



American FLOTUS



From White Haven to the White House: The 200 Year Legacy of First Lady Julia Grant

Alan Lowe: Welcome to *American FLOTUS*, a podcast produced by a partnership of the First Ladies Association for Research and Education or FLARE, and the *American POTUS* podcast.

I'm Alan Lowe. Thanks so much for joining us. I'm very pleased to welcome our guests today from the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site in St. Louis, Missouri: Nick Sacco, who serves at the site as Historian and Curator, and Robert Lippert, who serves as Lead Interpretive Park Ranger and Acting Interpretation Program Manager. They're joining us today to discuss the incredible Julia Grant in this the year of her 200th birthday. Rob and Nick, welcome to *American FLOTUS*.

Rob Lippert: Thank you.

Nick Sacco: Thank you, Alan. We're pleased to be here today.

Alan: To get us started, let's talk a bit about Julia's youth in Missouri at the home you preserve and help make available to the public, White Haven.

Rob: Sure. So White Haven was the childhood home of Julia Grant. She grew up here. She met and courted Ulysses in 1844. Julia called White Haven home until she was 33 years old when the Grants left in 1859 and later moved on to Galena, Illinois. She was born in St. Louis in January of 1826, and we're not certain whether it was here at White Haven or at the Dents home up in the city. We do know that when she was a year old, the Dents decided to make

White Haven their full-time home. In her memoirs, Julia recalls playing by the stream with enslaved children who made a playhouse for her from stones found around the streambed. She reminisced that she was catching minnows in the stream, and she had her enslaved playmates carry the bucket back to the house for her. And Julia loved horseback riding as much as her future husband Ulysses did, and both of them remembered slipping out onto the estate on horseback to spend private time together when Grant would come to visit.

Alan: Let's talk about when they met. How did they meet and was it love at first sight?

Nick: Sure. So, it's kinda interesting 'cause, Ulysses, he was first sent to St. Louis with the U.S. Army. In the fall of 1843, he finishes at West Point, and his first assignment is at Jefferson Barracks, which is about five miles south of the White Haven property. So, Ulysses, initially, when he first starts coming out to White Haven, he comes out maybe once or twice a week, and Julia is actually finishing up at boarding school. So, as Rob sort of alluded to, a fairly privileged upbringing here in St. Louis -- Julia growing up on a plantation here at White Haven, and she would go to boarding school in the city. And so, she is approaching her 18th birthday, finishing up at school. She actually returned back to White Haven here in February of 1844.

So, Grant had been coming out here for several months just visiting with the rest of the Dent family that was here at the home, including Julia's parents. And the way that Ulysses described it later on in life, is that when Julia came back home from boarding school his visits got a lot more frequent to White Haven. So that was the way he kind of described it. And so, it turned into this thing where he was coming out almost every day of the week and spending a lot of time with Julia. And I don't know if it was immediately love at first sight but there was a strong attachment between the two of them. They were four years apart, so Julia recently turning 18, and Ulysses is 22 years old. And I think their shared love of horses, their shared love of the outdoors and just being able to get to know each other and spend time here at White Haven, Ulysses really becomes fond of both Julia and just White Haven, more broadly. And so, it's amazing to me they only courted for three months when Ulysses is gonna receive orders that his infantry regiment is leaving St. Louis, and he decides to propose marriage to Julia on the front porch of White Haven. So, it was a very quick, three-month courtship. Julia was not so sure about the proposal at first because she was only 18; she didn't think her parents would approve. But they agreed to have a secret engagement in the short-term, and their engagement ends up being four years long because of Grant's involvement in the Mexican American War. But it was a love that grew very quickly during those three months in early 1844 when they were here at White Haven.

Alan: Both sets of parents had some issues, at least some of the parents did.

Nick: Both the Dent and the Grant parents wanted to assert, or exert, their influence on the relationship. For Julia with her parents, Ellen Dent, her mother, loved Ulysses, was a very big supporter of him. And later on, in the 1850s, when the farm operation is really struggling here, when Grant's trying to make it as a farmer, Ellen sticks by him and is a big advocate for him. But Julia's father, Colonel Frederick Dent, I think it's safe to say that maybe he was a little bit more skeptical. He was definitely worried about Julia getting married to somebody in the military, just the lifestyle of somebody in the military constantly moving around all the time and uprooting your life, and in the case of soldiers back then possibly being sent out to the Western frontier. And so, there was definitely some skepticism there from Colonel Dent,

for sure. On the other side of things, Jesse Grant, Ulysses' father, at one point in time referred to the Dent family as "a tribe of slaveholders" so he's not necessarily crazy about Ulysses having this relationship with a woman from a slave-holding family. I often compare it to Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd Lincoln, and the Todd family having their connections to slavery, as well. I also think it's interesting that both sides, both the Grants and Dents, are all Methodists. But in 1844 the Methodist Church is gonna have this really bad split over the institution of slavery, and so you have the Southern Methodist and then the mainline Methodist. And so, when Ulysses and Julia get married here in St. Louis in 1848, we're not a hundred percent sure why, but Ulysses' parents don't go to the wedding, and I think there's a lot of plausibility there with these splits within the Methodist church, maybe some political differences between the two families. But Ulysses and Julia did immediately go visit Ulysses' parents in Ohio after the wedding, so maybe they just decided not to travel to St. Louis.

I think Julia did have somewhat of a complicated relationship with Jesse Grant, Ulysses' father, and a lot of Ulysses' siblings. Julia later went on to say that the Grants perceived her as a little too extravagant, and she viewed them as the complete opposite of that, and so there's definitely some tension between Julia and the Grant family. Certainly, the other way, too. But at the same time, I actually tend to take the view that Ulysses got along pretty good with his in-laws, especially in comparison to Julia and her in-laws.

Alan: Tell me if I'm incorrect in this, that Jesse retained concern about this marriage even up to this point when they moved back to Illinois right before the war where, I think, didn't Grant's mother have to intercede?

Nick: I think, with Jesse Grant, there's still tension when Ulysses decided to leave the army in 1854. Jesse Grant was getting his business up and running in Galena. He was still in Ohio, but two of Grant's brothers were running the store up there in Galena. And Jesse Grant basically said, well, you can come up here, and you can work at the leather goods store up here, but the kids are gonna have to stay with us. And so, Grant was just not having that. He didn't appreciate his father meddling in his family's affairs and telling him what he could do with Julia and the children. And that is a contributing factor to Ulysses deciding to come here to White Haven in 1854 to farm. The Dents basically say, yeah, you can come here, and you can get started with farming, and there's a lot less restrictions upon the family, as compared to Jesse Grant and what he wanted. So, there may have been some skepticism, but I think it's a lot of just trying to exert influence and control on Ulysses and Julia and their family.

Alan: The first in-laws to ever try that, by the way. Interesting. Right? [laughter]

Nick: Right. Right. [laughter]

Alan: So, as you noted, Ulysses left the Army in 1854. He moved back to Missouri. But they have some really difficult economic times there, do they not?

Rob: Well, they do, yes. Julia was living here at White Haven with the two older boys while Grant was stationed out in California, in northern California. As you mentioned, in 1854 he resigns his commission and returns to St. Louis. Colonel Dent had given the Grants about 80 acres of the farm, and when Grant returned he began clearing the land, and struggled to begin to grow crops. At the same time, he was building Hardscrabble, the cabin that they would

occupy for only three months, between adverse weather and Grant's struggle with the long-term effects of contracting malaria, and so farming never really supported the Grants. They lived here on the property in various locations. Wish-ton-Wish was Julia's brother's home just south of White Haven. Hardscrabble was about a mile to the north. They were here from '54 through '59. As the farming faltered, Grant began taking on other jobs up in the city, trying to provide for the family. This included partnering with Julia's cousin, Harry Boggs, in real estate and attempted to secure a job as a city engineer, but none of these were successful. Eventually, the Grants ultimately decided to leave St. Louis and move to Galena where Grant would work for his father, as was mentioned. That only lasted about 16 months before the Civil War broke out.

Alan: How many children did they have, and what were they like as parents?

Rob: Well, the Grants had four children, eventually. Fred was born before Ulysses went to California. Ulysses Jr. was actually born while Grant was deployed. And then they had a daughter, Nellie, and a younger son, Jesse, that were both born here at White Haven after Grant returned in the later 1850s.

Nick: Yeah, and I would add, I think the best way to describe Ulysses and Julia as parents is that all four children at various points in their adult lives commented that they thought they were the favorite child of their parents. And so, if all four of the children feel that way, you've certainly succeeded as parents. I think Ulysses and Julia were very indulging of their children. Ulysses Jr. commented that he never heard his father raise his voice or become extremely cross with the children. I think they're very caring. I also think, too, that Ulysses and Julia, from very early in their lives really gave a lot of space for the children to become independent. And maybe that's not too different from other parents in the 19th century. But during the war itself, which we can talk about a little bit here, but there's a lot of times where the children are kind of on their own, or they're staying with other family members while Julia is visiting Ulysses on the battlefield. During Grant's presidency, Nellie Grant is a very young teenager and is allowed to go to Europe and to travel Europe and explore sights and sounds over there. They really gave a lot of space for their kids to discover who they were as individuals.

Rob: And yet there are anecdotes of Ulysses rolling around on the floor with the boys wrestling.

Nick: Right. Right.

Rob: So, a very sort of homey and loving picture of these parents that just doted on their children.

Alan: Reminds me of Abraham Lincoln, frankly. Very, very similar in that regard.

Nick: Yes.

Rob: Very much.

Alan: You mentioned Julia during the war. If you look at the turnaround of Ulysses working in Galena, then not that many months later in the Army and helping save the Republic, helping save the Union, what was Julia doing during his service in the Civil War?

Nick: Julia was very active. She is going to visit Ulysses several times during the Vicksburg Campaign, during the Overland Campaign, and eventually into the siege of Petersburg. There'll be extended periods of time where Julia is going to stay with Ulysses at headquarters and spend time with them [Ulysses and troops]. And I think that's also reflective of the fact that Julia has a different status as a general's wife versus the wife of a common enlisted soldier. She has the privilege to be able to do that, to move around, and maybe be a little less focused on figuring out ways to help raise money to support the family. Julia also came back to White Haven eight separate times during the war. She came back to St. Louis to visit her father, who was getting older here at White Haven, and to check up on him and spend time with him. She also, in the summer of 1864, attended what was called the Western Sanitary Fair, which was a large fundraiser for the United States military here in St. Louis and she is going to participate in that Sanitary Fair. Nellie Grant, the daughter, will pose as the Old Woman in the Shoe for a photograph, and that photograph will be sold for 50 cents during the fair to raise money for a whole range of things: food, clothing, and resources for the United States military to help provide care to refugees, white and Black, who came to St. Louis seeking aid during the war. So, Julia has got her hands in a lot of different things during the Civil War.

Rob: Well, and, even in the midst of the Civil War, the Grants had attempted to sell Hardscrabble and the surrounding ground, and that deal sort of fell apart. Julia ended up in court defending the property and the property rights while Grant was away on the battlefield. So really sort of an extraordinary circumstance where a woman was defending property rights in St. Louis in the midst of the war. Really, really, sort of an extraordinary move at that point.

Alan: Seems like an extraordinary woman. I would assume, in those travels to be with him, she's in danger, at times.

Nick: Certainly. You know she oftentimes would've had a military escort that was with her to accompany her to and from the lines, absolutely.

Rob: Well, and, their oldest son, Fred, was even at the front line. He was wounded, not necessarily mortally, but was grazed by a bullet. I believe it was at Vicksburg.

Nick: It was at Vicksburg, yeah. And I think that goes back to, you know, Julia wanted Fred Grant to see what life was like in a war, so she encourages him to stay with his father. And so, for several months at Vicksburg, Fred is like 13 years old at this point and he's out there watching affairs, and as Rob mentioned, he does get hit in the leg during this time. But I can't imagine a mother saying to a 12- or 13-year-old today, hey, you should go join the military; just go see what it's like on the battlefield. It would be terrible to think of somebody doing that to their kid today.

Alan: I would've said to get as far away as possible but, I understand, I guess I understand her motive. Let's talk about, we're skipping over a lot of time, I know. But again, an extraordinary, incredible story of her life. But Ulysses, from almost nothing to leading the

armies, to then President of the United States and Julia as First Lady of the United States. How did she, in that role, engage with the political world of Washington? And what role did she play, if any, in giving Ulysses political advice?

Nick: Yeah, I think there's a couple different aspects of her time as First Lady that, I think, are pretty significant. She was an entertainer. She enjoyed being a hostess. And, I think the various receptions, the luncheons, the different state dinners that she hosts at the White House, they're really a form of soft diplomacy, I think. I think they're a form of diplomacy, not just with the heads of state from other countries who might visit for one of those state dinners, but it's a way to build relationships with the Washington elite. It's a way to integrate the Grant family into those circles and to secure the ability to communicate with the leaders of Congress, or Supreme Court justices, or other movers and shakers in Washington, D.C. For Julia, I think she's also communicating to the public as first lady that she takes her role seriously, that she was prepared to handle that role and to handle it gladly, and she values the respect, dignity, and elegance of the White House, and she wants to do right by the American people by being a good steward of the People's House. Not that previous first ladies were not good at doing that, but I think some of those previous first ladies had a lot of trepidation about the role and about the responsibilities that were heaved upon them, whereas Julia fully embraces the role and does so gladly. Now politically I wouldn't say that she's, necessarily, publicly advocating for any particular position on various matters, but she was very interested in following politics. And that comes back to her time here at White Haven, where her father's reading the daily newspaper, and she's sharing her opinions and getting into arguments with her father here in St. Louis. And so, she says in her memoirs that, "General Grant would often, when he had a caller who was interested or important and who inquired of me, would invite him to come into the library, which is my usual sitting room." So, a lot of those White House guests, Ulysses made an effort to ensure that Julia had the opportunity to meet those guests, as well. And, oftentimes at the end of the night or early in the morning, she expected to hear from Ulysses, what's going on in your head? What are you thinking about different pieces of legislation? And there's this interesting story in her memoirs where she talks about this one particular bill, the 1874 Inflation Bill, which, we don't have to get into the details of that. But she says that she was upset because Ulysses was initially intending to sign that bill into law, and he hadn't talked with her about it. So, she voiced her disapproval of that, and she sets this expectation like, hey, if you're gonna be doing a really big signing of a piece of legislation, I want to hear about that. And so, they talked about it more, and she claims he did go on to veto that bill, the inflation bill, and she claims in the memoirs that she had a role in convincing him to veto the bill, take it or leave it. But I think that's a good example of Julia sort of setting the expectation that she wants to hear what's going on, and she wants to hear what her husband has to say and have her own say in political matters. So, I think, that's one example that is pretty illustrative.

Alan: Was that the case in his actions with the formerly enslaved people? I know he tried his best, in the South, to assist the Freedmen. Was she engaged in that discussion with the President?

Nick: I wouldn't say that Julia was particularly engaged with that subject or necessarily a civil rights advocate, per se, but I think simply just in her role as first lady and standing by her husband's decisions. I think that, in and of itself, maybe would've communicated to people that she is supporting changes to American society during the Reconstruction Era and the Civil War amendments and the various enforcement acts intended to enforce those new

constitutional amendments. I think one particularly interesting story that Julia talks about, though, is that at the very beginning of her time as first lady she was asked by White House staff about allowing African Americans into the White House for these receptions that she would host. And she says in her memoirs, "This is my reception day. Admit all who call." So, I don't know for certain, but that might be the first time in our country's history where a first lady said, regardless of racial background anybody can come and participate in these receptions. Now, she did go on to say that there were no African Americans that showed up to these receptions at the White House. And there's probably a multitude of reasons why it was that way, but the fact that she at least expressed that sentiment of truly anybody, regardless of race, having the opportunity to participate in these receptions is indicative of the fact that, Julia, to a certain extent, she is evolving with the very rapidly changing structure of civil society during Reconstruction.

Alan: Stepping back to the dinners she hosted, am I correct in that they hosted the first State Dinner?

Rob: They did, actually. Now, Julia, her party throwing expertise goes all the way back to her youth. She was very immersed in society here in St. Louis and she was comfortable in the trappings and fixings of that lifestyle. As an example, when her daughter Nellie was married, in May of 1874, she was only 18 years old. Julia pulled out all the stops and it resulted in a spectacular celebration at the White House. Just seven months later the Grants really changed the very nature of the state dinner. Before the Grant administration, state dinners were, primarily, sort of internal events. They were local and state politicians or cabinet members, hosted for meetings at the White House and what have you.

But Julia changed that precedent on December 22nd, 1874, when she and the president welcomed the first ruling monarch to attend a White House state dinner, King Kalākaua of Hawaii. This event was significant. It demonstrated that the nation was ready to host and honor foreign leaders, and it really reflected sort of a new international power and influence that the United States was gaining as we grew in the Gilded Age.

Alan: Really a time of transition in our country in so many ways, and you can see that, certainly, with the Grant administration. She also oversaw some restoration work in the White House. Is that correct?

Nick: Yeah, that's correct. Congress actually ended up during both of Grant's terms appropriating some money for renovations to the White House. The first term, Congress appropriated \$25,000, and then there was \$100,000, actually appropriated during the second term. And so, among the different things that Julia oversaw, she arranged the furniture into suites. So, essentially, each room of the White House had its own furniture set that had its own theme. A lot of that furniture was Renaissance Revival furniture. She had all the hall carpets replaced in the White House. When you first walked into the front entrance of the White House, for many years there was a reception room to the right. Julia got rid of the reception room and turned it into a waiting room. So, when you first arrived, you can wait there to be called upon by the president. She also, with the White House staff, she put some more rules into place for the staff. They were no longer allowed to smoke or eat while they were on duty. They had to wear dress suits and white gloves on the job. So, she really played this larger role in professionalizing the White House staff.

She had a fence installed in the back grounds of the White House. Julia recalled, later in life, that there were some newspapers that complained about this because the White House should be a place that anybody could walk up to, and the grounds are in the building itself and with it being the People's House. But Julia responded that she still had young children. She had young children that were still trying to have a normal childhood and putting a fence up in the back grounds gave them a space to play without interference from photographers or journalists or people just trying to harass the family. And I think one of the most popular changes that she did, she oversaw the installation of glass globe chandeliers in the East Room, ahead of Nellie Grant's wedding, and these particular chandeliers were very well received by most visitors of the White House. And that's the thing too. A lot of changes ahead of Nellie Grant's wedding in 1874 since the wedding was at the White House.

Alan: I think I would've said to the members of the press, as well, we just had a president assassinated, perhaps security should be an issue we think about a little bit, at the White House.

Nick: Yeah, absolutely.

Alan: So, obviously put her imprint on the Office of First Lady. After the Grant administration, a topic I love to talk about is the around-the-world trip they took post-presidency. Really just an amazing story. Do we know her thoughts and impressions on that trip?

Rob: Well, we do, actually. Nellie, when she got married, she was married to a British citizen, and they relocated to England. So, it started off as a trip to England to visit Nellie and her husband. But Julia dedicated about 80 pages in her memoir to the recollections of what that trip turned into as they went along. In addition to that, she left us a scrapbook of mementos and photographs from the trip, and we'll actually have that scrapbook on display here at the park this summer as part of a special exhibit to celebrate Julia's 200th birthday. In addition, the Grants were accompanied on the trip by a writer, John Russell Young, who chronicled the journey in a large, illustrated volume. So, well documented what Julia's experience was on that over two-year trip. The Grants were greeted as international celebrities. Julia felt that her husband was finally getting the respect and accolades that he deserved. The second term in office was pretty tumultuous, and he was peppered by the media with scathing accusations of corruption. In the international scene, Grant is greeted as a hero. Julia was showered with gifts, brought back many souvenirs from the trip. And while some foreign leaders greeted them and made a bigger deal of their visit, others, not so much. Nonetheless, overall, I think Julia felt that they were really welcomed everywhere in the world that they visited.

Alan: Years ago -- you both know so much more about this than I do -- but years ago I taught a course and part of that was about this trip, and I recall just making a list of the leaders that met with Ulysses and Julia. And it's an amazing, long list of just about everyone, almost everyone you could think of. The big names in the world at that time wanted to meet with these, as you said, celebrities traveling around the world.

Nick: It was really kind of the first of its kind where, you know, Grant wasn't in the role as a president, but a president doing a trip around the world like that had never really been done

before. So, I think for a lot of the nations and a lot of the people of those nations that the Grants traveled to, this idea of seeing a former American president on their shores, it garnered a lot of attention. And even though they were just visiting in their private capacity, they end up sort of representing the U.S. government on the trip. You know, another form of soft diplomacy, even if it was supposed to be just a personal vacation.

Rob: Well, all the way down to where Grant is called upon to mediate a dispute.

Nick: Right. Between China and Japan during the world tour. That's right.

Alan: So, you mentioned a few times Julia's memoir. She wrote this memoir, but it wasn't published until 1975. Why is that the case?

Nick: Well, there was really two factors at play. Now when Ulysses wrote his personal memoirs he got a really sweet book publishing deal from his friend, Mark Twain. And the deal was, basically, that Grant would receive 70 percent royalties from the sales of his memoirs. Julia was looking for a similar sort of deal. And there were no publishers at that time that were necessarily willing to pay that. But I think, even more so than that, the sort of Victorian culture. There were certain topics that were off limits. I think of Elizabeth Keckley, who was Mary Todd Lincoln's dressmaker. When she wrote her book about life at the White House, people criticized it, criticized her for speaking about the Lincolns' inner lives and their experiences at the White House. And book publishers had the same sort of trepidations about Julia getting too much into the personal and too much into the Grant family's private lives and getting into Ulysses' relationship with his wife and kids. And they were worried that the public would not respond to that in a positive way. In our culture today, nothing's sacred, but back then there was just certain things that you didn't wanna talk about, I suppose. And so, she started working on it in the 1890s after her husband's death in 1885. But it's gonna take until 1975. Long after she passed away, the Grant family held onto the manuscript. Dr. John Y. Simon, who was the director of the "Papers of Ulysses S. Grant" and a professor at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, he worked with the Grant family, and they were able to get the memoirs published. And so, for our purposes here in St. Louis at White Haven, an extremely valuable resource for us to tap into as we worked to restore this property and to educate people about Ulysses' and Julia's lives, being able to have her memoirs as one of those resources.

Alan: It has been an incredible resource to have. How did she work, after Ulysses' death, to help preserve his legacy?

Rob: Well, Julia, actually, it's really interesting. She ends her memoir with Grant's death, so she doesn't necessarily herself go into a lot of detail in the memoir about what she intended to do to try and promote his legacy. While she doesn't come out and say it, I think she really lost a significant part of herself when he passed away. After he died, she and their eldest son, Fred, undertook trying to find a suitable final resting place for Grant, and several options were looked at and explored. But by this point in time, Julia really saw New York as home. The kids were all in that area. The Grants had lived there after the White House years, and even during the White House years they had a summer home outside of New York and New Jersey. And so, she decided, when the Mayor of New York offered some land in Riverside Park in north Manhattan overlooking the Hudson River, that that would be the place to do it.

The land would be free, but then it would be up to Julia and the Grant family to raise the funds to actually build the tomb. The Grant Monument Association was formed. It took 12 years as they raised funds, with several stops and starts along the way before it was finally completed, and it ends up being the largest mausoleum to this day in North America as a result. The dedication ceremony was attended by over a million people on April 27, 1897. That would've been Grant's 75th birthday. Julia was in attendance that day, as well. And in addition to writing her memoirs, she occasionally sat for interviews. She wrote about supporting orphan children and occasionally discussed her husband's legacy. But she also spent a lot of time with her daughter, Nellie, who moved in with her in a house in Washington, D.C. near DuPont Circle, in the late 1890s, and spent those final years with her grandchildren.

Alan: Now, you mentioned earlier the exhibit you're having, showing the album from their around the world travels as part of your celebration of her 200th birthday. How else are you celebrating her this year? And more in general, what can visitors see and do when they come to your site?

Rob: Well, to answer the first part of that, we've got about 40 events planned for the year: our history talks, rangers diving into specific portions, visiting historians coming to speak. We've, in fact, got Ulysses Grant Dietz coming in April, the great-great-grandson of Ulysses and Julia, to speak. So, we've got a number of those types of events planned, but visitors all the time can come. We've got about 10 acres of the original 850-acre farm that was owned by Julia's father. We preserved the original home that was at the center of that, White Haven. And it's, of course, the home where the Grants met, lived, and they ultimately owned it after the Civil War until just before Grant's death. We have a few outbuildings. We offer ranger programs, seven times a day, where we talk about the Grants, the Dents, and the enslaved people that called this place home. In addition to the house, we have a museum that's housed in a horse stable that Grant built on the site when he was president. The museum tries to capture the Grants' legacy, telling both their personal lives as well as their public lives.

And then this summer the museum's gonna host a special exhibit, being curated by Nick, of Julia's personal belongings. It's part of our 200th anniversary celebration. The exhibit will open on May 22nd and run through September. This exhibit is gonna explore major themes in Julia's life, including her life through photographs, including the very first photograph that we know of, of Julia, taken while Grant was away in California. She's holding the two young boys. It'll also include family correspondence. We have a real nice collection of letters that Julia wrote to family members, some pieces from their wedding here in St. Louis in 1848, as well as Julia's relationship with slavery, her experiences as a general's wife and as a first lady. And since Nick's curating it, he may have some things he wants to add to that description.

Nick: I think you covered a lot of it, Rob. I think what's exciting about this particular exhibit is it's gonna be the first time that a lot of these artifacts have been put on display. A lot of partner institutions are loaning artifacts to us, which is really exciting. At the end of the day what I keep going back to is that Julia is, obviously, not around to tell her story. So, we're using artifacts and using her memoirs to try to do our best to reconstruct her life experiences. And so, I hope people will come to this exhibit with a lot of interest in learning about Julia's life experiences and just the ups and downs of life: from growing up in a privileged family, to really struggling where her husband's a farmer, to being a general's wife, and being a first lady, and being able to experience some pretty amazing things in her lifetime. People will,

hopefully, leave with a much better appreciation of Julia's dynamic experiences. And, you know, for those of us here in St. Louis, we're probably not getting another first lady anytime soon.

Alan: Well, I'll say you never know, but yes, that, that's right. I can't wait to get out there and see what sounds like a really terrific exhibit and, hopefully, take part in some of those many, many programs you're hosting this year. How can our listeners learn more about your site and planning their visit there?

Rob: Well, the best way to learn about our site and upcoming events is through our website. It's www.nps.gov/ulsg. From there, there are scores of articles about the people, places, and stories of here. There's a very packed calendar for the remainder of 2026 with, like I said, lots of events coming in the coming months, through the summer and into the fall. So that is by far the best way to find out. We do have a social media presence, but that website is really the tool.

Alan: Very good, very good. I know I went to that website and learned a lot prior to our conversation. It's very well done, and I encourage folks to do that and come visit you this year. It sounds like you're not gonna get any sleep this year, gentlemen. [group laughter]

Rob: Not much. [group laughter]

Alan: But that sounds like for a good purpose, for sure. Well, Rob, Nick, thank you so much for a great conversation. Thanks for joining us on *American FLOTUS*.

Nick: Thanks, Alan. Appreciate it.

Rob: Thank you very much. It was our pleasure.

Alan: I wanna thank all of you who tuned in for this episode. Make sure you check out all our *American FLOTUS* episodes which you can find at flare-net.org, or at americanpotus.org, or on your favorite podcast platform. Thanks so very much and I'll see you next time on *American FLOTUS*.