

Ulysses S. Grant

(1822–1885)

Ulysses S. Grant, the 18th president of the United States, graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 1843, and then served in the Mexican War alongside many future Confederate officers. Disillusioned with military life, he resigned his commission in 1854. For the next six years he worked with little success as a farmer, real-estate broker, and customs-house clerk, eventually settling as a clerk in his father's leather goods store.

At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Grant accepted command of an infantry regiment in the Illinois militia. Early successes earned him promotion to the rank of major general in the regular army from President Abraham Lincoln. In 1862, when his poor judgment cost 13,000 casualties at the Battle of Shiloh, the public clamored for his dismissal. Lincoln, however, refused to relieve him, claiming, "I can't spare this man—he fights."¹ Grant's brilliant victory at Vicksburg the following year restored his reputation and prompted Lincoln to award him command of all Union troops. His aggressive strategies led to Union victory in 1865, making Grant a national hero.

Grant reluctantly accepted the Republican presidential nomination in 1868, easily winning the subsequent election. He was reelected in 1873, but suffered deep embarrassment when several ill-chosen advisors were caught in acts of corruption. Nonetheless, he remained a military hero in the public's eyes.

Grant narrowly lost the Republican nomination for president in 1880, and four years later a bad investment once again tainted his name and ruined him financially. Grant was diagnosed with throat cancer in February 1885 and, desperate to provide a legacy for his family, he worked feverishly on his memoirs, completing the task just four days before his death on July 23, 1885. The two-volume work attracted wide acclaim and went on to become a best-seller.

Artist William Cogswell painted this portrait of President Ulysses S. Grant during Grant's first term in office. According to Laura Cooke, the widow of Henry Cooke (the original owner of the portrait), Cogswell worked in a studio improvised at the Cooke family home in Washington, D.C. Grant was an intimate friend and frequent visitor there. Laura Cooke reportedly termed the painting "a most speaking likeness to the General, so considered by himself, and all who saw it." Henry Cooke's brother, New York financier Jay Cooke, called the Cogswell portrait "the best picture of Grant in existence." The Senate acquired the painting in 1886, one year after Grant's death.

A favorite during the Grant administration, the self-trained Cogswell also painted a large group portrait of the president and his family, now in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution. The artist had a studio in New York City for many years and also traveled extensively; in Hawaii he painted portraits of King Kalakaua and Queen Liliuokalani. Cogswell portrayed other prominent individuals, including President William McKinley, General Philip Sheridan, naturalist Louis Agassiz, California Governor Leland Stanford, and banker Jay Cooke. The official White House portrait of Abraham Lincoln, as selected by President Grant, was painted by Cogswell; it remains in the White House collection.



William Cogswell painted *Ulysses S. Grant and Family* in 1867, a year before he completed the Senate's portrait of the president.

(National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution)

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William F. Cogswell (1819-1903)

Oil on canvas, 1868

29 x 24 inches (oval) (73.7 x 61 cm)

Signed and dated (lower left): W. Cogswell / 1868

Purchased by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1886

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