

Also by Robert C. Conner

GENERAL GORDON GRANGER

THE SAVIOR OF CHICKAMAUGA AND THE MAN BEHIND JUNETEENTH

[Robert C. Conner] brilliantly uses a solid array of primary sources to paint a good portrait of this complex man whose military acumen was overshadowed often by his personal shortcomings. ... In this new book, we are introduced to a general whose self-assurance, boldness, and quick-thinking proved to be a major asset on the battlefield, but whose propensity to disregard cooperation with his peers kept him from Army command when his martial performance rivaled men who rose to that position. ... It's an excellent and long overdue addition to the historiography of the Western Theater of the Civil War, as well as to the Reconstruction movement and the relations of the military with the freed slaves of the Old South and the Southwest.

York Blog/Civil War Round Table

[D]etailed yet succinct ... thorough and concise throughout; not flamboyant—a smooth, easy, and interesting read. ... This book is engaging, informative, and an important resource for students of the American Civil War, as well as for anyone interested in command relationships during wartime.

Emil Posey, Tennessee Civil War Round Table

[Granger's] story casts much light on the civil war realities, including battles for political advantage and career advancement. Despite his exasperating nature, Granger proved relatively adept at this game, although his premature (though predictable) death in 1876 prevented him from outlasting his opponents or penning his memoirs. Conner's biography will ensure that Granger's military career will not be forgotten "warts and all."

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THE LAST CIRCLE
OF
ULYSSES GRANT

ROBERT C. CONNER



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The Last Circle of Ulysses Grant

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For Barbara

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BOOK PREVIEW

THE LAST CIRCLE OF
ULYSSES GRANT

BOOK PREVIEW

PART ONE

THE BETRAYAL OF OLD FRIENDS

BOOK PREVIEW

CHAPTER ONE

JULIA GRANT TRIED NOT TO THINK ABOUT MONEY. Not to think about bills to tradesmen, some of whom had cut off service, while others continued to supply the household, thus increasing her obligations and sense of guilt. The quickest way to overcome guilt was to wallow in grievance, anger and self-pity, which she knew was unworthy. Nor should she increase the burdens on Ulys by letting him observe her distress, which would make him feel guilt and worry on her behalf. She hoped he had not seen their daughter Nellie just now, walking downstairs in tears after the breakdown of what Julia had thought was a simple conversation. All she had done was ask Nellie about her husband and children back in England, whom of course she must be missing. But that separation could hardly excuse the younger woman's anger and rudeness. Julia knew perfectly well that there was more to it, some family trouble over there that hardly bore examination, something neither mother nor daughter wanted to open up in the current circumstances of the overall family crisis.

She took some deep breaths, and told herself she could now leave worrying about finances to her eldest son Fred, who, with his wife and two children, had moved into the Grants' five-story townhouse on East 66th Street, just off Fifth Avenue and Central Park. But Julia worried that Fred might be too deferential to her own supposed feelings, hesitant to suggest selling things despite the necessity of doing so. And his very presence reminded her of his own involvement in the collapse of the family fortunes, along with the

deeper entanglement of her second son, Buck, who had actually gotten Ulys into the Grant & Ward investment firm.

Fred and Buck had both had to sell their houses to pay creditors, while she and Ulys had sold properties, too, from Galena to Washington. The younger children, Jesse and Nellie, also had invested money in the firm and lost it, along with other family members and many ordinary people, including veterans, who had had faith in the general's name, but were, along with him and all the Grants, swindled by Ferdinand Ward. Julia drew a quick breath in and out to release a little of her still hot indignation. For her and Ulys both, Ward's crime, deceiving and swindling the people who had taken him for a friend, was almost inconceivable, and that smooth young man was far worse than some violent robber on the street. This very house they lived in now, it turned out was not owned by them free and clear as she and Ulys had thought, because Ward had pocketed the payments leaving the mortgage still unpaid. She felt his concealed villainy as a horrible sign of a depraved modern age, inconceivably far removed from the West Point honor code by which her husband lived, or her own Christian faith.

Anyway, Buck and his wife Frances, who was more than eight months pregnant with their third child, had moved in with her father, Senator Chaffee. Jesse and his wife and daughter, along with Fred and his family, had moved into their parents' house on 66th Street.

The Grant & Ward Wall Street firm had failed without warning almost a year ago. It was on May 6, 1884, that Julia's—and the whole family's—illusions of prosperity were destroyed, when her husband Ulysses told her they had lost everything but debts. In those bleak days, the Grants' checks to pay bills had been returned because of insufficient funds, a mortification from which they were rescued by a \$1,000 loan from their friend Matias Romero. At least, Ulys had insisted on treating it as a loan, although the check had

just been left discreetly on their hall table by Romero, on his way out after a visit.

Ulys' insistence on paying debts was of course admirable, as was his commitment to earning back the money himself through writing a book. But Julia sometimes wondered how practicable it all was, and took refuge in the conviction (not necessarily shared by her husband) that the Lord would provide. They had survived poverty before, and calumny, and other slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. They were surviving now by selling property, and by this work of Ulys'. Although he had accepted an advance of only \$1,000 from the new publisher, a drop in the bucket compared to their prior income of \$3,000 a month, there was talk of much more money to be earned, if he were healthy enough to produce what was wanted—enough to pay every creditor and provide for the two of them indefinitely. But that was uncertain. Earlier this month, there had been something more solid when Congress for the first time provided the general with a military pension. It was much appreciated by the whole family, though Julia also detected in Ulys a trace of fastidious embarrassment at how badly they had wanted and needed Congress to act. It was humbling.

The reason for the family's financial disaster was the rascality of the investment firm's managing partner, Ferdinand Ward, who with a banker cohort in devilry, James Fish, had since been arrested and charged with fraud. Just last week, on March 26, 1885, Ulys had given evidence for the banker's trial, and was cross-examined at home. And then his health collapsed.

Ulys had, of course, been sick before. He had been hobbling with a stick for more than a year, since he fell on the ice the previous winter and hurt his hip, and then struggled with pleurisy. The family's butler, Harrison Terrell, had become then the general's constant companion and valet, helping him walk safely, a role that continued as there came

further ill developments in Ulys' health. It was early last summer, at Long Branch on the Jersey shore, that was the beginning of the throat trouble, when he bit into a peach and thought he had swallowed a hornet or some other stinging insect, and then when he drank even water he said it hurt like liquid fire. But the family physician, Dr. Barker, was in Europe, and it was not until November that the throat specialist, Dr. Douglas, diagnosed cancer. At first they didn't tell her this, or even Ulys straight out, although he heard enough to guess the truth, and started treatment for it without telling her or anyone else. She had of course found out, although she had refused to believe at first that it was a fatal malady. She had kept on asking the doctors if they could cure him, but ceased at last when she perceived they avoided answering her directly.

Many years ago, after the war, she had received a similar verdict from a surgeon in the much less serious case of her strabismus, when he told her it was too late for an operation to correct her crossed eyes. She smiled in familiar recollection of Ulys' comment after she told him: "Did I not see you and fall in love with you with these same eyes?" he had asked. "I like them just as they are, and now, remember, you are not to interfere with them. They are mine, and let me tell you, Mrs. Grant, you had better not make any experiments, as I might not like you half so well with any other eyes."

Her smile faded away as she returned to the present, to the word cancer that no one wanted to use. Ulys seemed in a way glad of the diagnosis, it was better than being debilitated and tortured by a secret, unknown enemy. Meanwhile, he had knuckled down to writing the story of his life—writing for bread, she called it. Julia also knew he enjoyed the work, or had until recently, when it became too much for him. He wrote mostly in a little room at the top of the stairs, overlooking the street.

It was hard to keep hopeful, with her dearly beloved

faithful companion now sinking lower, weakened by fits of coughing. She, too, had lost her natural ebullience, though she made an effort not to let people see the extent of the loss. She could hardly deceive Ulys, and they still could comfort each other, but nothing was as before. It physically hurt him to laugh or talk. He had written less and less, day by day, until no longer able to manage even the lap board, then stopped entirely. Before, she had been a little hurt when he would smile, hold hands briefly, but see her as a distraction from the writing. Now, when she could take his hand for as long as she liked, and did, and knew it was a comfort to them both, it was much worse. When he flinched in pain, she would flinch in sympathy. People, even their boys—no longer boys—had stopped meeting her eye, not wanting to let her see how bad they really thought, or felt, his prospects were. She had had to steer the family's spiritual adviser, the Methodist clergyman Dr. John Newman, away from the state of Ulys' soul, keeping him focused on prayers for strength and recovery, for peace from pain in life, not death.

Despite their little flurry this morning, she thanked God that Nellie had come home from England on March 14. Ulys had brightened to see her, as anyone could observe, as he always had done. The good effect on his spirits persisted even as his physical decline continued. Nellie was both shocked at the deterioration, and impressed at how much of the book he had managed to write despite declining health. What only Julia saw was the night he stayed awake and wept for very joy at his twenty-nine-year-old daughter's presence in the house.

Grant had wept before over Nellie, in plain sight at the White House, and not from joy, at his only daughter's wedding eleven years ago. It was a match that Julia had more or less supported, in a rare case when she was not in complete accord with her husband, but had soon developed misgivings about after Nellie left for a new life in her husband's

country, England. The young man had not fulfilled any promise he might have had.

In unspoken fact, Nellie was Ulys' favorite child. He had held her hand through his first inaugural address as president. While he loved the boys, too, Nellie was his favorite just as Julia had been favored by her own father, Colonel Dent, all the way from her childhood at the White Haven plantation in Missouri until his death in the White House. Spoiled was another word for it, how she and Nellie had been treated by their fathers, but Julia did not feel she had been ill-prepared for life. If Nellie's husband was now unable to appreciate his American wife—which Julia increasingly feared was the case—that made him the spoiled one, not her. Julia resolutely put aside thought of this morning's scene, vowing not to hold it against her daughter, and recalled that Nellie, like Julia herself and her daughters-in-law, was pitching in with routine daily tasks, as family members had to fill in for the much diminished and now overburdened domestic staff.

Julia knew traces of Missouri remained in her voice to this day, while Nellie's accent seemed to vary depending on where she was and whom she was talking to—and so was sounding more American these days. Now, of Julia's and Ulys' four children, only Buck was not living at their parents' home, which was perhaps just as well since he could be seen as a reminder—in fact the unwitting agent—of the family's disastrous comeuppance. And Buck's father-in-law, former Senator Chaffee, retained ample financial resources despite his own lost investment in Grant & Ward. But Buck and his own father loved one another, and Ulys was much too good a man to ever blame his son or want to make him feel guilty for the catastrophe—or any more guilty than his parents knew he already did feel.

Buck was a sweet-natured mama's boy, whose plight touched Julia's heart, although she could not help feeling there was something unmanly in the way he had entrusted

all of their fortunes to such a villainous partner. And for all that Fred and his wife Ida had lost in the crash, and after he'd given up his Army commission and pay, Julia noted that they still managed to employ a nanny. Nor was her mind entirely at ease when contemplating her youngest son and child Jesse, who like the others had not settled into a respectable and successful career, and whose behavior and bearing were not always what she thought they should be. But her love for all the children overwhelmed any doubts, which she confined to the back of her mind.

Nellie sat with her father now, across from Julia, who had told the nurse and valet to get some rest, after they had changed Ulys' neck dressing and put back the silk scarf which covered it. "You need sleep," she'd told them, "at least a nap," and when Nellie said the same thing to her she replied, "I am not for sleeping now." It was only eight o'clock in the evening, but all of them had had their nights interrupted as the general's condition deteriorated. Now though, he was sleeping, half propped up in the bed, and his wife and daughter sat quietly with him.

Julia closed her eyes, too, for a moment, before discreetly shaking herself awake. Her attention was suddenly caught by the closed curtains in the window, the top of which seemed a little askew. What did they call that, a soft cornice or a valance? Was it scalloped, that pattern? She might adjust the cloth, or direct someone taller in the operation, but better not to inquire too closely as to what was behind it. There would be no money for frivolous structural repairs, even simple ones to caulked tiles. She shifted her position in the chair, pulling at her dress and wiggling her shoes. The latter needed a cobbler's attention and, as far as she recalled, it should not be a problem since they did not owe that particular tradesman anything, or not much. She did not feel in a position to throw away old shoes or much of anything else.

Nellie met her eyes, causing Julia almost to start in dis-

tress as her thoughts returned to the man in front of them. Both women knew the lump under the general's jaw was not going to stop growing, nor would his swelling neck. The little hole at the back of his tongue would get bigger, as would the ulcers. The sedative treatments of morphine or laudanum would continue, along with atropine and red clover, brandy and cocaine—the latter two of which, apparently, somehow, did not directly work against each other, nor stir Ulys' old craving for alcoholic intoxication. The pain in his throat would not let him drink any alcohol now, despite Dr. Shrady's regular removal of whatever secretions had accumulated there, so the brandy was injected. The neck dressing could be changed by a nurse or valet, by Nellie or by Julia, but no one could make swallowing any easier for Ulys. He could barely manage water or broth. Because it was so difficult, he tried on rare occasions to gulp a significant amount at once, incurring great pain and sometimes a reaction of choking and vomit. The brandy went into his veins, while the cocaine was dissolved in water and used with a cloth or sponge as an anesthetic swab applied inside his mouth. Between them, the drugs and alcohol cleared the lungs and dulled the pain enough to let him drift off into sleep, but that made his breathing more labored and raspy. Julian and Nellie found it a heartbreaking signal of the accumulating ruin within.

A recent choking and coughing fit, relieved only by hemorrhage, had scared them all, but Nellie thought the doctors did not appear to be surprised. Dr. Shrady, the new man, had seemed more surprised that the general had been able to hold up and keep working so long, when others might have taken to their bed and turned their faces to the wall. Shrady had also been the first to bluntly call the disease by its name, cancer, at least to his colleagues and Fred. Before he ever met the general, when he first examined tissue scraped from his mouth, he had pronounced him "doomed," and while nobody would use such language to

Julia, she was not insensible of the true course of events. Nellie held her father's hand now, and glanced across at her mother with a little sad smile.

Julia guessed part of Nellie's mind was with her three surviving children back in England; little Grant, her eldest, lay under a tombstone there. She had left them behind to be with her dying, ruined father. Julia knew Nellie's marriage had proved harder than the girl could have imagined when she wed the glamorous, older Englishman—Algernon Sartoris, whom Ulys never warmed to—in 1874, and went across the ocean to make a life among strangers.

She looked down from her daughter to her sleeping husband, but now remembered Nellie sick once as a young child, sick almost to death in that too rough Missouri cabin Ulys had built and they called "Hardscrabble." He sat with her then, and got sick himself of ague or malaria, in that place Julia had never warmed to. They were better off back at White Haven, her plantation home. Julia hadn't married as young as Nellie, who had been too young at eighteen, they all three had long since realized. But Julia had been that age when she first met Ulysses, her brother's friend from West Point, and had permitted him to talk her into a secret engagement. That was forty-one years ago, when he had been a very junior officer with dubious prospects. She thought of their life together as a sort of "Switchback Railway," which the newspapers said was the name of that new roller-coastering attraction in the Coney Island amusement park (to which she had never ventured).

She and Ulys had had a glorious ride of a life together, although in reality his prospects never seemed to stay solid. First they had that long engagement, lasting while he was away fighting in the Mexican War. He had talked about becoming a mathematics professor, at West Point or some private college—had certainly shown no ambition to be a general or politician. But instead of academic life, after their marriage, they lived in small northern Army posts where

she'd had to learn housekeeping on her own without her father's slaves to do the work. There were little dances gotten up for Army wives in Sacketts Harbor, New York, on Lake Ontario, and Detroit, Michigan, dances where she'd had to lead without showing it because Ulys had no ear for music. Then the Army kept them two thousand miles apart for two years, until he resigned from it, which let them in for more hardscrabble years in civilian life. They lived with her family in Missouri for most of that time, as Ulys started off at farming, for he was no grasping Yankee businessman like his abolitionist father. But he'd had to beg work from that father, Jesse, at last, and move the family in 1860 far upriver to northwestern Illinois, where she had made it her business to adapt to northern ways. In the war, Julia went with the children to and from his camps, skirting the rebels, sometimes visiting Jesse and his wife, her mother-in-law Hannah, who wore her hair in rigid curls. They thought her a too indulgent and extravagant mother. But she had also learned, better than Ulys, how to conduct the family's personal business—renting, buying and selling, traveling.

The White House was where they'd spent the longest time together. Then more than two years of journeying around the world, followed by semi-retirement in New York. Their four children, and more grandchildren. What a life to contemplate. But now in ruins of fortune and men's eyes, and of Ulys' dear body, and him with the book-writing not finished, stuck back again in the Civil War. Her cousin James Longstreet had been stationed with Ulys (who called him Pete) in St. Louis, after they left West Point, and before they fought together in Mexico, and then against each other in the Civil War. Pete Longstreet had wooed and married Louise Garland at the same time that Ulys and Julia were courting. Now, Julia mused, Louise still had her man, healthy and hale despite his wartime wound.

Nellie said, "I hear General Parker was here this morning."

“Only a general by brevet,” said Julia. “Really a volunteer staff colonel.”

“I dare say he was, Mother,” said Nellie, the expression reminding Julia of her Englishness these days. “But he served in the Cabinet, too. And Fred says he’s been here before, and you won’t let him in to see Father.”

“Your father is in no condition for guests,” said Julia, then continuing as if she couldn’t help herself, “and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs is not of Cabinet rank.”

Julia told herself to be patient with Nellie, who would remember Parker from her childhood, of course. Once on a tour with Ulys after the war, they’d let him take Nellie and her younger brother Jesse on an expedition to see Parker’s sister, who was a Seneca like him but had married a Tuscarora and lived on their reservation in western New York. Meanwhile, Julia and Ulys had taken a romantic trip to Niagara Falls.

It wasn’t Parker being an Indian that Julia minded, nor the strange fact that when they had first met, in Galena, Illinois, in 1860, it was Parker the federal engineer who was the more successful man than her husband. But now he brought with him too many memories. A great friend of General Rawlins, who was always dropping dark hints about Ulys’ drinking, it was Parker himself who caused scandal after the war by being too drunk to show up on his own wedding day to a white woman—or girl, another eighteen-year-old in love. They got married quietly a week later, and Ulys insisted on going to that ceremony, too. He told her, irritatingly, that Abraham Lincoln had done much the same thing before his wedding to Mary Todd—with whom Julia, like many women, had had a tense relationship. On a visit to the Army of the Potomac in early 1865, Julia had seen Mrs. Lincoln fall into a prolonged jealous rage over a subordinate general’s wife that did seem insane, so she was not surprised when, a decade later, Mary’s surviving son Robert Lincoln had her placed in an asylum for a few

months. Still, Julia was not of the opinion that the Lincolns had had a loveless marriage. And the Parkers' marriage, as far as she knew, had been more successful than the Lincolns', although falling short like all others to the Grants' own wonderful union.

At the Office of Indian Affairs Parker fell into one of the Grant administration's early scandals, not a bad one, not convicting him of anything, but enough to push him out of office. All the scandals had bewildered Julia, not least when they caught up friends and family, although never including Ulys or her or the children. They confirmed her determination to avoid all thought of money. Parker, however, had thought of it, had gone off to Connecticut, quickly making and losing a pile in the stock market. Then, she heard, he took a low-level municipal job that was controlled by Baldy Smith, a onetime Union general whom Ulys had promoted in the war, before they fell out. Julia reflected that she seemed to know a lot about Parker, too much. He came with too much baggage.

"I think Father would like to see him," Nellie insisted. Before Julia could decide how to respond, Ulys stirred, and her first thought was horror that he'd been listening to them talk about this Parker business, and it had woken and upset him. But that did not appear to be the case. His face was contorted as he gasped for breath, yet she forced herself to look on the bright side—he seemed far from a death rattle. "Water," he said, and she lifted the cup to his lips, and he was able to swallow some without an obvious increase in pain.

Into the room walked quietly another Julia Grant, the eight-year-old daughter of Fred and Ida, and a favorite of the general's. Julia restrained herself from wondering aloud whether the girl ought to be in bed by now. Ulys, stirred into consciousness, took the hand gravely offered by his granddaughter, and smiled at her with his eyes. He looked

back and forth between these three people he loved, and was grateful for their presence.

“Do you know,” Julia asked her granddaughter, “about the ancient Greek tale of Ulysses, by Homer?”

The little girl contemplated the matter gravely, and replied, “I think I’ve heard of it, but I don’t really know it.”

“Well,” said the elder Julia, as Grant and Nellie happily looked on, “he had a long sea journey home from a long war, and many years later, your grandfather, my Ulysses, and I were on the same sea, the Mediterranean, which is between Europe and Africa. And we came to the island where the Sirens, who I think were sort of mermaids, tried to lure the first Ulysses ashore by singing to him, and they said I should stop up your grandfather’s ears with cotton wool, but I said I feared nothing, and had learned from Penelope in that book to travel with my husband and not stay home. Then there was a real storm and I wanted to go back to Malta, but my Ulys reassured me. I fear no storms when we are together, and nothing can part us now.”

BOOK PREVIEW

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This is the first novel by Robert C. Conner, a longtime journalist who won two first-place writing awards from the New York Associated Press Association for newspapers with circulation between 50,000 and 200,000. His previous book, published by Casemate in 2013, was a biography, *General Gordon Granger: The Savior of Chickamauga and the Man Behind Juneteenth*. Conner has a Phi Beta Kappa bachelor's degree from New York University, and an associate's degree in chemical dependency counseling from Hudson Valley Community College. He serves as a volunteer at Grant Cottage in upstate New York, and as president of the Malta Sunrise Rotary Club. He and his wife Barbara have three grown children.