C-SPAN SERIES, JULIA GRANT
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SUSAN SWAIN: Serving as first lady from 1869 to 1877, by all accounts, Julia Grant relished the role, once commenting that life inside the White House was a "garden spot of orchids."

Growing up in a slave-holding family, she ended up as the spouse of the commanding general of the U.S. Army during the Civil War. She and Ulysses S. Grant shared 37 years together that included the hardships of war, the triumphs of politics, and eight challenging years in the White House.

Welcome to our program, our continuing series, "First Ladies: Influence and Image." Tonight, the life of Julia Grant.

Let me introduce you to our two guests at the table.

Bill Seale is a member of our Academic Advisory Panel for this series. We're delighted to have him here. He's a longtime White House historian and the author of "The President's House."

Bill, nice to see you.

WILLIAM SEALE: Thanks, Susan.

SWAIN: And Pam Sanfilippo is a historian at the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site in St. Louis, Missouri, and she's also working on a biography of Julia Grant.

Thank you for being here tonight, as well.

I want to start with you.

We last left this series with the Johnsons after impeachment, and the politics with the radical Republicans and reconstruction in the South. So, set the stage for us as the Grants come into the White House.

SANFILIPPO: Well, Grant's election was started off with the campaign, "Let us have peace." And so, people were really looking to Grant to kind of bring some peace and quiet to the White House and to the nation after the war and then the years of the Johnson administration. And so, those were Grant's initial efforts to -- as he took office.

SWAIN: And what -- the other -- those were the themes -- we brought -- we were looking at his inaugural -- the first inaugural address...

SEALE: Uh-huh.

SWAIN: These were the themes that he struck when he spoke to the nation for the first time?

SEALE: Yes. And also, he had the added advantage of being a hero. Famous even in the South, if he wasn't beloved, but everywhere else -- I mean, a million young men tried to imitate his stance -- his particular stance he had. And he was wildly popular and clean. He was clean. Nothing dirty attached to him. So, I think he was a natural.

SWAIN: The country was ready for him, in other words.

SEALE: Ready for him.

SWAIN: So, talk about the first lady herself. She had been the wife of a general, and that brings certain sorts of skill sets along with it.

SEALE: Mm-hmm.

SWAIN: What did she bring to the role in the White House?

SEALE: She brought an incredibly strong supporting role to the president. Their -- their lives had been that way. She ultimately was very supportive of him. She'd argue, and all, but she was supportive to him. And they wanted to represent in the White House the ideal American family. And they weren't there but a few days when this huge portrait was brought in on an ox cart and hung in the Red Room.

You know, the White House had been open to the public since Jefferson's time. And they put this in the Red Room, this huge picture of the Grant family so the public could see it on the tours -- see this was their home, this is where they lived. So, this whole symbolic home, Julia Grant developed.

SWAIN: Since you're working on a biography of her, tell us about her personality and what kind of woman she was.

PAM SANFILIPPO: She was very outgoing, warm...

SWAIN: To Grant's quietness?

SANFILIPPO: In some ways, they were opposites, and yet, they had similarities, as well. Both had a fondness of riding horses and -- and reading.

She was a very likable person. You get that not only from contemporaries of hers, but from her own memoirs, as well.

SWAIN: Would it be fair to say she was the better politician of the two?

SANFILIPPO: Ooh...

SEALE: Hmm.

SANFILIPPO: She could be very politically astute in -- in some of her dealings with cabinet members and their wives and the public, but she would most often defer to her husband for political realm.

SWAIN: Do you have any thoughts on -- on her and her personality?

SEALE: She seems to have been very protective, I think, of her husband, too. And she was not hesitant to give her opinion on things. She seems to be a woman who knew -- who cut her claws, as they used to say, exactly where she wanted. She knew what she...

SWAIN: What does that mean?

SEALE: She knew what she wanted to do, what she wanted to accomplish, and the rest of the stuff could be arranged.

SWAIN: And she was unusual in the fact that she had been educated that timeframe. So, she completed something like 15, 16 years of schooling.

SANFILIPPO: Yes, she had gone to a neighborhood school as a young child with her siblings and then to a female academy in the city of St. Louis, a boarding school that she attended until about age 18.

SWAIN: Well, the Grant administration is a two-termer. And it was full of so many stories, it was hard for us to find just a few to put on the screen to give you a sense of what it was like. In 1870, President Grant was successful in having the 15th Amendment to the Constitution ratified, giving people the right to vote regardless of race. Of course, still not women.

SEALE: Mm-hmm.

SWAIN: Then in 1871, the Force Acts were passed. That was anti-KKK legislation. It was something that President Grant was much involved in. And that was to protect voters in the South against the rising work of the KKK.

1873 -- and we'll talk more about this later -- the panic of 1873 -- big downturn that resulted from some of the policies of the administration. And in 1876, the Battle of Little Bighorn was fought. So, that's just some of the important points during that administration.

Well, as he brings on his cabinet, the -- well, the story of the Grant administration is that there were -- they were no strangers to political patronage. So, for both of you, how -- what kind of advisers did he surround him -- himself with? And, again, how involved was Julia in that process?

SANFILIPPO: Most of the people that Grant appointed, at least to his cabinet, he either knew of or knew personally. For example, Elihu Washburne, a former congressman of Illinois, he appointed as secretary of State, kind of as a thank-you for having supported -- for Washburne having supported him through the war. And others were business people that he thought would do the best job. Some of them turned out to be not so trustworthy as -- as deserving of it as he had placed in them.

SWAIN: But tone is often set at the top. So, what kind of tone did the grants set for their -- their cabinet and their administration?

SANFILIPPO: Well, actually, I think at first, Grant made the decisions himself, and I think that caused some friction with Congress, especially members of his own party who expected him to consult with them in his selection of cabinet members. And he made his decisions entirely on his own.

SEALE: But he was, I think, the whole theme of the hero was success, great success. It was before the panic, the national panic of '73, and the people Grant associated with were people like himself who had come from not a lot and had gained a whole lot, so whether it was in business or military or what, he was attractive to those kind of people, and she was too, and they entertained them, they associated with them, and it was certainly a more lose supervision by the government than today over what politicians did.

And Grant, the idea was that Grant would be the chief executive over a great company. The White House was called the executive mansion. The White House was just what -- on street talk, but executive mansion. This is where the executive of the great nation lived, and the Congress was the board that ran the country.

And that was -- you know, oversimplifying, but sort of the idea. And Grant didn't always stick with it.

SWAIN: Well, you know the insides of the White House like nobody else, and we've got some video of what is now today the White House Treaty Room. We're going to show people that right now, and that was the room that Grant used for his cabinet.

SEALE: Cabinet.

SWAIN: And we're looking at the pictures right now.

Will you tell us a little bit about the table that's in the room?

SEALE: They purchased the table. The Grants purchased the table in 1871, as I remember, in Philadelphia, and it's -- sorry, it's been in the White House ever since. It was brought back to this use in the Kennedy Administration, but it was used clear through the beginnings of Theodore Roosevelt's administration. A very elaborate, carved table supposedly made for the same purpose.

That room was a sitting room, always. And Lincoln made it into a reception room where you -- you've took reports, clerks took reports to register them, and then Andrew Johnson took it in as a cabinet room and Grant refurnished it as a cabinet room with other things you see here. That sofa, in the back. And different things were in the house at that time. It was a grubbier -- a grubbier room than it is today. I mean, the spittoons and -- and lots of political memorabilia and long-books.

SANFILIPPO: Definitely cigars.

SEALE: Cigars, sure.

SWAIN: And President Grant was known to smoke up to 20 cigars a day, is that right?

SANFILIPPO: Yes, he picked up that habit during the Civil War, when after one of his victories, he was sent cigars in appreciation, and he had so many he started smoking them on a very regular basis.

SWAIN: We invite your participation in our program. That's what makes it work for us, this every week, and you can do it in a number of ways. You can call us, and hear our phone lines. 202-585-3880. If you live in the Eastern or Central time zones. If you live in the Western or the part of the United States, Mountain or Pacific time zones or beyond, our phone number is 202-585-3881.

You can also send us a message on Facebook. We already have some interesting questions coming in. Find CSPAN's Facebook page and join the conversation. And you can tweet us. If you tweet us, use the hashtag #firstladies, and we will include some of your questions and comments in our conversation.

Well, Julia Grant, by all accounts, as we said in the outset, loved life in the White House. Here is one quote similar to the one we used in the outset. "My life in the White House was like a bright and beautiful dream. How did she approach her time there?"

SANFILIPPO: She considered herself hostess to the nation, and was going to do her best to ensure that she acted in that manner that the public would've received very well. She did compare her time there to her life, her early life at White Haven, and I think that was more a reflection of the fact that it was the first time in many years that the family spent eight years together without separation.

SWAIN: Because of his war duties.

SANFILIPPO: Correct.

SEALE: And part of her job, as she clearly envisioned it, was to make this a model house of the nation. Other first ladies have felt that way too, but it was part of Grant's program, and she -- they entertained lavishly, very lavishly, not in a fancy sense, but an elegant since, and she handled that very well herself.

Grant brought his old cronies in as much as he could, and he brought the -- and a cook in from the Army for the chef at the White House, and he -- this diplomatic banquets, he would serve big roast beef slices and apple pie with cheese on it and the diplomats were horrified, so Julia let him go, and hired Valentino (Mieli), who was a chef, a well-known chef in New York at Sherry's and he -- he came there and turned it into a very cosmopolitan table. And flowers, costume, she was very stringent about rules. All the White House staff had just worn business suits. They were half guard, half staff. They had to be in full dress, and they had to stand at attention in the entrance hall on shifts.

And there's a story she tells herself, where a woman would come to the women's noon receptions, and if you did not wear a hat, you were a part of the house party, greeting the guests. If you did, you were a outside guest, and women from time to time would go into the coat room and take their hats off and come out, and Mrs. Grant said they never repeated that a second time.

SWAIN: Well, how was this all received by the nation? Because one of the other things that was happening is that there was quite a burgeoning press corps and lots of coverage of the couple in the White House.

SEALE: There's a lot of very good press describing them. People were so interested in him, and all the details of what he did. And he would appear in public. He and his friend, General Beall, who lived across Lafayette Park, would get in races down Pennsylvia avenue on their selkies, with their horses, and as you know, Grant was absolutely a horseman to his soul. His father dealt in horses. He was raised that way, and Grant knew horses.

So, he had quite a stable. He brought his own coachman to Albert Hawkins to the White House. Hawkins stayed there until the automobile took over as head of the stables. He was a black man who was very, very grand looking, and more obsession with livery and uniform, and managed the stables with his staff.

And Grant would spend time in the daytime in his stables, but the elegant equippage the Grants had was part of the story. And the public liked it, because it looked good, it looked successful, it looked peaceful, and of course, the accumulation of successful friends, which was easy to do, was one of the sad things. He trusted people that he shouldn't have trusted.

SANFILIPPO: Well, I think two, the fact that as you said, the family was there and so while -- while there was this opulence on one level, it was very down to Earth in -- in the fact that with four young children still at home, Julia for example closed off the back yard so that the children could play.

SEALE: And it had been a public place.

SANFILIPPO: Exactly.

SWAIN: Help people understand the economy of the United States at this point. Was the South still reeling in the years after the war?

SEALE: It depends on where you were.

Louisiana sugar came right back on its feet and was just as red as it was until the hurricane of 1883, but you go up into Mississippi, there was some pretty horrible poverty and in Georgia as well.

It's not all blamed on Sherman, it's the collapse of the cotton market because the English went to India for cotton, and Egypt.

And that lapse of years, you know, of the blockade, it broke them. I mean, there are -- New Orleans flourished. You know, 6,000 Union soldiers elected to settle in New Orleans.

And it was -- so it wasn't all like "Gone with the Wind," with everyone starving. It was -- it was coming back, but it was a different culture. It wouldn't be agricultural, have agricultural (florescence) again until later in the 19th century.

SWAIN: But the North was in the midst of griping industrial revolution.

SEALE: Right.

SWAIN: And these were the days of the big financiers on Wall Street.

So tell us more about what was happening there.

SEALE: Well, thanks in part to the war...

SANFILIPPO: Right, exactly.

SEALE: ... the machinery of war.

SANFILIPPO: A continuation of the war and expansion. And they were getting ready for the centennial of the nation and showing off the advances that had been made in the past 100 years. And most of those were technological advances. The old farming equipment to the new modern technology. Transcontinental railroad. Transportation was bringing people closer together, making it much easier to get across country, so.

SWAIN: Here's just a few of those big things that happened during the Grant presidency.

As Pam mentioned, the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, just as the Grants were coming into the White House.

1870, the establishment of the National Weather Service and the issuing of their first forecast.

1871, the Great Chicago Fire happened.

And in 1872, the first national park was established in Yellowstone.

And, as we just heard, the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition.

How big a deal was this for the nation to celebrate its anniversary?

SANFILIPPO: It was huge.

SEALE: Absolutely. Huge.

SANFILIPPO: It was almost like a world's fair. There would have been people from all over the world attended it. But it was really a time for America to shine, and really become -- show that it was coming into its own as a world power.

SEALE: And Mrs. Grant loved it. She went there and she bought two things for the White House with public money. One was a shield that showed characters from Milton's "Paradise Lost." And then she bought a more endearing piece. I don't know what happened to that, but what -- it was a centerpiece.

She hated the old James Monroe centerpiece of 1818 with the mirrors on it, so she bought a Hiawatha silver centerpiece, which is about this big, and it shows the (Gitchegoomee) with the -- with all the cattailed and the weeds, and the canoe in the middle of it and Hiawatha lounging on a bearskin rug. And that was the new centerpiece for the White House she bought at the fair. It was on exhibit. And it's still in the silver closet at the White House.

SWAIN: So, (Nick Stuffit) asks on Twitter, did Julia Grant have any hired assistants who helped her at the White House? How were first ladies staffed at this point in the process?

SEALE: There was no social secretary then. Usually, the ladies got together and filled out the blanks for invitations. And they all used blanks. It was the, you know, The President and Mrs. Grant in the honor of blank, blank. And their friends would come over for a tea party and they would fill out the blanks, usually.

She had Mary (Muller) as the housekeeper. She -- isn't that the one who traveled to Europe with her?

SANFILIPPO: I think so.

SEALE: They were very close. She called her a most excellent woman. And I daresay she helped with some of that. But most of the -- of social duties, there might be a clerk from the office that would help, but there was no social staff until Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt.

SWAIN: Now, here's a question about their days preceding coming to the White House from (Brian Watkins), who wants to know, Grant's family was often close by during the war in Washington, D.C.

Did Julia have a president's -- a presence, excuse me, in Washington before the election?

SEALE: I would say yes.

SANFILIPPO: Yes. Actually, because Grant was still head of the Army after the war and then for a short while interim secretary of war. And then she talks about the receptions that he held, that they held, in their home in D.C. and that it was a natural progression then into the White House.

(CROSSTALK)

SEALE: Don't you think she was one of those women that attracted people, too?

She was a personable woman and she cared about people. When someone had a hard time or something, she went to them. She was a -- she was a nice person.

SANFILIPPO: Yes.

SEALE: And people were attracted to her.

SWAIN: One of the interesting stories that I read of the allusions to tensions between Mary Lincoln and Julia Grant.

Julia Grant would come during the war years, certainly sometimes with the general, but it seemed as though there was some bit of competition that Mary Lincoln might have felt.

Let me read you just this one little paragraph from a book called "Rating the First Ladies," (John Roberts).

SEALE: Yeah.

SWAIN: He writes, "On another occasion, Julia was in a military camp when Mary Lincoln visited. She imperiously commanded Julia to leave the room, as is done in royal courts. Mary ordered Julia to back away from her, so that Julia never turned her back on the first lady, as if the first lady were a queen, and Julia a mere commoner.

"If the humiliating treatment was intended to provoke an outburst, Mary Lincoln failed at it. Julia later denied she had any ill feeling about her treatment at the hands of the first lady."

SANFILIPPO: I'm not familiar with that particular story.

SEALE: I'm not familiar with that one, either. It could have happened during the steamboat days, down when below Richmond was being defeated. And, boy, there were problems there with Ms. Lincoln.

And she's very kind in her recollections of Mrs. Lincoln. But when those recollections were dictated, it was years later, and Mrs. Lincoln's tragedy, you know, and her insanity and all that had happened.

But there were problems with Mrs. Lincoln. She was very jealous of Lincoln, of women and Lincoln. I think there's absolutely no reason for that, but she was. And she would be very ugly to people that said -- and General (Lord) made a remark once that it was -- it was a feisty horse. And he said, you need a feisty horse like that to keep up with your husband, or words to that effect.

Mrs. Lincoln said, And what do you mean by that, sir?

SWAIN: We are going to see videos of a few of the Grant preserved sites. You work at one of them.

How many are there altogether?

SANFILIPPO: There are several homes that are owned and operated by the National Park Service or the various states that they're located in. Then Grant's Tomb, and, of course, each of the battlefields have connecting sites. And then there are some that are no longer there.

SWAIN: The first one is in Galena, Illinois.

Now, this to a modern ear sounds fairly shocking, but because of his great achievement in the war, when he came home, people built and gave to him a fully furnished house, or at least more than one of them.

How was that viewed in the day? Was that considered ethically appropriate to do?

SANFILIPPO: Apparently so. It was welcoming a hero.

And...

SEALE: Look at the British and Wellington. I mean, you know, it was done. Houses were given to people at various places.

It's unusual to see an American history, but it was certainly done with him. And he had to sell most of them; he didn't have the money to keep them. But they were fully furnished. They had everything in them.

SWAIN: Well, we're going to visit the Galena, Illinois house. And this is where the Grants lived in the years after the war and before coming to the White House.

Let's take a look, because it sets the stage for their presidency.

This home was a gift that 13 businessmen from Galena purchased to give to the Grant family in appreciation for his service during the war.

Julia mentions in her memoirs coming up the hill and being presented this lovely villa, that she said was furnished with everything good taste could offer.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

FEMALE: The room that we're in now is the parlor, which was the entertaining part of the home. And, of course, we all know that Julia was an avid entertainer, loved it.

The family spent quite a bit of time here in the parlor also. We know that Mrs. Grant and their daughter Ellen played the piano. So, you know, imagine the family sitting here, the general in his favorite chair. The other boys here, listening to their sister and their mother play some songs for them.

And they entertained in here, and Julia and maybe Ellen, you know, played a little song for their guests.

Grant actually launched his presidential campaign from Galena, his headquarters were located at the DeSoto Hotel, which is downtown Galena.

The day after his election, Grant and Julia opened up their home and the parlor here for people, townfolk, to file through and congratulate both of them on his election and the next step of their lives.

This is the General and Mrs. Grant's bedroom. The bed here is the oldest piece that we have in the house, probably the most personal. This is the original bed they brought to Galena with them from (White Haven), putting down some roots here in Galena, and they loved it here.

You know, even through all their travels and the White House, I mean, this was always here for them when they came back.

This is called a lap book. It has Mrs. U.S. Grant on it. This was Julia's. And she probably kept papers, pens, her correspondence in here, for when she was either writing letters or maybe receiving them and kept them stored in here.

And religion was very important for -- for Mrs. Grant. Her grandfather was a Methodist minister. So, you know, growing up, it was important to her, and she instilled that in the children. They attended the Methodist church here in Galena, which their -- the pew that they used is still marked at the church, that it was the Grant family pew.

Over on the dresser, we have a bible that was given to Mrs. Grant by the Methodist-Episcopal Church in 1888.

This is the dressing room, the most personal space in the house relating to Julia Grant. This is the room where she would come in to get ready in the mornings, get ready in the evenings, ready for bed, and just to come in, maybe kind of just get a little solitude from everybody in the house.

We have a lot of personal things in here that belonged to Mrs. Grant. We have her sewing kit that she probably would have used to mend some socks for the kids or the general, sew a button on. We have a couple pairs of her little, size 4 shoes that she wore. And some purses that she would have used as they were going out on the town, visiting on a Sunday afternoon.

A majority of the furnishings that we still have in the house belonged to the Grant family when they were here. If they walked through the door today, they would recognize this house and probably feel right at home, because it's, furnish wise, is the same as when they were here.

This is where he came back after he was a military hero. And he started his political career here, basically, his rise to the presidency. And this is where he was living when he was elected, when she became first lady. And this was -- this was home to them right before that.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: And Regina Crumkey asks us on Twitter, did the Grants ever consider returning to Galena after their presidency?

SANFILIPPO: They visited there for a while, as they did at (White Haven), but settled in New York, in part to be closer to their -- the children. Three of the children, the boys, were living in New York City, and their daughter was in Europe.

And part of it, we think, was the social life in New York was a little bit more enjoyable for Julia than Galena or St. Louis.

SWAIN: Now, the Grants had five children. Four of them lived to maturity. One child died in -- well -- that's just bad information?

SANFILIPPO: Yes.

SWAIN: Oh, my goodness.

SANFILIPPO: No, they only had four children.

SWAIN: You do find things (inaudible) -- that are -- that are very controversial.

SEALE: But Nellie by then had renounced her citizenship and was English. We haven't talked about Nellie's wedding.

SWAIN: And we shall. We shall talk about Nellie's wedding.

But just saw the family life that they created in Galena, Illinois. Talk about the family life that they created in the White House.

SEALE: One thing I like to tell about family life that makes me want to have been a fly on the wall. General Grant added, between the -- as you face the White House from Pennsylvania Avenue, on your right, the greenhouses were built up on the top of the wing, the West Wing, not the offices. They weren't there, but there was just a straight wing.

And General Grant built between that and the house a billiard room, which had stain glass in it and all sorts of things -- a billiard table and all. And he would invite his old Civil War cronies there and play billiards.

SWAIN: And smoke cigars?

SEALE: And smoke cigars and maybe drink a little. And they'd end up going into the Red Room and reliving the battles, taking an object off a table, putting it on the floor, "this is Memphis, this is Vicksburg," whatever, and reliving all the old (generals). I mean, imagine -- imagine being able to see that.

But that's -- that's the sort of informality they lived with their friends. And the Hayes', of course, were very moralistic, trying to show morals more than the Grants were. The Grants (inaudible) a good time. They tore the billiard room down immediately.

SWAIN: Well, we also have some video of this White House small family dining room. And it was told that the Grants would gather there as a family for breakfast every day. What is that room like today? We're going to look at it once again here.

SEALE: It's very dressy today. Yeah, it doesn't look anything like it did. It reflects more Theodore Roosevelt, what Theodore Roosevelt did to it in 1902. It was a big (barny) family breakfast room with always a cloth on the table. And you served through a pantry through those doors on the side. And the dishes were washed there and the family gathered there at this great big table.

And that -- every family did. That was the family dining -- the little dining room. And through the door was the big -- was then a hall and staircase and a big dining room where the state occasions were held. In 1902, this room was turned around and incorporated in the dining room and the grand stair the Grants had built was removed.

And it's the State Dining Room of today.

SWAIN: Well, the Grant family had four children, we've established, but were all of them living in the White House at the time they came?

SANFILIPPO: The oldest son had received an appointment to West Point under Johnson's administration, so he was coming and going. But the younger children were still there. And Julia talked about -- over that dining room table how Ulysses sometimes with the kids would play around, play games and take pieces of bread and roll it into a ball, into dough, and throw it at the kids, at the boys, and play with them.

SEALE: She disapproved.

(LAUGHTER)

SANFILIPPO: She disapproved, yes. But she also recalled upstairs in the White House, in the private family area, all of the children and Ulysses coming into her room about a half-hour before dinner and they would all just sit and talk and visit and share their day's comings and goings and the events. And she recalled that very fondly.

SEALE: They were very lenient parents. When they had -- I think Fred was the most disciplined, and then Buck or Ulys, the second one, Ulysses, a little less, and then Jesse, he actually talked back. He could -- he could checkmate a lot of things his father said. And they just thought it was funny. I don't think it hurt any of them in later life.

SWAIN: Here's our first caller. It's (Bianca) watching us in Newport News, Virginia. Hi, (Bianca), you're on. Welcome.

BIANCA (ph): Hi. How are you doing?

SWAIN: Great. What's your question?

BIANCA (ph): I would like to know more about Julia's dad. I understand that her family is the Dent family. Can you talk more about her family -- the Dent family?

SWAIN: Thank you. Very briefly because we're going to spend more time on that a little bit later, but just give us a quick synopsis.

SANFILIPPO: Sure. Julia's parents came to St. Louis in 1816 and established their family in the city of St. Louis and then a country home out at White Haven, where she grew up, spending most of her summers and then year-round. She had four older brothers and two younger sisters, so it was a rather large family.

They considered themselves southerners, her father did, and they were a slave-holding family. There were as many as 30 slaves that Colonel Dent utilized the labor of at White Haven.

SWAIN: And that caused great tension between the two families, the Grant and the Dent families. Is that correct?

SANFILIPPO: Yes. As a matter of fact, when Ulysses and Julia were married in the city of St. Louis, none of the Grants attended the wedding, reportedly because they didn't approve of Ulysses marrying into a slave-holding family.

SWAIN: Did Father Dent actually live in the White House for some time?

SEALE: Yes, and died there.

SWAIN: And died there. And how was that received?

SEALE: His living there? Well, he was a jolly old man called Colonel Dent. He wasn't really a colonel. He was very heavy, white-headed and funny. He was very witty. And that's probably where she got it. And the -- Grant's father, Jesse, would come in. He was a horse-trader and entrepreneur. And he would go around to the departments and try to make them buy horses and hides and whatever from him.

And the two of them -- well, just the repartee was unbelievable in the White House. The colonel called Grant -- Jesse Grant "that old gentleman over there." And they teased each other a lot.

SWAIN: It was good-natured teasing? They had very...

SEALE: In the long run, it was good-natured because it would have been stopped if it hadn't been.

SWAIN: Very different views about the world.

SEALE: Very. But the old colonel was very lovable, and everybody loved him in Washington. And Jesse Grant was never around long enough. He was always wheeling and dealing somewhere.

SWAIN: Now, (Tessie Meadows) on Facebook writes to us, "It seems as though Julia used her husband's military direction to organize and command the White House. That seems to hold strong

even today. Julia was more influential than she realized, it seems. Did she bring military organization to the running of the White House?"

SEALE: I think that's quite fair. I think it's a good remark, good idea. Yeah, she brought a real order and organization. She had to manage the money. She had to manage the people. The servants were doubled to 30 and all -- all the payrolls exist. And then she very much interacted with them.

There was one named (Henry Harris), a man who worked at the White House who had a lot of children. And she suggested, to begin with, and then she was very emphatic that he start buying Washington real estate. Well, he died a wealthy man. But she forced him to put part of his salary into that.

(Jerry Smith) was another favorite of hers, of the different members of the staff. And no, she ran the whole thing. And she and, with the help of the doorman. And I think that's a likely remark of how the military was organized. She seemed to run things that way, too.

SWAIN: She found the White House in a state of disrepair. And we were talking about this before the program. But Bill, who studies this building, says a bit of different view. But you and I have both read about the fact that there were infrastructure problems and that she tackled this and also did great refurbishment of the design.

What do you know of it?

SANFILIPPO: Well, I think a lot of it was the perception that she wanted to present to the public. This was the -- the nation's home, as well as their home. They were only temporary residents. And she also was concerned in some ways that the fact that she was from the west, as she called it, which Missouri was at the time, that she didn't have the social acumen that many of the eastern families would have expected.

And so she wanted to ensure that what she did would meet with the approval of the nation and of social elites. And so she immediately, she talked about not even moving into the White House right away because she's going through and cleaning things up and getting things organized.

SWAIN: And the money for that came -- came from Congress? Congress appropriated the money to do this?

SEALE: Yeah, for Andrew Johnson originally. And the Johnsons had his daughter Patterson -- Miss Patterson had completely redone the White House inside. They repainted, redecorated it all. But Julia Grant says in her memoir that she went in and changed the furniture around, but it was very stylish in the 1860s, you know not to have sets anymore. People were reacting to mass production.

Mrs. Patterson had everything mixed up in all the rooms so it would look artistic. And Mrs. Grant went in and pulled everything together in sets again and put (tidy bows) on the back of the furniture. She did that, and then of course they later redecorated the East Room and did some work in 1874 on the house. But I don't know about...

(CROSSTALK)

SWAIN: And the style was what?

SEALE: Well, they called it "General Grant." It was probably at the time (neo-Greek), and they called it sometimes in the 20th century "steamboat gothic" after (Frances Parkinson) "Guys and Dolls"...

SWAIN: "Steamboat gothic," I can get the image in my mind.

(LAUGHTER)

(Scott Adams) asks us on Twitter, "Were the Grant children educated at home or in school?"

SANFILIPPO: They did attend schools. Even during the war, the boys were sent to various schools. Once the Grants moved east, when his responsibilities called him east, they -- the boys went to school in Burlington, New Jersey. Jesse and Nellie would have been schooled in Washington, D.C.

SWAIN: And we didn't really establish this, but it was implied or inferred. This -- (Michael) asked on Twitter, "What did Julia Grant think of Ulysses Grant's decision to seek the presidency in 1868?" Was this something she supported?

SANFILIPPO: She did, but she was initially hesitant. She said she had always wanted to marry a dashing lieutenant and always saw herself as the wife of the general. And so initially, this -- this change into the presidency was a little -- she wasn't sure about. And she wasn't sure if Ulysses really wanted it either. And she asked him and he said no, he really wasn't interested in it, but felt that he was the one that the nation could best use at that time.

SEALE: She was happy as an Army wife. She liked the Army. She loved the Army and Army people. And was so proud...

(CROSSTALK)

SWAIN: But he had left at that point.

SEALE: Yeah, but he was still a famous general and she relished that. However, eight years later, she wasn't so happy about leaving the presidency.

SWAIN: We should say that in those years in between, and this is the story of their life -- so many ups and downs economically, great success and then financial ruin.

After he left the Army, he struggled -- is that correct? -- to find something that he could do well.

SANFILIPPO: He resigned from the military in 1854. He had been stationed on the west coast. Julia was living at White Haven in St. Louis. She had made the journey with him two years earlier because she was pregnant with their second child.

And so Grant resigned from the military in 1854 to come back to St. Louis. And rather ironic, he says that -- he supposedly told someone, "If anyone hears of me in 10 years, they will know of me as an old Missouri farmer." Of course, 1864, he was general of all of the Army during the war.

So, he came back to St. Louis...

SWAIN: What a turn of fate.

SANFILIPPO: ... to farm. Just getting started in those years, it was rather difficult. Throughout the country, there was economic panic and bad weather. And so he held a couple of different jobs in the city of St. Louis and then moved to Galena.

SWAIN: And we'll show a little bit more of that later. I don't want to leave this section about life in the White House, because lots of people are asking it -- you alluded to it -- about the daughter, Nellie, being married in the White House. Oh. So...

SEALE: You know, the most sweeping...

SWAIN: ... tell us about it.

SEALE: ... romantic, dramatic event to happen in the White House probably since the British burnt it down. You know, Nellie was 17, right? She met Angelin -- Anginton...

SANFILIPPO: Algernon Sartoris.

SEALE: Algernon Sartoris, an Englishman on the ship. And they were engaged to be married. And the parents disapproved because she was going to England, but -- and she was so young. Mrs. Grant said, "Oh, so young." But the wedding took place May the 21st, 1874. And they redecorated the East Room for it, leaving the basic woodwork and adding a lot more. And mirrors and (goleaf), and all sorts of things. And -- and the nation just went wild. It wasn't -- there weren't a lot of invitations. 200, I think. Maybe 250. But the streets were mobbed. You couldn't get near the place.

And Walt Whitman -- I brought this little -- Walt Whitman was there, and wrote, "Oh, Bonnie Bride, yield thy red cheeks today unto a nation's loving kiss." And that was carried in all the papers. And it was just the most wonderful thing. She married beneath two huge wedding bells. And they had the -- the presents were assembled according to the stores where they were bought. A.T. Stewart would have a table with its name on it, and those presents were bought.

And there was a wedding breakfast, and then they left on their honeymoon, and then lived in England, where she, as I said earlier, renounced her citizenship, which she later very much regretted, and petitioned Congress to get it back, and did get it back.

SANFILIPPO: And I think she actually had to renounce her citizenship by marrying someone from England and then moving over there.

SWAIN: It lasted 17 years?

SANFILIPPO: Yes.

SEALE: Yeah, not very happily, though.

SANFILIPPO: No. And reportedly, after the wedding was over, Grant went upstairs and just fell on the bed and wept...

SEALE: Mm-hmm.

SANFILIPPO: ... he was so upset that his daughter was leaving.

SEALE: Well, the guy was a womanizer and drank a lot and spent a lot of money. And it was not happy. They had, what, four children?

SANFILIPPO: I think so.

SEALE: Four?

SANFILIPPO: One died in infancy.

SEALE: And he died at 90 something. And she died later.

SWAIN: Now, one of the things -- we've shown so many photographs of Julia Grant, and they're often from the side. One of our viewers is asking on Twitter Book -- Twitter -- excuse me, Facebook.

SEALE: "Twitter Book."

SWAIN: "Twitter Book" -- that -- that, "I read that Mrs. Grant was injured as a child and never saw straight again. Was this true? And how did she stay so active and involved in the war?"

SANFILIPPO: I have read one instance where it was supposedly caused by an injury, but my understanding is that she was born with what today we would call a lazy eye -- strabismus. And so, one eye turned in. And she was always very self-conscious about that, feeling that -- especially as Grant rose to fame more, she needed to do something about it. And she, on two separate occasions, attempted to have a surgeon work on her eye to -- to fix it. And Grant found out about it and told her that he had fallen in love with her the way she was, and he might not like her half as much if she had her eyes surgically corrected. And so...

SWAIN: Marty's watching us in Lancaster, Ohio. And you're on. Thanks, Marty.

MARTY (ph): Thank you.

I have a question. It's been rumored that President Grant liked to drink a lot. How did Julia handle his situations where he was getting drunk?

SEALE: Well, there -- there's not a whole lot of proof that Grant was a drunk. He drank. I mean, a lot of people drank. But I -- and there's stories about him being drunk -- secondhand stories and things like that. But, you know, when you lay it all on the table, it doesn't go very far. He was a binge drinker type person, that anyone's ever been able to prove. I mean, not (six) sources for that.

He went through a lot of trouble in the years before his -- the Civil War. And he had hard times in business, but half the people in the United States had hard times. It was a national depression of the worst kind -- the Panic of 1857. And it was only ended by production in the Civil War. So, he was trying to do business in those terrible years. And they said he was drunk all the time. Well, there really isn't documentation much for that.

SANFILIPPO: And the rumors are greatly exaggerated. Some of the things I've looked at have indicated that perhaps out on the West coast after being separated from his family for two years, he was definitely depressed and missing them. There's evidence that he was forced to resign from the military at that time.

Later times during the Civil War, when some of these rumors came up again, it seems to have often been when other generals were jealous of Grant's success, and this was one way to possibly bring him down a step or two. It wasn't successful. And...

SEALE: Tell the Lincoln story. I love that one.

SANFILIPPO: Of course, Lincoln is rumored to have said -- although it's not a proven story -- that when congressmen came to him saying, you know, "Remove Grant. He's a drunk. He can't be running the Army," he reportedly asked them find out -- to find out what -- what type of alcohol Grant was drinking, and he would order barrels for all of his generals.

SWAIN: Because of his success on the battlefield?

SANFILIPPO: Yes.

SWAIN: We have so much to cover in so little time. But -- but often, when you see historians' analysis of the Grant administration, it ranks very close to the bottom for the many scandals that encompass the administration. What do people need to know about that period? What are the most important ones, and what were the effect on the presidency?

SANFILIPPO: Well, actually, historians have been reassessing Grant's presidency. And I think C-SPAN's own 10-year survey has moved him from 33 13 years ago to 23. So, he is improving in perspective. And a lot of that has to do with his actions regarding civil rights for the newly-freed African-Americans in the country.

SWAIN: He did do that, but it doesn't -- it doesn't take away from the domestic scandals and the corruption and the sort of things, so we need...

SEALE: Well, they were...

SWAIN: ... we need to talk about it.

SEALE: They were peripheral to him, though. And most of them had -- I'd say all of them had been going on before his time, some as far back as Lincoln.

SWAIN: But some suggest that Julia Grant was in the middle of some of these things.

SEALE: Yeah.

SWAIN: Do you both contest that?

SANFILIPPO: Yes.

SEALE: Yes, absolutely.

SANFILIPPO: She talks about the -- the Black Friday incident where Fisk and Gold tried to capture the gold market -- a corner of the gold market. And Julia talks in her memoirs about that -- that the only thing she knew about was when Grant had her write a letter to her sister-in-law. It was actually Grant's sister, Virginia, who was married to Abel Corbin, who was reported involved in this in trying to persuade Grant. And Grant has her write to Virginia, saying, "Be careful." And then he turns around and sells off government gold to bring that to a stop.

SEALE: Mm-hmm.

SWAIN: Martha is watching us in Charleston, South Carolina. Hello, Martha.

MARTHA (ph): Oh, hi, Susan. Thanks again for another terrific show.

You alluded to my question earlier in the show about the possible tension between Julia Grant and Mary Lincoln. And then you visited the beautiful Galena home that was given to the Grants.

SWAIN: And I'm not sure. (Was it) during the same time period that Mary Lincoln was trying to get attention out of the government and here, Grant has a home given to him and Mary Lincoln was in Germany trying to educate her son, Tad and I believe the Grants later on visited Mary Lincoln when she was in (Peau), France? Is that correct?

SEALE: They in fact didn't. Did they?

SANFILIPPO: No. They crossed paths but Julia says she didn't find out about Mary Lincoln being in the same town that they were in until they were on their way out and couldn't change their plans.

SWAIN: Do you agree with the irony of the fact that -- that Mary Lincoln was struggling and looking for a pension after her husband was the chief executive in the war and -- and the Grants have these houses given to them?

SANFILIPPO: It seems extremely unfair to Mrs. Lincoln.

SEALE: But she was sneaking pensions from the government and the houses were given by private people.

SANFILIPPO: Right.

SEALE: I mean, there's a difference. And (if) the Congress didn't approve of pensions and the Congress was (inaudible) (and they're all) remembered, you know, as thugs sort of (inaudible) (in a popular way).

They were vigilant. It was not all that bad a Congress. They were vigilant. They were the ones that exposed these -- these three major scandals, the one closest to the White House, of course, being Orville Babcock who was sort of a part of the family and he got involved in the...

SWAIN: (Pure) congressional oversight.

SEALE: Yeah. They found him and he was tried and General Grant testified.

(CROSSTALK)

SANFILIPPO: He -- he submitted testimony. He didn't actually come to St. Louis for...

SEALE: First time a president had ever done that in a criminal trial.

SWAIN: Next is (Sherry) of Independence Missouri.

Hi (Sherry).

SHERRY (ph): Hi.

You answered my question about her eyesight but I do have another question.

Being so well educated for the time, did Julia speak other languages?

And I also understand that after the Grants left the White House that they were really party animals.

I'll hang up. Thank you.

SANFILIPPO: She may have learned some French while she was in school but not on a real conversational basis that I know of.

During their world tour, which may be what the (caller) was referring to as far the partying. They -- they took a two and a half world tour and were welcomed by the public and by royalty throughout the world. And -- but most of the time, they had to have an interpreter while they were there.

SWAIN: We learned that -- at least Mary Lincoln thought that Washington looked down upon her as a Westerner.

And a question -- a question from (Dave Murdoch) on Twitter, "Did Washington look down on Julia as being one of the first ladies from west of the Mississippi"?

SEALE: I never found that. I never found that at all.

She was more -- she was more sure of herself and -- and not insecure like Mary Lincoln. And she went after it. She was one of those people that jumped in the (middle).

She considered herself the head of women's society in the capital and she was accepted. She was friends with all the -- all the -- those kind of people in Washington, all of the embassies and everywhere. She -- she was a (go-getter)-type woman. And Mary Lincoln sat back and waited for people to come to her.

SWAIN: We're going to visit another one of the sites associated with the Grants and we'll learn about what influenced her. Her early childhood and White Haven Farm outside St. Louis.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

FEMALE: This is the front porch of the history home known as White Haven where Julia Dent Grant spent her -- many of her childhood years. She wasn't born here. She was born in the city of St. Louis at their city home but spent all of her summers initially and then year-long out here as she grew up, watching the boys play out in the yard or her sister playing the guitar and then singing on the front porch.

And it's where she has her earliest memories of her father lifting her up in the air, telling her that the trees were waving and welcoming her back to her childhood home. And that was when she was about two years old. So, a very early memory.

They would have entered through the main door into the foyer, and from here, would have gone most frequently into the former parlor, where they would have been welcomed by Colonel and Mrs. Dent, Julia perhaps at her mother's knee, learning how to be a lady and welcome guests and company to the home here.

Some of Julia's fondest memories from the dining room here at White Haven include the meals that were served here. Meals were always served by the Dents' enslaved housekeepers. She talked about white china with gold trim and the cut glass. She talks about the slave cook making Maryland biscuits, and -- and the games that would be played over the dinner table with the children, as well, talking and laughing about the day's activities.

From here, after dinner, the guests would have -- close family and friends would have come into the sitting room, which is really where the family would have spent more of their personal time in the evenings, playing games on the -- the game table -- checkers or chess -- things like that. Julia would have played with some dolls in here. And, again, lots of reading taking place.

On the second floor of White Haven were two rooms that served as bedrooms for the family. Her parents would have typically had one bedroom. Julia and her sisters would have shared the most likely, this bedroom. And frequently, in the 19th century, when you had a nice upstairs porch area, the boys would have slept out there in the summertime.

And we know much about White Haven from her -- those memoirs. She's the first first lady to ever write her memoirs. And she spent a lot of time talking about her life here at White Haven.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: And there, we saw our guest, Pam Sanfilippo, in her day job.

SEALE: Yeah. They sure liked green (doing that).

(LAUGHTER)

SANFILIPPO: This is the color the Grants had the house painted after his -- he had purchased the property from Julia's family...

SEALE: Ah. In the '50s?

SANFILIPPO: ... in 1874.

SEALE: Oh, '74? So, it was...

SANFILIPPO: Mm-hmm. During the Civil War, they purchased.

SEALE: Wow, that's (green).

SWAIN: And (Reed) Williams asked where and when did Ulysses first encounter Julia? She seems rather short, he, tallish.

SEALE: Well, he wasn't tall.

SANFILIPPO: No, he -- he was about five-eight, and she was around five-two. They met at White Haven. He had been a roommate of Julia's brother, Fred Dent, at West Point. And when Grant, after graduation from West Point, was stationed at Jefferson Barracks, which is about five miles South of the city of St. Louis, Fred invited Ulysses to visit his family out at White Haven.

Grant did that in September of 1843, and then in February of 1844, Julia returned home from the boarding school she was attending in the city. And Grant says -- and Julia says that initially, his visits had been about once a week to White Haven. But once she returned home and he met her, his visits were daily. And he proposed to her within three months.

SWAIN: And we learned in this from you that they were a slave-holding family. I have a number of questions about their families and their personal attitudes towards slavery.

Here's one from Donna Price. "Julia came from a family where her father owned slaves. Is it true that she had pro-slavery sympathies?"

SANFILIPPO: Initially, she did. She had been born and raised at White Haven with the enslaved individuals providing everything that she needed. And, in fact, at one point, she says that she thought the house kept itself with all the work that was being done by those individuals.

SEALE: There were eight of them, right? Eight?

SANFILIPPO: The family?

SEALE: The slaves at...

SANFILIPPO: There were as many as 30 slaves...

SEALE: Oh, there were?

SANFILIPPO: ... that Colonel Dent owned, according to the census records. And so once she met, fell in love with and married Ulysses, it kind of put her in the middle between these two opposing viewpoints. She talked about growing up, some of those enslaved individuals were her playmates, playing in the yard with her, going to take -- carrying her to school, things like that.

And these are the same individuals, then, that would -- would provide the work on the farm. And she -- the older individuals she considered part of the family -- aunts and uncles, a typical southern way of addressing these individuals. While she considered them part of the family, they obviously did not.

SWAIN: Would the Grants then have been the last slave-holding family in the White House?

SANFILIPPO: The Grants -- well, Grant did own one slave that he acquired from Julia's father, that he freed, (William Jones), in 1859, so before the Civil War started. Julia, although she talked about having four slaves given to her by her father, she didn't actually own any. Her father never made legal transfer, otherwise they would have been Grant's property to perhaps free.

And so I -- I think though that then counting that -- counting (William Jones)...

(CROSSTALK)

SWAIN: ... they would have been the last.

SEALE: They all left White Haven, didn't they?

SANFILIPPO: Yes, before they were legally freed by Missouri's emancipation proclamation.

SWAIN: So, is it an untrue story that when she made trips to visit Grant on the battlefield that she occasionally brought a slave as an assistant?

SANFILIPPO: That is a true story.

SWAIN: That's a true story. So even as he was fighting the Civil War, she brought...

SANFILIPPO: Yes, as a nurse for her children, because they would travel as well.

SWAIN: And was the irony not lost on her?

SANFILIPPO: It doesn't seem to have been. She needed the help and she even talks about how "Black Julia," as she was called, was almost captured at Holly Springs and then did free herself left on one of the trips.

SWAIN: Related to this, and maybe this will be, (Bill), your thoughts. (Regina Krumke) on Twitter asks: Did Julia have any thoughts on equality for freed slaves and women by the time she got to the White House?

SEALE: I only know that she, when asked if colored people, as they said, in the request were to be admitted to the receptions, she said yes. But she said she never remembered any attending. Well, I think they were stopped at the gate by the guards, but I'm not sure.

I will say in her treatment of the staff at the White House, she -- it was a personal one-on-one thing with her. And I imagine that's how she was African Americans, as a personal relationship, as apart from this bigger issue.

SWAIN: (Jim) is in Prescott, Arizona. You are on the air.

JIM (ph): Thank you. What type of a retirement fee did Grant receive after he was out of the presidency and after the war? Can you answer that?

SWAIN: Retirement fee from the government, you mean?

JIM (ph): Yes, ma'am.

SWAIN: Was there a pension for presidents?

SANFILIPPO: No, there was not, either for a president or for his military service. It wasn't until shortly before his death that Congress awarded him a pension right before he died.

SWAIN: And we will talk about how he found a way to make some money during that period a little bit later on.

We have about a half-hour left in our 90-minute portrait of Julia Dent Grant, the wife of Ulysses S. Grant, in our first lady series.

SEALE: Do you have a minute for a story?

SWAIN: I do, always.

SEALE: Well...

SWAIN: Especially if it's a good one.

SEALE: (Mr. Williamson) who called in was talking about Grant's size. He was small. And you always think of him with a big -- kind of scruffy with the beard and the cigar, the macho look and everything. When he was a young lieutenant, he was very small for a military man. And they were down in Mexico in the Mexican War, and the soldiers were being entertained. And they got together and did a production of "Othello."

And Grant was elected to play Desdemona, which he did to great success. And later when the famous actors, the Great Western, came to entertain the troops and took the part of Desdemona, the audience booed and put Grant back up on the stage to play Desdemona.

SWAIN: Following up on the question about her views about women, (Gary Robinson) is asking: Susan B. Anthony, pardoned by President Grant -- did Julia have any influence on this decision?

SANFILIPPO: Don't know if she had influence on that decision. She did become friends with Susan B. Anthony and although she wasn't working for suffrage for women, she did refuse to sign an anti-suffrage petition that was going around, which was duly noted.

And she had certainly learned during the war years when she was kind of forced to take on roles that typically the husband would have assumed, she learned how to become independent and felt that women should have some role in decision-making.

SWAIN: Now, we're going to visit another of the Grant sites and we'll ask you to set the stage for this one. It's called "Hardscrabble Farm." What is it and where is it?

SANFILIPPO: When Grant resigned from the Army in 1854 and came back to St. Louis, they lived for a short time at the main house, White Haven. But living under his father-in-law's roof was not what he wanted for his family. And so he built a log cabin for Julia and their children as the family grew. And so, you're going to see that log cabin.

SWAIN: Now, recall that Julia Dent was from a very wealthy family. You saw what White Haven looked like. So we'll see what kind of house that Ulysses S. Grant built for her as their first married homestead together.

Let's take a look.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

Voice: We're standing inside Hardscrabble, which is a two-story log cabin that Grant built for his family in 1856. Julia in her memoirs lets us know that she does not like it one bit. She found it crude and homely.

But true to her nature, she will make the best of it. Farming his own land, having his own home on his land, having their own place to begin their life again, to renew that marriage is what inspires Grant to say, "I want our own house."

And Julia is perfectly comfortable with that. She wants her own home, too. As a young married woman, she would want to be the mistress of her own home. She just thought that he could have built something as nice as White Haven and was, like I said, a little perturbed that her father had talked Grant into building a log structure.

The cabin itself may be rustic. Whitewash would have been typical not only to help with bugs, but white reflects light so the rooms would have been open and a little more cheery. But so rustic. Yet Julia would have brought with her finer things, because as a privileged child, she would have had fine china. She would have had fine furniture. There would have been comfortable chairs and a broad table. Because she -- you had -- at this point, she would have had five people eating in this dining room.

This is not a cook fireplace here. These are not set up for cooking. Kitchen out the back with servants, in this particular case, would still have been slavery, and slave people coming in and serving Julia and Ulysses and their children here in the dining room.

What is important about Hardscrabble for them, and even though they do not live in it very long, is that this represents their very first home together. Julia will gain a great deal of confidence as a wife and a mother and it starts here at Hardscrabble.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: And a question from (Sheldon Cooper): As an Army wife, did Julia find any location more her home than any other?

SANFILIPPO: No, she always considered White Haven her home. In fact, in her memoirs, she again compares the White House to White Haven because of the home that it represented. They traveled so much and had so many different headquarters or homes around the country that it would have been next to impossible to -- but she created home wherever she was for the family, I guess.

SWAIN: As is the purview of Army spouses I think over the years.

SANFILIPPO: Right.

SWAIN: Well, we have one more video of White Haven, that beautiful green structure we showed you earlier, but you'll have to go to our website to find it. Each week we're putting a special feature on our website at cspan.org first ladies. And we have a video there that will show you the Grant's life together at White Haven. You're looking at just a little glimpse of it now, and boy does it look green.

(LAUGHTER)

SANFILIPPO: It's called "Paris green."

SWAIN: Next is (John), watching us all the way out in Washington state, Snohomish, you are -- Snohomish, excuse me -- you're on the air.

JOHN GRANT (ph): My name is (John Grant), no relation to Ulysses. But my great-grand-uncle was one General Grant's staff. His name was (Cyrus Blue Comstock). And I have a copy of his diary. And in it, it mentions a number of times when he was in Washington that he would have lunch with -- with General Grant's wife. And I was wondering if anybody could elaborate on that. You know, mostly you hear about General Grant and his war escapades, but afterwards, you know, does anybody -- has anybody ever heard of that?

(Cyrus Blue Comstock), by the way, married (Elizabeth Blair), of which her -- I think it was her grandfather was the secretary -- or postmaster general under Lincoln.

SEALE: Well, they were very close to the Grants.

GRANT (ph): Yes.

SEALE: The Blairs.

SWAIN: Do you know any more for him on that?

SANFILIPPO: Well, Julia entertained so much that -- quite possible. And I recognize the name Comstock, both from the Civil War years and Julia's memoirs in the White House. And frequently congressmen or people who were looking to get into see Grant would try and do that through Julia, or to gain favor from Grant, they would frequently go through Julia because she was so easy and accessible to them.

SWAIN: Our next is a call from (Judy) watching us in Brooklyn. Hi, Judy.

JUDY (ph): Good evening. I had two questions. Since General Grant smoked so many cigars, I was wondering if Julia or the children have any respiratory problems. And my other question was since England had leaned so heavily toward the confederacy, what were the relations like during the Grant administration with England?

SWAIN: Thanks very much.

SANFILIPPO: Good questions. None of the -- neither Julia nor the children ended up with any respiratory problems. Of course, Grant ended up with throat cancer from smoking those cigars, and so it did eventually kill him.

As far as England was concerned, one of the first issues that Grant had to deal with as president were the claims against England for their support of the confederacy...

SEALE: Confederacy.

SANFILIPPO: ... and he actually sets up the first ever international arbitration, and is credited with peacefully resolving the dispute with England.

SWAIN: We'll take another call. This is Larry in Mill Hall, Pennsylvania. Hi, Larry.

LARRY (ph): Hello. I am watching all of your series...

SWAIN: Great, thanks.

LARRY (ph): ... series and enjoyed them very much.

My question is, I've recently read "The General's Wife" by Isabel Ross. And one of the comments that she makes in her book is that Julia's father really did not care for Ulysses at first. So, I was just wondering if you could comment on that.

SEALE: Well, he did say that she wouldn't -- he told Grant that she would not like the military life. He was very dubious. And she had been raised with everything, and would -- would definitely have to do without. He didn't...

SWAIN: And -- and they also had disagreements about -- over slavery and...

SEALE: Slavery.

SANFILIPPO: Yeah. But initially, he...

SEALE: I think it was personal. I think he thought that Grant was not going to amount to much financially, and would not be able to give her what she took for granted.

SANFILIPPO: Right.

SEALE: Yes, he's absolutely right -- I mean, Ross was absolutely right about that. Yeah.

SANFILIPPO: Yeah. Yeah, Julia was her father's favorite child.

SEALE: Mm-hmm.

SANFILIPPO: The first daughter born after four sons. And according to Julia, Colonel Dent actually offered -- when he -- he told Ulysses that the life of the Army wasn't what Julia was set for, he offered her sister, Nel, to...

SEALE: Oh.

SANFILIPPO: ... to Grant, which Grant obviously turned down, and continued to try and convince Colonel Dent that no matter what it took, he would be the one to make Julia happy.

SWAIN: But is it not fair to say, some of his concerns may have been valid? Because...

SEALE: Sure.

SWAIN: ... Ulysses S. Grant was a great warrior, a great general. But most of the other ventures he got involved with, he had a pretty difficult time making it work.

SEALE: Yeah.

SANFILIPPO: Well, of course, at that time -- you know, in 1843, 1844, nobody knew that Grant would become the success. He was in the Army. He was -- he actually didn't intend to stay in the Army. He wanted to get out and be a math professor. So, I...

SWAIN: But let's -- but let's look at his post-White House years. Even after he has all of this time in the White House and the experience, he then goes on to a career in Wall Street and loses lots of money.

SANFILIPPO: Well...

SEALE: No, Fred did that.

SANFILIPPO: ... it was actually his son, Ulysses Junior...

SEALE: Fred, yeah.

SANFILIPPO: ... who is the -- joins with...

SEALE: (inaudible)? Oh, I thought it was Fred.

SANFILIPPO: No, it was Ulysses Junior.

SEALE: Didn't Fred lose the first money?

SANFILIPPO: Well, I know it was...

SWAIN: But it affected the family fortunes, didn't it?

SANFILIPPO: Yes, it affected all of the family...

SEALE: Oh, yeah.

SANFILIPPO: ... fortunes. And basically, Ferdinand Ward had everyone fooled. He was basically a -- called a Wall Street wizard. He was making everybody money hand over fist. And that should have rung some bells, but just like today, it doesn't. And...

SEALE: Bernie Madoff, yeah.

SANFILIPPO: ... he ended up -- Grant lost just about everything.

SWAIN: Well, this is a similar question on Twitter. "How is it that Grant lost all his estates and money? Was it due to his drinking? Was he a gambler? Was he financially irresponsible?"

SEALE: No.

SWAIN: So, you'd say no, no, no to all that?

SANFILIPPO: Correct. No...

SEALE: He wasn't a man probably who concentrated on finance, like people who make money do. I don't think that was the first thing in his life ever. He would like to have had money -- a lot of money, but I think other things interested him.

SWAIN: Was he bad judge of character?

SANFILIPPO: Well, he talks about when this financial failure happens with Ferdinand Ward where Ward comes to Ulysses Junior, and then to Grant himself and says, you know, "the bank is in a little bit of a financial strait. Can you borrow some money? And we just need to get through the next few days." And Grant accepts that. Borrows $150,000 from William Vanderbilt, and Ferdinand Ward absconds with the money to Canada and the fortune is lost. Grant says that he doesn't know if he'll be able to trust anyone ever again.

SWAIN: Well, we have them already in their post White House years, and we haven't talked about their leaving the White House. People watching should know this, but of course at the time there were no restrictions on running for a third term.

SEALE: Third term, yeah.

SWAIN: Did the Grants wish to seek a third term in office?

SEALE: No, he didn't. But there were many people who wanted him to, and she did.

And so when he declined it, he didn't tell her. He gave the letter to them without telling her, and she'd begun to be suspicious. They were upstairs in the hall at the White House, and she said "you can't do this. Why did you?" He said, "I've declined a third term." And she said, "you can't do this to me, you can't do this to me. I want it."

SWAIN: She wanted to continue being first lady?

SEALE: Yes, and he said, "it's done. That's it." And she seems to have held up fine until inaugural day, when they got on the palace car, as they called it, the train car, and then she says she went to a bedroom and fell on the bed and sobbed and cried and wept. She hated to leave the place, so.

SANFILIPPO: She said she felt like a -- a waif with no home, because she wasn't sure exactly what was going to happen.

SEALE: And surely she'd felt that before.

SANFILIPPO: Right.

SEALE: Isn't that a splendid situation.

SWAIN: She was loathe to leave. And in fact did they plot a comeback?

SEALE: Once he...

SANFILIPPO: In -- when they returned from the world tour, there were those who thought that he should run for office again, and especially with all of his foreign relations experience, and he was interested at that point, feeling again that he could be of service to the country.

Julia says they were in Chicago when the convention met, and she tried to encourage him to go downstairs and meet at the convention and show his face, knowing that -- that would put him over the top with the votes needed, but he absolutely refused to do that and lost the nomination.

SWAIN: A very specific question, because some of the properties that we're looking at are near the Anheuser-Busch family property, and you're from that region of the world. Michael Reagan wants to know, were the Grants tied in any way to anyone in the Anheuser-Busch family?

SANFILIPPO: No, not at all. The Busch family purchased about 280 acres of the White Haven estate in 1903. The only connection is that in the early years of the war, Adolphus Busch served for a short time in the Civil War.

SWAIN: Marvin in Cincinnati, you're on. Good evening.

MARVIN (ph): Yes, I had always heard the story, and I know you had alluded to the enmity that Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Grant had between each other, that -- that they were originally the first couple that was offered an invitation to Ford's Theater the night of the assassination, and that Mrs. Grant sort of politely told Mr. Grant not to accept, and that was the only reason that they were not in the box that night. Is that true or not?

SEALE: That's true, but they were going to Philadelphia, and they had a house there. They were going to see the children in Philadelphia, and that's where they were when they heard that the president had been shot.

SWAIN: Now, was it as specific that the assassin made it to the train and the door was locked?

SEALE: She talks about it.

SANFILIPPO: That's what she talks about in her memoirs, and that even earlier during that day when she was at lunch, that there had been a suspicious group at the other table.

SEALE: And then when they were driving to the train, a man came riding a horse along by the carriage, on the way to the station, and which was on the mall in those days, and looked in the window at Grant, and Grant remarked that he was sinister, and he did it twice. It may be just coincidences, who knows, but she was obviously scared to death. Everybody was scared to death.

SWAIN: And they believed that he was targeted as part of the assassination plot that brought down the Lincoln administration.

Well we learned that Julia Grant was much, very unhappy to leave the White House, and General Grant assuaged that grief by taking her on a two-year world tour. What should we know about that tour?

SANFILIPPO: Well, it was actually his idea. He said he felt upon leaving the White House that he felt like a boy out of school, and he had always loved traveling, and so they embarked on this tour that was just originally supposed to be Europe, and then extended all the way around the world. She enjoyed every minute of it, mostly because of the praise and acclaim that she saw her husband receiving, and the -- the shopping that she did as well, of things that she wanted to -- to bring back home with her. But she just had a wonderful time on the world tour.

SWAIN: We're going to return to the Galena home and look at some of the world tour items that they have on display there.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

FEMALE: After his eight years in the White House, the Grants came back here to Galena for a little rest and relaxation for a couple months. And then they decided to go on a world tour. They were gone for over two years, visiting close to 40 countries on this tour.

The Grants were so popular at that time, they were like American celebrities, and they were treated like royalty, these countries that they went to. They received a lot of gifts on the tour. We're fortunate enough to have some of those still in the home. Two of them are here on the mantle. These red vases were a gift from the king of Bulgaria.

After the world tour, they came back here for another couple months, then they went to Mexico and Cuba. Now, the paintings on each side of the fireplace, the landscape paintings, were given to the Grants on that trip by the government of Mexico. Artist Jose Velasco, a very popular artist in Mexico, did these landscape paintings for the Grants.

This is the dining room, and of course, this is where the family would have their meals. Julia maybe would've done a little light entertaining here. This is not, you know, anything too elaborate in the home. We have some of the gifts that were given to the Grants on that world tour.

This piece was actually given to Julia. This was -- this is a bronze urn on a teak wood table given to her by the citizens of Yokohama, Japan. The little vase on the table was given to the Grants by the emperor of Japan.

And back here on the mantle is probably one of the most personal pieces that Julia probably liked the best. The frame, the leaves in here, she actually framed it. The leaves were given to her by General Grant on their tour. It was leaves that he picked up from the holy city. She kept, had it framed, and wrote the whole story on there.

Julia probably had the time of her life on this world tour. She devotes almost a third of her memoirs talking about it. She developed friendships with Queen Victoria and a very good friendship with the emperor of Japan. They actually ended up staying in Japan longer than they had expected because they developed such a nice, close relationship with him.

After President Grant passed away, Julia was living in New York, and the emperor of Japan actually came to visit Julia while she was there. They still kept that friendship and had it for the rest of Julia's life. This was always a place that the children, the family could come back to. And this was always considered home and always was welcoming for them. Not just this house, but Galena, too. She speaks in her memoirs of Galena, and always refers to it as her dear, dear Galena.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: Well, we have a -- a -- just a short while left, and we have to talk about their years after the tour. They come back to the United States and we've -- they've lost lots of money in this event we talked about with the family and the investments in New York City. What's their financial situation, and what's the role of the memoirs in assuaging that?

SANFILIPPO: Well, they are -- when word gets out that they've lost this money, there are actually some veterans from the war who send Grant money to help him to -- that they loan to him, but he's been offered to write some articles for Century magazine about the war, and then encouraged from that to write his memoirs, something that he had never been interested in doing.

And it's Samuel Clemens, Mark Twain's publishing company that ends up publishing those memoirs for Grant, and although he completes them just a few short days before he passed away, he knows that they will bring financial comfort to Julia.

SEALE: Well, the first royalty check was $200,000.

SWAIN: $200,000.

SEALE: Imagine in that day. The book made what, over around a million? It's a great book, a great classic. I recommend it to anyone.

SWAIN: Is that right? Still readable today?

SANFILIPPO: Oh, very much so.

SEALE: Absolutely. It's a beautiful work.

SANFILIPPO: Even for those of us not military historians.

SWAIN: A question on Twitter, were Mark Twain and the Grants friends, since he offered to publish the president's memoirs?

SANFILIPPO: Yes, they did become good friends and it was through Twain's efforts that, as I said, Grant began diligently writing the memoirs, and there were some claims that Twain had actually almost ghost-written, but Twain was very adamant that no, it was Grant who had written those, word for word.

SWAIN: More specific question about Mark Twain on Facebook. How close was Mark Twain to the Grants? I know Twain paid for a sculptor, Gerhardt, to wait for Mr. Grant to die so they could have a death mask made of him. Was Twain a regular at the White House, and how did Mrs. Grant relate to him?

SANFILIPPO: Not at the White House. It was afterwards that they developed the -- the closer relationship. Apparently Twain had initially, years earlier, suggested to Grant about writing his memoirs, but almost as an off-hand remark, and so when Grant says that Century Magazine is going to publish his memoirs, because they were the first to make the offer, Twain reminds him that no, he had made the offer much earlier.

SWAIN: I'm going to ask my colleagues if we can bring that picture up, the photograph again of the president in his very final days. It's such a poignant picture. We've all seen it, wrapped in his blanket, on the porch of the cabin in New York, working on these memoirs.

SEALE: In horrible pain.

SANFILIPPO: Mm-hmm.

SWAIN: And it was throat cancer, and very painful. How -- how was he able to get these memoirs done?

SEALE: He became impassioned to do it.

SANFILIPPO: Sheer determination.

SEALE: She became that way about writing later. It was the main thing in her life. But he did. He became impassioned. It was so important to secure a comfort for his wife.

SWAIN: And then he died so shortly afterwards. It seems as though, as somehow adrenaline was keeping him going until he could get these finished.

SANFILIPPO: Yes, and Julia even talks about that, and Grant does too, that that was what was keeping him going, just -- just to be able to finish those.

SWAIN: Now, I would like to take a call, but then I'd like to hear about her memoirs, because she was the first first lady to write memoirs. I actually have a copy, but let's listen to a call, and then we'll come back to that.

Kathleen in San Francisco. Hi, Kathleen.

KATHLEEN (ph): Thank you very much.

I had a quick question. Julia had four brothers. And I think I remember that during the Civil War, they fought on the South -- for the South. Is that true? And then did they finally reconcile?

SANFILIPPO: It was her brother Fred who had been at West Point with Ulysses, did stay in the Union army, and ends up serving on Grant's staff. Her brother, John, none of them actually joined the Confederate army, but they certainly did go south and support the Confederacy during the war.

At one point, her brother John is captured and put in prison and seeks Grant's assistance in getting an exchange, a prisoner exchange, and Grant refuses, basically, to teach John a lesson. But when they're in the White House, the family is always there.

SEALE: Always close.

SWAIN: Another question on Twitter. With all these complexities during the Civil War, asking, were the Grants friends with either Robert E. Lee or Jefferson Davis?

SANFILIPPO: Not friends. Certainly, Grant respected Robert E. Lee during the war, and he had known him earlier in the Mexican war.

SEALE: This was afterward.

SANFILIPPO: But Julia does become, after both Jefferson Davis and Ulysses Grant passed away, Julia does become friends with Varina Davis.

SWAIN: Well, here's the memoir, and it is available today. This is Julia Dent Grant's memoirs, and again, the first first lady to write her memoirs. It was not published until 1975. This edition was edited by the great John Y. Simon, now deceased, but a great Civil War and Lincoln historian. What's the story about how these became -- and the editor of the Grant papers, I should say that most importantly, the editor of the Grant papers, which was his life's work.

The -- how did these memoirs of the first lady come to be published, and why so long between her death and their writing?

SANFILIPPO: Well, she says that it was her children who, after Grant's death, encouraged her to begin writing her memoirs of her wonderful life with her husband. And she says she just started it to satisfy their request, but then she realized that recalling all of these wonderful times kind of brought new life to her.

And she did look at them, I think she was kind of ambivalent about having them published. Initially, she thought it was just something to record for her children. But then she did try to pursue getting them published several different times, and one publisher told her that they were so private that the people that were alive at that time, it was -- it was too much personal information. Another time, it

was -- she was told that they would be sold through subscription and she was looking for kind of a lump sum deal. So they -- they remained in the family hands then, unpublished until John Simon convinced the family that they should become public.

SWAIN: Well, she lived for a good number of years after.

SANFILIPPO: 17 years.

SWAIN: Was she an active first lady? Did she advise other first ladies, or did she basically become a private citizen again?

SANFILIPPO: She still did a little entertaining initially.

SEALE: I think she was out there, yeah.

SANFILIPPO: Her son, Fred, was appointed ambassador to Austria, and she joins him over there. And then comes back to the United States. She wrote several articles for different magazines, Harper's Bazaar, after the Spanish-American War, she writes an article that talks about the governments and the nation's responsibility to the widows and orphans of the war.

SWAIN: Norma, in Newcastle, Indiana. Your question.

NORMA (ph): Yes, I was wondering about whether or not there was a relationship between Julia and Ulysses and the Confederate, General Longstreet.

SWAIN: Thank you.

SANFILIPPO: Longstreet was a distant cousin of Julia's and so when Grant was first courting Julia at White Haven, Longstreet was also stationed at Jefferson Barracks and came out. It's -- there's a possibility, although the record is not quite clear, that Longstreet actually served as one of Grant's groomsmen at the wedding.

SWAIN: How long after General Grant, President Grant's death was the famous Grant's Tomb built in New York City?

SANFILIPPO: That was dedicated April 22nd, 1897.

SWAIN: And at his passing, how did the country mourn him?

SANFILIPPO: I believe it was the largest funeral ever held in the country.

SWAIN: Larger than Lincoln's?

SANFILIPPO: Mm-hmm. They brought his body from Mount McGregor, where he had passed away, into New York City and buried his body in a temporary tomb in Riverside Park in New York City, and then began the fundraising effort to build the -- the tomb that we know today.

SWAIN: And Julia was alive for the dedication?

SANFILIPPO: Yes, she attended that.

SWAIN: And what was her role in all of that? Was she...

SANFILIPPO: Proud widow of -- and pleased to see the nation recognizing her husband in that way.

SWAIN: So, as we close here, we've looked at a long and distinguished military career. A life of many ups and downs for the Grants over time. Eight years in the White House. A successful world tour, very celebrated. What is the legacy of Julia Dent Grant, and how does she fit into the pantheon of first ladies we're studying and learning about this year?

SEALE: Well, they are all women who basically support what their husband is trying to achieve. She did it with certain splendor in a very difficult time in American history, and really turned the knob on a period of a -- of a dark period that ended with the early Reconstruction and brightened things for the rest of the century.

I think her public popularity, her featuring of the general, the way she did things, the personal way she was, that she was a very significant first lady in that way, a public kind of first lady.

SWAIN: And after coming from just after the sort of Victorian fainting lady first ladies, is she a harbinger of the modern first lady in any way?

SEALE: That's very difficult to answer. I think they all were opinionated, strong women. Most all of them. But perhaps in a way. She had public interests. Yes. I would say so. (inaudible) the next people, it would be moreso with Mrs. Hayes, but I think Julia Grant attracted a lot of attention and public attention to the family that lived in the White House.

SWAIN: Well, Pam Sanfilippo, you're working on a book to establish this thesis. What is your answer to that question?

SANFILIPPO: Well, I think she would've said that her legacy was that she was a devoted and loving wife, mother to their -- their children, but I think more than that, she tried to represent what her husband was trying to achieve: peace and reconciliation in the nation, and in her role as first lady, she was able to accomplish that.

SWAIN: Many thanks to all the folks at the Grant sites around the country who helped with us, bringing you video tonight, and to the good people at the White House historical association who are our partners for this series. And that concludes our discussion of Julia Dent Grant. Our thanks to our two guests for being with us tonight.

SEALE: Thank you, Susan.

(MUSIC)

END