Inside the Vault:
Highlights from the Gilder Lehrman Collection

May 15, 2020

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- Your camera is automatically off.
- Your microphone is muted.
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Gilder Lehrman Staff

Panelists

• Sandy Trenholm – Collection Director
• Patience LeBlanc – Gilder Lehrman’s 2018 Texas History Teacher of the Year

Support

• Allison Kraft – Assistant Curator
• Laura Hapke – Curatorial Assistant
For Security

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How to Participate on PC or Mac

- In order to keep this a safe and secure meeting, your mic is automatically muted and your camera is automatically off.

- If you would like to ask a question, you can use the Q&A feature, which can be found along the bottom of your screen.
The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History

• The Gilder Lehrman Institute has more than 70,000 documents pertaining to American history from colonization through the end of the 20th century.
• We are dedicated to improving K–12 history education while also serving the general public.
  • Educational programs
  • Online resources
  • Direct access to unique primary source materials
Grant - HISTORY documentary

- Premieres on Memorial Day, Monday, May 25 at 9 p.m. ET and airs for three consecutive nights.
- Executive produced by Pulitzer Prize-winning author and biographer Ron Chernow and Academy Award-winning actor Leonardo DiCaprio,
- Rated TV-14 V. It is not recommended for younger students.
Grant
Today’s Documents

- The earliest known letter by Grant, written when he was a 17-year-old cadet at West Point
- A political cartoon showing Grant’s “bull-dog” grip on the Confederacy in 1864

What we will be doing

- Providing historical context
- Analyzing key parts of the document
- Discussing how media & primary sources can further our understanding of people and events
Dear sir,

I was just thinking that you would be right glad to hear from one of your old friends who is away and I hope you will find my letter well. I have just read in the paper about the murder of a man at the point, so far as I recollect, the only road between the town and the road. I have been surprised, and even the road to the point. It seems as though I should have been there if my friend had only come to our town. The road to the town were and then not just a letter.
Hiram Ulysses Grant

- He was born April 27, 1822, in Point Pleasant, Ohio, to Hannah and Jesse Grant.
- His first name was Hiram because his maternal grandfather liked the name.
- His middle name, Ulysses, was suggested by his maternal grandmother and his father.
- He was always referred to as Ulysses.
- Ulysses was a small, sensitive, quiet youth. The local schools bored him, and other children mistook his quietness for stupidity, nicknaming him “Useless.”
In 1839, when Grant was 17, his father arranged for him to enter the United States Military Academy at West Point.

Grant wanted to switch his middle name and his first name.

Congressman Thomas Hammer nominated Grant for West Point as Ulysses S. Grant.

In 1844, Grant wrote to Julia Dent, “You know I have an “S” in my name and I don’t know what it stand[s] for.”

He arrived at West Point in the summer of 1839.

West Point classmate William T. Sherman gave him the nickname “Uncle Sam” or “Sam.”

He was an mediocre student, but he didn’t really study. He graduated 21st in a class of 39.

Grant planned to resign from the military after he served his mandatory four years of duty.
Ulysses S. Grant to McKinstry Griffith, September 22, 1839

[Handwritten letter]

Dear Sir,

I was just thinking that you would be right glad to hear from one of your relations who at some time at least, I have paid your address and now wish to tell you a story about that part of America near Point. So far as it regards the situation it is desirable to know the most beautiful place! I wish I have one seen there one bad and dark and rainy day, there are no scenes for the visitor to take up from the window. With the Adirondacks, that I am supposed to be a river with its banks shaded with hundreds of trees and woods.

If I look at the view I can see the Fort Plain and the river as a scene in the mountains of a house and the woods planted with trees and woods. The Adirondacks, that I am supposed to be a river with its banks shaded with hundreds of trees and woods.

Please write to me and ask me about the climate of the Adirondacks, that I am supposed to be a river with its banks shaded with hundreds of trees and woods.

Ulysses S. Grant
Ulysses S. Grant to McKinstry Griffith, September 22, 1839

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Ulysses S. Grant to McKinstry Griffith, September 22, 1839
What did 17-year-old Grant write about?

- Clothing
- Classes
- Money
- West Point’s location
- Homesickness
- Demerits
- Lack of women

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“If I were to come home now with my uniform on, they way you would laugh at my appearance would be curious. My pants sit as tight to my skin as the bark to a tree and if I do not walk military, that is if I bend over quickly or run, they are very apt to crack with a report as loud as a pistol.”
Ulysses S. Grant and Alexander Hays, 1845

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“So, I have put asaid my Algebra and French and am going to tell you a long story about this prettiest of places West Point.”
“We have tremendous long and hard lessons to get in both French and Algebra. I study hard and hope to get along so as to pass the examination in January. This examination is a hard one they say, but I am not frightened yet.”
Landscape watercolor painted by Grant while a cadet at West Point, ca. 1842
Landscape watercolor painted by Grant while a cadet at West Point, ca. 1842

Gilder Lehrman Collection
“The fact is if a man graduates here he safe for life.”
The Old Bull Dog on the Right Track, 1864

Uncle Abraham, don't you think you had better call the old dog off now. I'm afraid he'll hurt those other dogs. The catchers hold of them.

Why Little Man, that's the same punk of crows that chased you aboard the Overland two years ago. They are pretty noisy now up here. I think it best to give the old bull dog still another to go on and finish him!

You must get this breed out old fellow!

I'm bound to take it.

The Old Bull Dog on the Right Track.

Published by Currier & Ives, 172 Varick St., N.Y.

Gilder Lehrman Collection
Grant Comes East, 1864

- By the spring of 1864, the Army of the Potomac had been through four commanders, but none had been able to defeat Robert E. Lee or capture any significant ground.
- In the West, Grant had defeated two Confederate armies (one at Fort Donelson in 1861 and another at Vicksburg in 1863) and had captured key cities along the Confederate supply lines.
Lieutenant General Grant, 1864

March 1864, Grant is appointed Lieutenant General and given command of all Union armies.

He was the first Lieutenant General since George Washington.

Grant came east to personally lead the Union forces in Virginia.

Grant’s strategy focused on the destruction of Lee’s army, the Confederate economy, and Southern morale.
Summer of 1864

- Between May 5 and June 24, Union and Confederate troops clashed almost daily.
- They suffered a combined total of more than 83,000 casualties—dead, missing, and wounded.
- Even though the two armies were in a siege, there were still assaults on Petersburg and battle happening in vicinity.

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Grant’s Bull-dog Grip

- With such heavy losses, Northern governors feared the resurgence of draft riots.
- It was suggested that some troops be removed from Grant’s army and sent to keep the peace in northern cities.
- Grant strongly disagreed and stressed the importance of keeping Lee’s troops pinned down at Petersburg.
- On August 17, 1864, President Abraham Lincoln supported Grant’s request.

“I have seen your despatch expressing your unwillingness to break your hold where you are. Neither am I willing. Hold on with a bull-dog grip, and chew & choke, as much as possible.”
“Uncle Abraham don’t you think you had better call the old dog off now, I’m afraid he’ll hurt those other dogs, if he catches hold of them.”
“Why little Mac thats the same pack of curs, that chased you aboard of the Gunboat two years ago, they are pretty nearly used up now & I think its best to give the old bull dog full swing to go in and finish them!”
General Ulysses S. Grant

“I’m bound to take it”
“You aint got this kennel yet old fellow!”
Summer of 1864

- From August 18 to 21, Grant concentrated his army on the capture of the Weldon Railroad, Richmond’s main supply line.
- Grant’s victory at Weldon left Lee’s army and the Confederate capital without supplies and prevented reinforcements from being sent south to stop General William T. Sherman.
The Old Bull Dog on the Right Track, 1864

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GRANT - HISTORY documentary

Grant
Three-Night Miniseries Event Premieres Memorial Day at 9/8c
Book Breaks

- Gilder Lehrman Book Breaks is a new program that features the most exciting history scholars in America discussing their books live with host William Roka, followed by a Q&A with home audiences.

- Join us this Sunday, May 17, at 2pm ET for a conversation with Annette Gordon-Reed about her book *The Hemingses of Monticello*.

- Follow this link to register and view a schedule of speakers: gilderlehrman.org/bookbreaks
Richard Gilder, 1932-2020

gilderlehrman.org/about/richard-gilder
What’s next?

1. We will send you a packet with the documents we talked about today.

2. Please complete a 2-minute feedback survey:
   [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Vault_May15](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Vault_May15)

1. Visit [gilderlehrman.org](http://gilderlehrman.org) for
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Thank you!