime United States Army from 1869 to 1877 when he became the only president between Andrew Jackson and Woodrow Wilson to serve two consecutive terms. Grant later became the first former American president to make a world tour and to write memoirs that became an important piece of non-fiction American literature. His tragic death from throat cancer in 1885 and his funeral, which was the largest ever on the continent, completed his life. Only once during all that time did he ever return to Mississippi. In April 1880, he passed through Vicksburg and received an enthusiastic welcome from the populace during his brief visit.

In the twenty-first century, however, Ulysses S. Grant has returned to the Magnolia State, and he has been welcomed back as he was in 1880. In 2008, the Ulysses S. Grant Association and its magnificent collection of manuscripts, photographs, copies, and artifacts left Southern Illinois University, Carbondale and arrived in two huge moving vans at the Mitchell Memorial Library on the campus of Mississippi State University (MSU). In 2012, the Grant Presidential Library was born, and in November 2017, it moved into its new magnificent 21,000 square foot facility on top of the Mitchell Memorial Library. The grand opening on November 30, 2017, hosted Frank and Virginia Williams who had recently donated their

magnificent Lincolniana Collection to MSU. Others present were the Archivist of the United States, the Librarian of Congress, the governor of Mississippi, the head of the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, and a host of other leaders from throughout the state and nation. Television cameras hummed and still cameras clicked as nearly 1,000 people observed the event.

The nation's and the state's media found it all impossible to understand. Here was the military leader of the Union victory over the Confederate States being honored in the state that once was the wealthiest and most significant state in the South. Grant had not been born in Mississippi nor had he lived in the state during his life. He had won a major military victory here, but Union leaders are seldom honored for defeating Confederates. Yet, Mississippi State University, the state's largest and most significant research university, was welcoming him and expressing pride at his presence. During the now defunct Mississippi Picnic in the Park in New York City, MSU and the Ulysses S. Grant Association featured a sign at their booth proclaiming boldly "New York City has his Tomb, but Mississippi has his heart, at Mississippi State University."

And so it is: Mississippi State University has, what Grant Association officials believe, is a copy of virtually every letter Grant ever wrote and every one ever written to him. The Collection encompasses more than 17,000 linear feet. It is the home of the thirty-two volumes of *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, which as huge a mass as they are, represent only twenty percent of the Grant writings preserved in the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library at Mississippi State University.

Even while it was in temporary quarters, the Grant Presidential Library, became a magnet for visitors from around the nation, and even the world. During the most recent three-year period, visitors came from forty-eight of the fifty states and from foreign nations such as Iceland, Great Britain, Japan, and Thailand. Classes of school children arrived in yellow busses to visit and learn. Famous authors, such as Pulitzer Prize winning/Hamilton play consultant Ron Chernow, leading biographer Ron White, Gilded Age historian Chuck Calhoun, and author Joan Waugh, and other important writers as well as graduate students have come to use Grant material. In-house editors John Marszalek, David Nolen, and Louie Gallo have produced a modern, annotated edition of *The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant*, published by the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Even today, the belief persists that Grant could never be welcomed in Mississippi because most of the state's white citizens dislike him with a passion and have done so since the Civil War. However, in 1895, Grenville Dodge, a Union Civil War commander, invited John Marshall Stone, governor of Mississippi, a former Confederate colonel, and the second president of Mississippi Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Mississippi State University) from 1899-1900, to attend a dinner in New York City honoring U.S. Grant on the anniversary of his 1885 death. Stone responded that it was not possible for him to attend, but, he said, "I believe I voice the sentiment of all Mississippians, especially those who are survivors of the late war between the states, when I say that the memory of General Grant is cherished with sincere affection. . . . Next to those officers whom we loved so well, General Grant is first in the hearts of the people of Mississippi."

The essays that are presented here in the *Journal of Mississippi History* reflect the significant role of U.S. Grant in this state's history. Not surprisingly, too, most of these essays concern Grant's role during the Civil War.

The first essay is written by Timothy B. Smith, native Mississippian, doctoral graduate of Mississippi State University, leading Civil War scholar, and faculty member at the University of Tennessee-Martin. Smith points out that Grant almost left the Union army, when it was undertaking the siege of Corinth. Had he done so, Smith argues, the Union cause would have suffered an irreparable loss. Ironically it was in Mississippi that Grant made the decision to stay and fight for the Union cause and go on to his great victory at Vicksburg.

Susannah Ural of the University of Southern Mississippi and the 2017-2018 president of the Mississippi Historical Society offers her analysis of how the Mississippi press covered Grant during the war and after. She argues that Mississippi newspapers expressed confidence in the ultimate victory of the state. Significantly, moreover, they regularly expressed affection for Grant and when he died "Ulysses S. Grant became Mississippi's most unlikely hero."

Terrence Winschel, long time historian at the Vicksburg National Military Park and now retired leading interpreter of the battles in and around Vicksburg, presents an in-depth look at the use of Army Field Manuals FM 100-5 and FM 3-0 in studying Vicksburg. He details how these publications are used to teach twentieth century army personnel about Grant's strategy during the Vicksburg Campaign and what the

modern military can learn from it.

David Nolen and Louie Gallo of the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library at Mississippi State University clearly and effectively present a history of one of the most important books ever written by an American, *The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant, The Complete Annotated Edition* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017). These two scholars along with John Marszalek, point out, among other facts, the irony of a modern edition of Grant's classic being completed in the former Confederate state of Mississippi.

Ryan P. Semmes, coordinator of the Congressional and Political Research Center at Mississippi State University, and archivist of the Grant Presidential Library and the Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincolniana, wrote the final essay in this volume. Beginning the process of completing a doctoral dissertation on President Grant's foreign policy, Semmes here discusses Grant's and Mississippi's black Senator Hiram Revels's desires to ensure civil rights for African Americans after the Civil War. Semmes describes the possibility of Santo Domingo's annexation and how this matter influenced domestic politics.

The authors of these essays and the editor are pleased to present this special issue about Ulysses S. Grant in the Magnolia State. As Mississippians, we are proud that one of the leading figures of the nineteenth century has found a home in our state. We believe that the future with Grant as a focus of study will encourage Mississippians to understand the Civil War and Reconstruction better and will cause the rest of the nation to take a fresh look at one of our nation's most underappreciated presidents.

