

PRESIDENTIAL PASSINGS

Written by Bob Boetticher Sr.
 Chairman, National Museum of Funeral History

PART FIVE OF OUR 8-PART SERIES

Journey from Mount McGregor to Riverside Park

THE ULYSSES S. GRANT FUNERAL TRAIN

Union Army general, Ulysses S. Grant later served as the 18th President of the United States.

In 1884, Grant lost all of his savings on Wall Street. After being diagnosed with throat cancer, in order to generate money for his family, he started writing his memoirs at his home in New York, with assistance from his good friend Mark Twain. Because of the heat and humidity of the summer, Grant's doctor, George F. Shrady, suggested a cooler climate for the former president. Banker and friend Joseph W. Drexel offered his personal cottage, which was nestled on Mount McGregor.

Even though his health was rapidly declining, Grant and his family traveled on June 16 to the mountaintop cottage. He finished his memoirs in six weeks, and, several days later, as the sun was rising over the mountain, he died at 8 a.m. on July 23, 1885, at the age of 63.

Plans were immediately made to return his body to New York City. At around 10 a.m., a somber message was handed to undertaker Stephen Merritt, owner of the Stephen Merritt Burial Company, New York. The family requested that he journey to the Adirondacks. Arriving at the cottage, Merritt and professor Felix A. Sullivan prepared Grant's body for transportation back to New York.

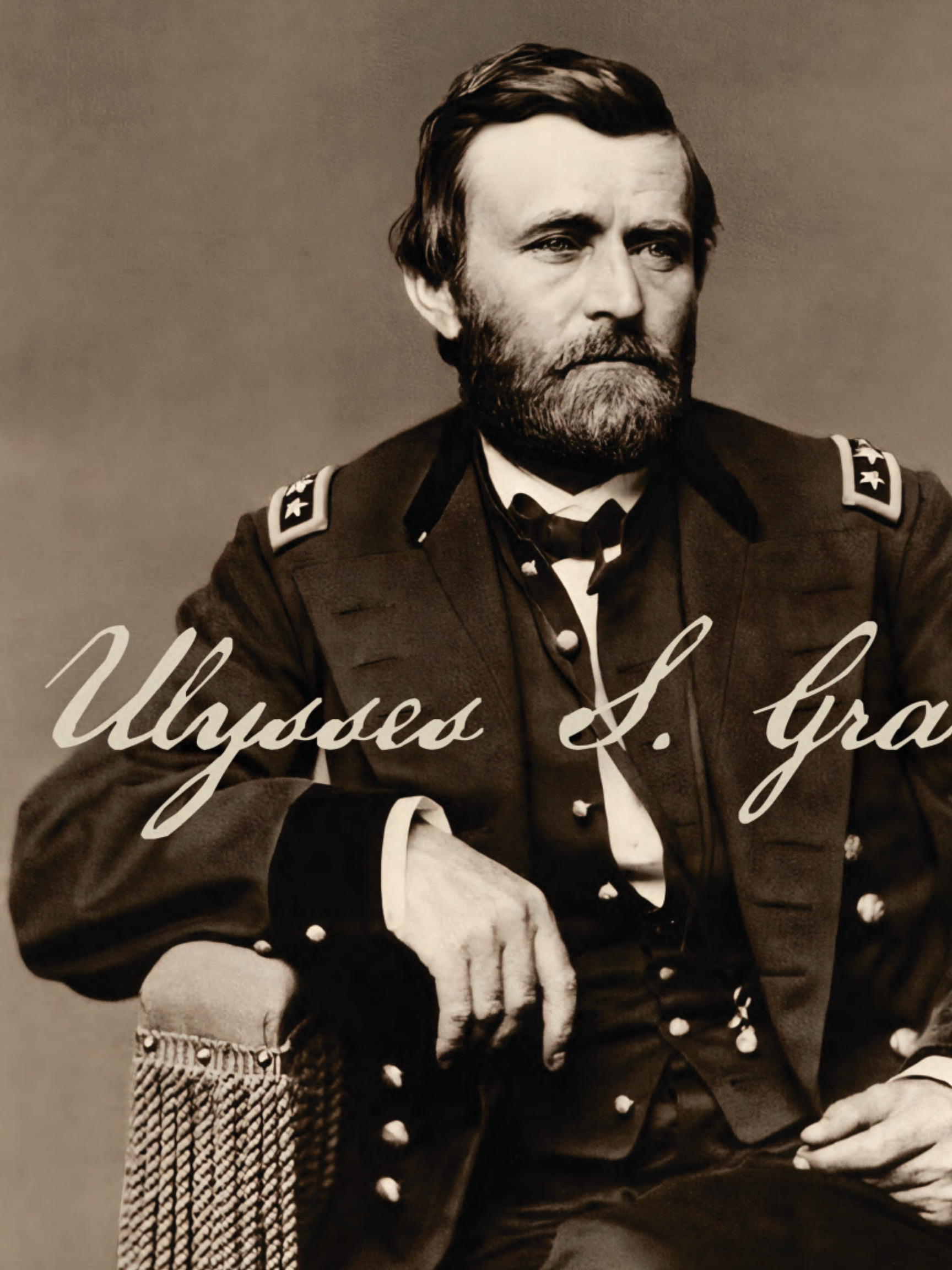
The specially-made E style polished oak casket featured dark purple velvet covering, ornamental silver mountings, solid silver handles and a gold nameplate. The interior,

<p>New York Central and Hudson River R. R. <small>(Former Erie System)</small></p> <p>Special Time Table</p> <p>Funeral Train</p> <p>Gen. Ulysses S. Grant</p> <p>Wednesday, Aug. 5, 1885.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">+</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Instructions.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">—</p> <p>This Train will have the right of track over all Trains between Albany and New-York.</p> <p>A Pilot Engine will leave Albany at 12.20 P. M. and run ten (10) minutes ahead of Schedule Time for Funeral Train to New-York having same rights.</p> <p>All Freight and Work Trains and Single Engines must be out of the way "at least thirty (30) minutes" before Funeral Train is due.</p> <p>The Train will reduce speed through all cities and villages.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">J. M. TOUCEY, <small>Gen'l Supt.</small></p> <p style="text-align: center;">S. M. BISSELL, <small>Sgt.</small></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+</p>	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Leave ALBANY</td> <td>12.00 P. M.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" E. ALBANY</td> <td>12.35 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" CASTLETON</td> <td>12.51 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" SCHODACK</td> <td>12.57 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" STUYVESANT</td> <td>1.07 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" COXSACKIE</td> <td>1.12 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" STOCKPORT</td> <td>1.17 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" HUDSON</td> <td>1.27 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" CATSKILL</td> <td>1.35 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" GERMANTOWN</td> <td>1.45 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" TIVOLI</td> <td>1.55 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" HARKYTOWN</td> <td>2.03 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" RHINEBECK</td> <td>2.12 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" STAATSBURGH</td> <td>2.22 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" HYDE PARK</td> <td>2.30 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" POUGHKEEPSIE</td> <td>2.45 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" NEW HAMBURGH</td> <td>3.01 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" FISHKILL</td> <td>3.11 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" COLD SPRING</td> <td>3.21 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" GARRISONS</td> <td>3.27 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" PEEKSKILL</td> <td>3.45 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" SING SING</td> <td>4.01 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" TARRYTOWN</td> <td>4.11 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" DOBBS FERRY</td> <td>4.19 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" YONKERS</td> <td>4.29 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" SPUYTEN DUYVIL</td> <td>4.37 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" JUNCTION</td> <td>4.48 "</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Arriv G. C. STATION, N. Y.</td> <td>5.00 "</td> </tr> </table>	Leave ALBANY	12.00 P. M.	" E. ALBANY	12.35 "	" CASTLETON	12.51 "	" SCHODACK	12.57 "	" STUYVESANT	1.07 "	" COXSACKIE	1.12 "	" STOCKPORT	1.17 "	" HUDSON	1.27 "	" CATSKILL	1.35 "	" GERMANTOWN	1.45 "	" TIVOLI	1.55 "	" HARKYTOWN	2.03 "	" RHINEBECK	2.12 "	" STAATSBURGH	2.22 "	" HYDE PARK	2.30 "	" POUGHKEEPSIE	2.45 "	" NEW HAMBURGH	3.01 "	" FISHKILL	3.11 "	" COLD SPRING	3.21 "	" GARRISONS	3.27 "	" PEEKSKILL	3.45 "	" SING SING	4.01 "	" TARRYTOWN	4.11 "	" DOBBS FERRY	4.19 "	" YONKERS	4.29 "	" SPUYTEN DUYVIL	4.37 "	" JUNCTION	4.48 "	Arriv G. C. STATION, N. Y.	5.00 "
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Funeral train timetable and instructions (Museum of the City of New York)

THE FUNERAL TRAIN OF GENERAL GRANT PASSING WEST POINT.
(From a sketch by Cadet C.T. Hamilton)





Ulysses S. Grant



General Grant, at his cottage in Mt McGregor, New York, 1885, working on his memoirs

Set of first-edition printed *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*



which had a beveled glass lead liner with tufted, cream-colored satin, was manufactured on July 24 by the Stein Manufacturing Company of Rochester, New York.

The little Mount McGregor train was normally used for guests and luggage to reach the Hotel Balmoral at the top of the mountain, which was located near Grant's cottage. On Aug. 3, the little train with four cars shuttled mourners up the mountain in the pouring rain to the cottage parlor, where they filed past the flag-draped casket in silence.

The following day, a lengthy service on the cottage veranda was attended by more than 1,000 mourners and officiated by Dr. John P. Newman. At the conclusion of the service, Mrs. Grant and the other women decided at the last minute not to travel on the special funeral train and instead planned to leave for New York at 4 p.m.

The flag-draped casket was carried from the cottage by members of the U.S. Grant Post 327, Grand Army of the Republic, while two buglers played "Dead March from Saul" as the casket was gently placed in one of four cars coupled to the little 0-4-2T steam engine. The mourners then proceeded to board the train cars for the short 12-mile trip down to Saratoga Springs, where the New York Central Railroad special funeral train was waiting.

At 1 p.m., train engineer Martin shut off the steam to the cylinders, and, with a puff of white smoke, the train slowly backed down the steep mountain grade in silence, through throngs of people lining the entire track to bid farewell as the president's casket passed by. On the last curve, the train encountered an artillery battery with brass guns saluting as it passed. It arrived at the bottom of the mountain, where the military was holding back thousands of grieving people standing motionless as the little mountain train came to a stop next to the New York Central Railroad special funeral train.

The special funeral train, brought in from New York, consisted of a new steam locomotive 4-4-0, No. 210, built in 1884 by the Dickson Manufacturing



Above: Stephen Merritt Burial Company 1845-1967

Below Left: General Grant's son places a ring on his father's finger

Below Right: Original tomb of General Grant, Riverside Park, NYC, 1885



Company of Scranton, Pennsylvania, coupled to nine passenger rail cars. The beautifully decorated cars were draped with 2,700 yards of black fabric, and the casket viewing car, "Woodland," was elaborately adorned with black pleated panels. The national flag was attached in the center.

Three-hundred-fifty yards of black cloth draped the engine from the boiler rails, and the front of the engine had black, pleated panels. The tender and sides of the engine were draped with black pleated panels, and in the center was a rosette created at the D&H Green Island shop under the direction of D.M. Kendrick.

The casket was lifted by the guard of honor in silence from the mountain train and placed in the Woodland, the first car behind the engine. The Brooklyn Guard of Honor and six members of the Loyal Legion entered the funeral car along with the two members of Wheeler Post GAR, who would stand with their arms folded at the head and foot of the casket during the journey.

With the church bell tolling at 2 p.m., train conductor Thornton gave the signal, and the impressive heavy black train, smoke billowing from its stack and steam hissing from its four drive wheels, chugged at 10 miles per hour down the track, through masses of grieving people watching the train leave Saratoga Springs.

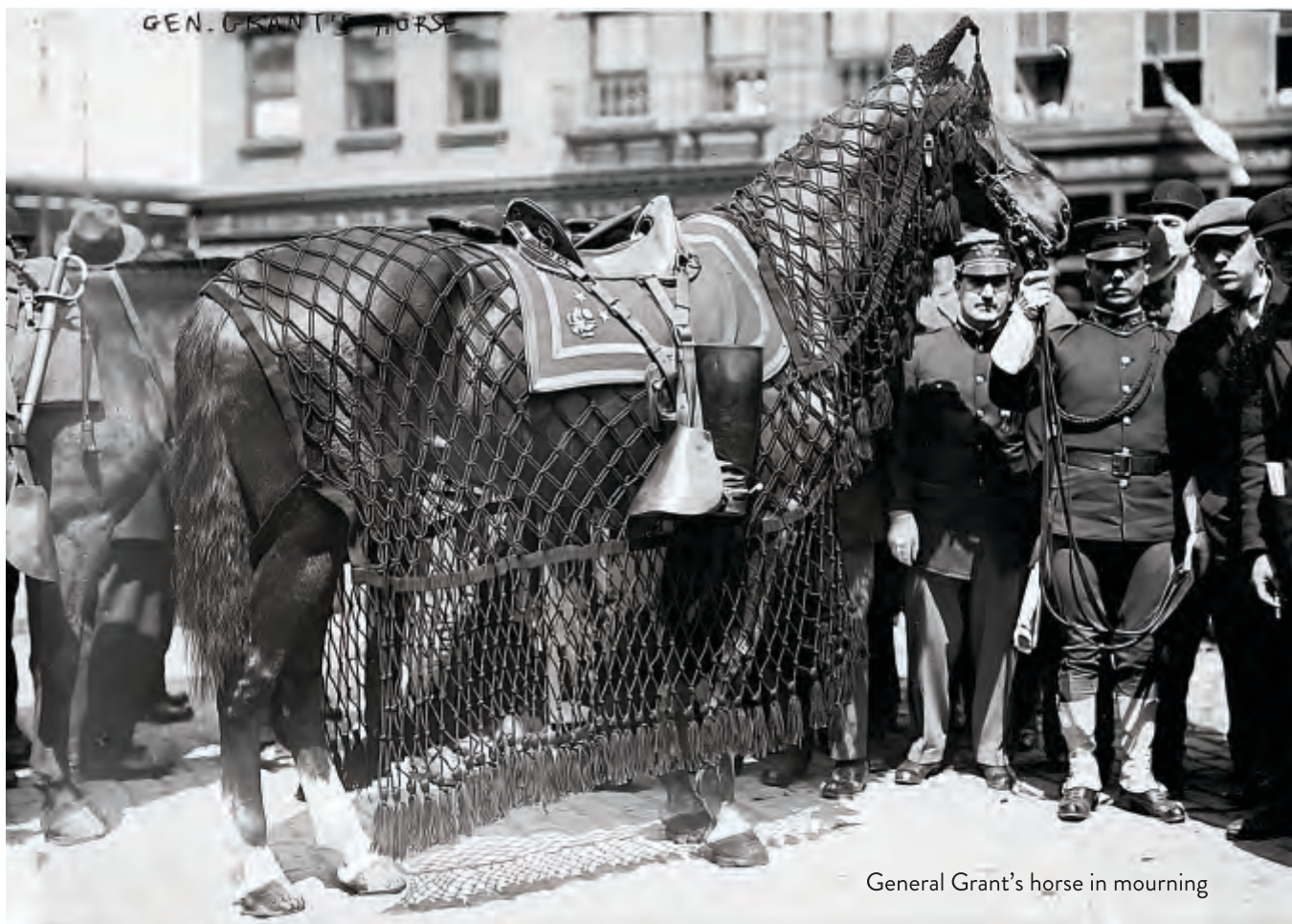
The train rumbled through towns and villages, past buildings draped in black crape and verandas and balconies

filled with mourners. After a little more than two hours, the funeral train, on schedule, rolled into Albany at 3:40 p.m. and quietly came to a stop at the corner of Spencer and Montgomery streets. During the short trip, the engineer never once made a sound from the steam whistle or locomotive bell for this solemn occasion.

Grant's sons – Col. Fredrick Grant, Jessie and Ulysses Grant Jr. – were the first to disembark from the train, followed by Gov. David B. Hill.

The bells in the church tolled while the flag-draped casket was carried from the Woodland by military guards to the black-draped funeral catafalque, which was hitched to six black horses with black trappings. A member of GAR Post 5 and 121 led each horse as the 4,311 members of the military slowly traveled down Spencer Street, through dense crowds of grieving citizens to the state Capitol. The casket rested on a black catafalque in a private room. The undertakers and embalmers immediately removed its lid to inspect the body for the public viewing, which so far appeared to be in excellent condition.

Starting at 5 p.m., approximately 75,000 people filed past the open casket, illuminated by eight incandescent lamps. At 10 a.m. the following day, the Capitol doors swung shut and the undertakers prepared the body for its final journey. In the driving rain, church bells tolling from the steeple, along with blaring trumpets and the dull sound of cannons, the casket was transported back to the special funeral train waiting at the Central Railroad Station. The casket arrived



General Grant's horse in mourning

on a black-draped funeral car hitched to six black horses with black riggings and was placed back in the Woodland funeral car for the final leg of the journey to New York City.

The pilot engine left the station at 12:20 p.m., clearing the track ahead of the special funeral train. Ten minutes later, the engineer released the brakes of the funeral train, and it lurched forward along the steel rails. The only sound emanating from the train was the rumble of its wheels as it crossed the long bridge of the Hudson on its journey to New York City on the Central and Hudson River Railroad.

Many mourners, men without hats and ladies with scarves, waited for hours, waving handkerchiefs and weeping at the sight of the funeral train. An old, one-legged man leaning on his crutch and with a Grand Army of the Republic badge pinned to his coat took off his cap and bowed his head as the train passed.

Hundreds of people placed coins on the track along the route, anticipating the heavy wheels of the funeral cars would flatten the coins, creating lifelong keepsakes of the president's final journey home.

White clouds turned ominously dark, and rain began to fall as the train slowly rolled past Garrison Station at 3:27 p.m. As a tribute from Grant's alma mater, West Point cadets, dressed in gray coats with white trousers, with their eyes looking straight forward, stood at present arms as the post band played "Sweet Spirit, Hear My Prayer" in subdued tones as the train swept around a corner and disappeared.

The special funeral train continued to race across the countryside, passing through many towns and villages. The train finally made its last curve down into Harlem and thundered toward New York City under heavy rain. The hands of the Grand Central clock on the depot were at 5 p.m., and the train emerged from the soot-coated tunnel and made its last stop at the railroad platform as Grant's final journey home ended.

The family gathered as the flag-draped casket was lifted from the Woodland and carried to the horse-drawn funeral car for the procession to City Hall.

On Saturday, Aug. 8, Trinity Church bells tolled while hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers lined the funeral route. The procession consisted of the casket on a great black-draped funeral hearse, along with 300 carriages carrying the Grant family, President Grover Cleveland and many other dignitaries. More than 34,000 members of the military who had fought in Grant's campaigns marched for 9 miles to the temporary tomb in Riverside Park, where the rituals of the Grand Army of the Republic were conducted. Following a closing prayer by Post Chaplain Rev. C. Irvine Wright, the Randolph Light Battery, situated north of the tomb, fired three salvos, and the bugler from the Jennings Band of Camden, New Jersey, played the 24 notes of "Taps," bringing the beautiful funeral service for the 18th president of the United States to a close.

As the thousands of mourners dispersed from Riverside Park, the heavy steel gates of the tomb were gently closed and locked, and a guard of federal soldiers remained at their post to protect the resting place of Ulysses S. Grant.



On April 17, 1897, Grant's remains were quietly transferred to an 8.5 ton red granite sarcophagus and placed in the mausoleum. The monument was dedicated ten days later on April 27, 1897, on the 75th anniversary ceremony of Grant's birth on April, 27, 1822. Julia Dent Grant, Grant's wife of nearly 40 years, died five years later in 1902 and was placed in a matching sarcophagus and laid to rest beside her husband.



General Grant National Memorial
Morningside Heights, Manhattan, New York