

Columbia University
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences

Oral History Master of Arts

Grant's Tomb
An Oral History at a Commemorative Landscape

a final paper
by
Sarah Elizabeth Dziedzic

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of
Master of Arts

May 2011

“What people make of their places is closely connected to what they make of themselves as members of society and inhabitants of the earth, and while the two activities may be separable in principle, they are deeply joined in practice. If place-making is a way of constructing the past, a venerable means of doing human history, it is also a way of constructing social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities. We are, in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine.”

- Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*

Preface

I recently unearthed a photograph I took after my first winter in an apartment on Riverside Drive and 115th Street. The sun had emerged after a late afternoon rainstorm, and though the trees were still without leaves and the air was cold, I remember feeling that it was not inappropriate for me to be excited about the coming spring. I climbed to the top floor of the building and pushed open the door to the roof and saw the sun lowering across the Hudson to the west, the clouds slightly pink and the sky still a bit gray. I leaned as far as I could over the side of the building, looked up Riverside Drive and took a picture. And this is what I realized when I rediscovered that photograph I took nearly a decade ago: I had leaned over the edge of the building to include Grant's Tomb in my vista, its dome and upper colonnade peeping out above the tops of the trees, white in the afternoon sun. Rather than be alone on a roof on a winter afternoon, I was there with Grant, my silent neighbor.



Figure 1 – A photograph taken from the roof of the Woodbridge dormitory. The pointed top of Grant's Tomb is visible on the far right. *Photograph author's own.*

In Morningside Heights, the neighborhood where Grant's Tomb is located, Riverside Park is a long and quiet promenade shaded by a canopy of trees that overlooks the Hudson River. Though Riverside Park has been the site of many mundane and momentous events in my own history, it is Grant's Tomb in particular—the colossal white marble monument at the park's northern tip near 122nd Street—that has remained a source of constant fascination and mystery, working its way into my memories of events in the way the photograph from the roof of my apartment illustrates. The meaning I gather from this place has been the motivation for this project.

Using oral history and landscape studies, I structured my research around my original impression that Grant's Tomb had an otherworldly feeling and a rich but hidden history. Learning about the history of the site from a variety of written and visual sources revealed a number of distinct phases of management and usage at Grant's Tomb. Some evidence of these historical developments is visible to visitors today while other evidence has been obscured or effaced. I conducted oral histories, a complement to this history of the built environment, to uncover what has been hidden from view. Memory and imagination are an integral part of the site's history and contribute to its existence as a landscape filled with personal and collective meaning, and oral history has helped confront this history of meaning and examine it in the present.

This project is rooted in my personal curiosity about Grant's Tomb but grows outward to explore my narrators' shared fascination with a place. The oral history interviews I work with are not only events of information-gathering and sharing lived experience but are also quests to uncover *what else* is Grant's Tomb besides a memorial,

besides a neighborhood landmark and besides a site of public history. *What else* can a monument—and a very old monument at that—be?

The narrators I worked with shared their experiences and interpretations of Grant's Tomb in ways that are imaginative and meaningful, and in language that is often beautiful. Steve Laise, a Historic Interpreter for the National Park Service, situated Grant's Tomb within a larger story of the Civil War and, 100 years later, the Civil Rights Movement, and spoke of its potential to involve the public in these points of American history. A retired firefighter and antiques collector, Kevin McGeary, spoke about the neighborhood of Grant's Tomb in the 1980s and his yearly participation in the clean-up of a nearby monument. Lev Kalman, a filmmaker and a close friend, placed Grant's Tomb at the center of neighborhood stories, real and imagined.¹ As this project continues to develop, additional narrators will represent a diversity of experience; at present, my own first-person narration serves as the only woman's perspective. The point remains, however, that without oral history such experiences of place would be unexplored. Grant's Tomb would be a page in a guidebook, a mysterious landmark, or a too-neatly described memorial in a National Parks Service brochure.

Perhaps it is because I have heard it too often during the course of my research, but I find the response to that famous, site-specific joke, "Who's buried in Grant's Tomb?" to be inescapably troubling rather than humorous: "No one." While it may be Ulysses and Julia who are *entombed*—and notably not *buried*—there, the stories of so many past visitors are, quite seriously, buried in the past without record or ceremony. I am certain I am just beginning to understand the sort of questions required to invite each

¹ Please see Appendix-1 for more information about the individuals I interviewed for this project.

individual I interview to speak freely about the imagined or historical past. But there are no simple answers or trick questions that should stand in for a thoughtful response as to why I or my narrators find Grant's Tomb to be a place worth talking about. I interpret what I have collected through my own experience and, in the future, endeavor to hear still more stories of Grant's Tomb and still more interpretations of their meaning.

Oral History and a Commemorative Landscape *An Introduction*

Grant's Tomb holds the bodies of Ulysses S. Grant and his wife, Julia Dent Grant. Built in 1897 in New York City's Riverside Park in Morningside Heights, the tomb and the surrounding plaza are officially the General Grant National Memorial, a name change that coincided with its establishment as a National Park Service site in 1959 after a long era of management by the Grant Monument Association.² It is a historic monument and a site of public history; a New York City landmark and a place of national storytelling; a nineteenth century shrine and a complex memorial that also serves the present. In this work, I consider how Grant's Tomb becomes a place of diverse and personal meaning endowed with the ability to transport visitors to a past that reaches back to select points of the twentieth century, to the tomb's construction and Grant's death at the end of the nineteenth century, and to the American Civil War in the 1860s.

In order to discuss the way that meaning is located at Grant's Tomb, I approach it as a commemorative landscape, a term that encapsulates it as both a site of meaning-making and as a feature of the built environment. The Cultural Landscape Foundation defines this category of space as an "expression of a culture's shared memories":

A commemorative landscape [is] set aside and marked by a culture to recall, celebrate, honor, or memorialize significant people, places, ideas, or events in its history. Such landscapes can be designed, vernacular, ethnographic, or historic, and range in form and scale from a single object to a panoramic view-shed.³

² The Grant Monument Association provides a succinct overview of their history: "The Grant Monument Association (GMA) was formed within days of Grant's death to establish and administer a suitable resting place for a preeminent American. The GMA did this for years, but following a declining membership and aging leadership that would not allow it to continue, the GMA transferred the site over to the National Park Service (NPS) in 1959." "About the GMA," Grant Monument Association, accessed April 6, 2011, <http://grantstomb.org/ind-gma.html>.

³ "Commemorative Landscape," Cultural Landscape Foundation, accessed March 30, 2010, <http://tclf.org/content/commemorative-landscape>.

This term unites the different functions of the site—an external, manmade space that also locates the individualized act of remembering—and provides two different but connected lenses that bring the site into focus and provide a way to see how it functions as a memorial.

The concept of landscape refers to the placement of Grant’s Tomb within a “concrete, three-dimensional, shared reality” in an area that can be comprehended by a glance.⁴ This lens grounds Grant’s Tomb in the external world of human use and shared space. The tomb is a formidable presence; it is a 150-foot Neoclassical monument whose vertical granite columns reach upward to a dome that is barely perceivable from the ground below.⁵ It is the largest mausoleum in North America⁶ and it attains the goal of the tomb’s architect, John H. Duncan, to create “a Monumental Tomb, no matter from what view it may be seen.”⁷ In my interview with Lev Kalman, a resident of Morningside Heights in 2000-04, he confirmed the achievement of this effect: “It takes *a couple minutes* to pass Grant’s Tomb.”⁸

In conjunction with this visible, physical reality of the commemorative landscape is the more intangible lens of memory and meaning-making. The General Grant National Memorial is tasked with preserving and presenting memory and, as with other commemorative sites, these tasks raise questions as to whose memories have been

⁴ John Brinckerhoff Jackson, “The Word Itself” in *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*, ed. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 302.

⁵ See Appendix-2 for photo of Grant’s Tomb.

⁶ “General Grant National Memorial: History and Culture,” U.S. National Park Service, accessed March 19, 2011, <http://www.nps.gov/gegr/historyculture/index.htm>.

⁷ John Duncan quoted in “Grant’s Tomb - An Overview: Building Design Characteristics,” Grant Monument Association, accessed April 16, 2010, <http://www.grantstomb.org/ind-gma.html>.

⁸ Lev Kalman, interview by Sarah Dziedzic, Brooklyn, February 8, 2010. Transcript in possession of this researcher (emphasis original).

represented.⁹ As a site that has held local and national significance since it was built over a century ago, there are, additionally, *generations* of memories to sort through—a dusty attic of newspaper clippings, yellowed letters and brass trinkets—which makes the transmission of memories and meaning at Grant’s Tomb quite complex. Investigations into the relationship between history and memory, which form the contemporary field of “memory studies,” have been a source of debate at Grant’s Tomb for generations, and historian Joan Waugh writes that “long before memory studies became the vogue in academic circles, the story of the Civil War haunted generations of ordinary citizens, intellectuals, writers and historians.”¹⁰ I argue that that haunting is still part of the experience of visiting Grant’s Tomb and is evoked by the interaction of landscape and meaning. Generations of Americans have presented, rejected and reworked their memories at Grant’s Tomb, and that cycle of meaning-making is both tangible and disquieting. How does one sense—and even feel corporeally—that the preservation of a memory has occurred and is *still occurring* at the General Grant National Memorial?

Through their varying relationships with Grant’s Tomb, the individuals I interviewed describe experiences of the site for either historical or recreational use as well as their personal approaches to memorializing and learning history from a public memorial. These sources both support and sustain that haunting feeling—the tangible sense that meaning at that site has been reworked and reworked again—by describing

⁹ For example, James Young observed that the 10-year struggle to select a design for the Holocaust memorial in Berlin was also a struggle over memory: “You may have failed to produce a monument, but if you count the sheer number of design hours that 528 teams of artists and architects have already devoted to the memorial, it’s clear that your process has already generated more individual memory work than a finished monument will inspire in its first ten years.” Quoted in Kenneth E. Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America’s Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*, revised edition, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 342.

¹⁰ Joan Waugh, *U.S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 6.

personal experiences of the landscape and by offering their interpretations of the interplay of history and memory at the site. Oral history provides an opportunity to explore, on an individual level, where “imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge” in narrative.¹¹ These points of engagement are a way to develop a sense of how Grant’s Tomb and the meaning it transmits changes over time and reaches visitors in different ways; the oral history interviews I have conducted explore those transmissions.

To give one example, Kevin McGeary, a retired fireman, proposed that “usually the people who build these things [historic sites] in the first place get it right the first time around,” and that sites that explain the impact of time and changing perspectives detract from the potency of an original designer’s message.¹² By contrast, I began this project because I believed the opposite to be true: that a physical restoration project at Grant’s Tomb completed in 1997 blocked an essential part of the place’s history—a part that I needed to know in order to look at Grant’s Tomb historically as both an aspect of the landscape and a place of memory. Much about the site resists the sort of contextual details that would allow a visitor to see the developments that occurred there historically; a disorienting effect that creates an almost *ahistorical* experience.¹³ In my interview with Steve Laise, a historic interpreter for the National Park Service, he was quick to situate his thoughts on the history of Grant’s Tomb in the ever-changing present and to draw

¹¹ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 51.

¹² McGeary, February 19, 2010.

¹³ Kirk Savage writes that any memorial is complicated by this same paradox: “Investigating the history of the [commemorative] landscape cuts against its deepest grain. History is about change, contingency, fallibility. The most cherished axiom of the memorial landscape is its permanence, its eternity. That axiom shuts a lid on history. . . .Reconstructing the history of this place, then, cannot help throwing a wrench in the works. To write a history of a memorial landscape is to subvert it, to watch it emerge from the fog of ‘identity’ and into the sharper light of human affairs.” In Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 10.

attention to the necessity of a visitor to identify the changing perspectives of the past:

What's interesting to me is not just what happened insofar as we can tell at a particular time and place, but...how over time our perception of the how and the why and the what *changes*. And it changes because—not the event changes but—and very often the people didn't change because they're all dead now anyway—but we change because the world around us changes, and we express our current concerns and values in how we talk about our past.¹⁴

It is the history of that changing perception that Grant's Tomb has the capacity (or perhaps, tendency) to obscure, which sends researchers like myself out into that shadowy attic with a lantern hoping for some well-marked clues. What were those values of the past that led to such a grandiose design for Grant's memorial? What was the story people told themselves when the Civil War ended in 1865 and how were those stories part of the process that led to construction of Grant's Tomb? How can we see Grant's Tomb in historical context?

I acknowledge that this sort of mysterious can be the reason a place is compelling.¹⁵ But memorials need not rely on a lack of information to draw visitors. Conversely, the goal of a memorial is to *communicate* its purpose and to provide enough information for a visitor to combine their impression of the overall space, sculpture or landscape with knowledge of the specific event or individual the memorial aims to commemorate. Art and architecture historian, Kirk Savage, writes that monuments and memorials also seem to communicate that their message is eternal. Yet:

No matter how compelling they are, they can never fulfill that promise. People and history get in the way, and they force the commemorative

¹⁴ Steve Laise, interview by Sarah Dzedzic, New York City, November 2, 2009. Transcript in possession of this researcher (emphasis original).

¹⁵ Contemporary memorials such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Pentagon Memorial notably avoid the use of explanatory or narrative text in their design in order to create evocative spaces for exploration and contemplation. Keith Kaseman, "Moving Beyond: The Design of the Pentagon Memorial," *CUSP Speaker Series*, Columbia University, March 28, 2011.

landscape to change and adapt. For that we should be grateful: change keeps the monuments alive.¹⁶

A memorial built in the nineteenth century, therefore, still holds that nineteenth century message and endeavors to transmit it outward even to contemporary visitors—in the case of Grant’s Tomb, a broadcast over the distance of 125 years. Though, as Savage writes, individual experience and knowledge of history can “get in the way,” forcing a reevaluation of this original message communicated by the memorial, and spurring a search for new meanings. Visitors adapt the meaning transmitted by those aging monuments to their knowledge of events in the present and recent past.¹⁷ So what of that first generation’s message is accessible from a visit to Grant’s Tomb? How do narrators’ experiences and impressions illustrate, as Savage writes, that Grant’s Tomb can be *alive*? Through the lenses of landscape and commemoration, I pursue this question.

While I compare the original design of the tomb and the experience it aimed to foster with its reception by my narrators, I examine this dependence on change that Savage described. Such flexibility is, of course, no minor feat for structures made of marble, granite or bronze, yet it is perhaps essential to the continued relevance of aging memorials such as Grant’s Tomb and a significant point of consideration for professionals and community members who are involved in the planning of new commemorative sites. By extension, the capacity to foster flexibility between past and

¹⁶ Savage, *Monument Wars*, 7.

¹⁷ That old monuments and memorials remain compelling in the present is good news for Grant’s Tomb and other Civil War era monuments as the nation readies to celebrate the sesquicentennial of that war in 2011-2015.

present—and between lived memory and historical memory—is part of what makes the experience of visiting a place meaningful.¹⁸

Working with these oral history interviews is a way to learn about how a small group of others engage with Grant’s Tomb, and to explore what my personal experience of enchantment shares with theirs; we, as visitors to commemorative landscapes, employ our own frameworks for understanding history and place—frameworks that are perhaps more durable, creative and personal than those that historic interpretation materials may endeavor to construct. Interviews, in the sense that they are forums for imagination and invention, provide a way for people in the present to connect to those ideas, symbols and desires of the distant generations who lived through the Civil War and formed their experiences into a granite monument. What evidence of these life experiences still exists at the tomb, and what is the importance of finding that evidence when it has, at times, been obscured? Steve explains how such evidence can reveal much about the past:

Creating a monument reflects external circumstances that go beyond the story itself... We tell history in a variety of different ways for reasons that may be external to the subject matter. And I think we always do that. There’s nothing wrong with that.¹⁹

Without access to such historical perspective, a memorial risks being a site without history or context; a mute memorial that prevents visitors from engaging with its meaning in the present. Andreas Huyssen, in *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of*

¹⁸ For a scholarly analysis of the interplay between individual and collective memory and their role in an oral history project, see Alistair Thomson’s “Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia” in *Oral History Reader, 2nd edition*, Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., (New York: Routledge, 2006), 244-254. Also see Alice M. Hoffman and Howard S. Hoffman’s “Memory Theory: Personal and Social” for an explanation of the ways in which collective memory is embedded in individual memory and lived experience in *Handbook of Oral History*, Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless, eds., (New York: AltaMira Press, 2006), 290-295.

¹⁹ Laise, November 2, 2009.

Memory, issues a warning: “At stake is the power of a commemorative site to keep the story alive as opposed to entombing it.”²⁰

²⁰ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 101.

The Memory of Grant and the Shape of a Monument *A Brief History*

When Ulysses S. Grant died on July 23, 1885 after a long battle with throat cancer, he was staying with his family in upstate New York near Saratoga Springs at an estate called Mount McGregor. He had made arrangements for his burial site to be in New York City so that his wife, Julia, could visit him easily, and so she could, ultimately, be buried beside him when she died.²¹ Grant's death was big news, and after a private funeral at Mount McGregor, arrangements were made for the body to lay in state in Albany and then to be transported by train to Manhattan on August 6; 50,000 people came to see the body in Albany over the course of one day and mourners lined the train tracks all along the route to New York City.²² As the leader of the victorious Union Army in the American Civil War, as well as the United States' 18th president, Grant's funeral on August 8, 1885 was a theater for much political symbolism: former Confederate Generals Joseph Johnston and Simon Buckner served as pallbearers and Fitzhugh Lee, nephew of Robert E. Lee, General of the Confederate Army, performed duties as a prominent aide.²³ This inclusion of former Confederate icons was meant to display that harmony between the North and South—due in no small part to Grant's efforts to promote the idea of Reconciliation—had been attained.²⁴

The ceremony also gave many regular citizens opportunities for participation:

²¹ General Grant turned down the opportunity for a military burial at Arlington National Cemetery because his wife, Julia, would not have been able to be buried there. He sought an alternate site that would accommodate his and his wife's wish to be buried—or entombed—together. Before her death, Julia Dent wrote of her husband in her memoir, "...even though his beautiful life has gone out, it is as when some far-off planet disappears from the heavens; the light of his glorious fame still reaches out to me, falls upon me, and warms me." Julia's body was placed in the tomb after her death on December 14, 1902.

²² Grant's failing health was a popular topic in the New York press. For a full description of his following, see "Historian of the Union Cause" and "Pageantry of Woe" in Waugh, *Grant*, 193-213, 228.

²³ *Ibid.*, 263.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 238-9.

approximately 250,000 people visited Grant's body as it lay in state at City Hall in the days before his funeral.²⁵ The formal funeral procession began at 9:30 A.M., crept up Broadway, moved through Central Park, and was greeted by the tolling of bells, funeral dirges and spectators who leaned out of windows and lined the streets along the procession's route—it took some 50,000 participants until 5:00 P.M. to reach the site of the temporary tomb in Riverside Park.²⁶ The participatory elements of the funeral procession, including the draping of buildings in black crepe and the proliferation of memorial cards, pins and flowers “invested the individual citizen with a public role to express personal loss, and just as importantly provided a chance to claim his place in national history.”²⁷ Participants not only formulated a personal story of meaning in response to Grant's death, but also put that meaning *in place*. Those who stood along Broadway or in Central Park would remember that spot along the procession route where they mourned publicly for Grant. Those who followed the procession through Manhattan would forever see the whole route colored by the intimately formal service of accompanying a body to its final resting place. And those who met the procession at the site of Grant's Tomb would see *that place* as the epicenter of expression, a spot in the earth that seemed to open in response to his death and was able to contain so many living people who sought a place to express what they felt for Grant.²⁸

The outward manifestation of mourning allowed everyone involved in the ceremony, from ordinary citizens to former Confederate Generals, to valorize Grant—

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. Please see Appendix-3 for an image of Grant's temporary tomb.

²⁷ Ibid., 249.

²⁸ See Appendix-4 for a commentary on the ceremony held at the site of Grant's temporary tomb one year after his death.

though this was in marked contrast to criticism he received during his lifetime. While General of the Union Army, Grant was often disparaged; journalists were critical of Grant's military maneuvers and exaggerated his use of alcohol.²⁹ And as President, his lack of political training was made apparent through the unfulfilled promises of Reconstruction and by allegations of cronyism.³⁰ But again in 1897, when the permanent tomb was completed, the dedication ceremony promoted the memory of Grant as a magnanimous leader with the tomb itself as a representation of his celebrated persona: Classical, measured, and stern.³¹ The event, over thirty years after the Civil War ended and twelve years after his death, drew a crowd of one million people, all of whom, through their bodily presence at the ceremony, iterated this revision of Grant's reputation; the monument represented Grant unquestionably as an honorable hero.

Constructing a place to represent the memory of Grant was part of a larger process of remembering and representing the Civil War.³² As those who fought in the Civil War died, represented most notably by the death of Grant, younger generations were faced with an important question: how would they preserve the memory of those who died for future generations? This younger generation needed not look farther than Grant, the iconic leader, for direction: Grant often spoke to the press in a confident tone

²⁹ Waugh, *Grant*, 38-40.

³⁰ I have greatly summarized Grant's military and presidential career in order to focus simply on the contrast his unfavorable reception by the public during his lifetime with the positive celebration of his military and political career after his death. More about Grant's Presidential terms can be found in "A Baby Politician," in Waugh, *Grant*, 105-153.

³¹ Oversight of the design competition for Grant's Tomb as well as fundraising for its construction was handled directly by the Grant Monument Association. When I refer to the "designers of the tomb" I refer both to the GMA and to the citizens who donated money (over \$600,000 by 90,000 contributors) to the GMA for the purpose of creating an appropriate resting place for General Grant and his wife. U.S. National Park Service, *Analysis of Management Alternatives: General Grant National Memorial* (New York: North Atlantic Region, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, 1980), 6.

³² For a full study of the relationship between memory, forgetting and history as it pertains to the American Civil War, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

about a restored friendship and cooperation between the North and the South, the success of Reconstruction and the celebrated emancipation of slaves.³³ It is not clear whether Grant believed his own statements wholeheartedly or whether he spoke strategically to posterity, but that banner of cooperation, reconciliation and honorable progress that he helped create at the end of his life was used as a model to shape the visible memorial landscape, and flown high above his own tomb after he died. The choice to emphasize the heroism of Grant through an enormous Neoclassical monument revealed a generation's determination to supplant memories of a traumatic, brutal and racially motivated war in which over half a million soldiers were killed with a story that emphasized unification over separatism and reconciliation over remorse.³⁴ A story of reconciliation supported the idea that the war, despite all its violence, had been justified, and that political and social progress had been made and enemies forgiven. The opportunity to rework and express memories of the Civil War was the means by which experiences of violence and loss could be reinterpreted and accommodate new meanings: the racism, violence and division so many people surely remembered was *not* the story they would pass onto the next generation through the shape and stature of Grant's Tomb.

As a photo from the tomb's dedication in 1897 illustrates, early visitors experienced a place that was quite different from the site today: there were no other buildings in the immediate vicinity and very few trees. Nineteenth century visitors approached Grant's Tomb with reverence as though it was a grand castle on a hill, a white beacon visible from afar drawing Grant's mourners to a central location. They

³³ Waugh, *Grant*, 189-191.

³⁴ Approximately 620,000 soldiers are estimated to have died as a result of battle or disease. For a full account of the way that death and loss permeated existence during the Civil War, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

could remember Grant's life and achievements over a picnic on the lawn or contemplate his life more solemnly while overlooking the Hudson River. Grant's Tomb and the landscape around it were built to accommodate such personal demonstrations of memory and meaning in which a violent war was summarized by a Neoclassical style building, and sadness over the loss of a hero was conveyed by windows made of dark purple glass.



Figure 2 - The Dedication of Grant's Tomb was a highly attended and symbolic event that represented support for Grant as well as cooperation between Northern and Southern politicians. *National Park Service photograph.*

The people who filled the space and used it for its intended purposes displayed the way in which Grant's Tomb functioned as a commemorative landscape in its early years: visitors drew on personal memory and experience of the Civil War and the presentation of Grant's role in bringing about its end to create a landscape of memory that was passed from one generation to another. Geographer Kenneth Foote observes that the "physical durability of landscape permits it to carry meaning into the future so as to help sustain

memorial and cultural traditions” to future generations.³⁵ In this way, landscape functions as a “communicational resource...capable of extending the temporal and spatial range of communication.”³⁶ The people who came together to mourn for Grant and to design his memorial built a physical landscape capable of conveying that memory—that Grant was a valiant hero whose death was a devastating loss to the nation—across time and space to the present. Yet the capacity of this resource has been affected by changes in the visible landscape around Grant’s Tomb, which impacts what the landscape can communicate to visitors.

Flanked for blocks by large apartments up and down Riverside Drive, Grant’s Tomb has been dwarfed by larger buildings and is part of a much changed and fore-shortened vista. The Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University’s main campus were built up along Claremont Avenue and Broadway throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, filling in many formerly open spaces on the avenues east of the tomb.³⁷ Riverside Church—the tallest church in New York City—was completed in 1930 and stands only a block south of Grant’s Tomb on Riverside Drive.³⁸ Additional statuary has also been erected along Riverside Drive, including monuments to Lajos Kossuth at 113th Street, Franz Sigel at 106th Street and Daniel Butterfield along 122nd Street in neighboring Sakura Park. Growing in Riverside Park and also lining the plaza in front of the entrance of the tomb, a small forest of trees are more readily visible

³⁵ Foote, *Shadowed Ground*, 33.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ In 1897, the President of Columbia University, Seth Low, moved the campus to its current location in Morningside Heights—then a “rural” area of Manhattan. Shortly afterward, the affiliated schools, including Columbia Business School, Columbia Law School, Columbia School of Journalism, also relocated to this central campus. “Columbia University: A Brief History,” Columbia University in the City of New York, accessed April 6, 2011, <http://www.columbia.edu/content/history.html>.

³⁸ See Appendix-5 for images of Grant’s Tomb before and after the construction of Riverside Church.

than the tomb itself. Planted as part of a Works Progress Administration project in the 1930s, the trees—in conjunction with the increase in neighboring buildings—profoundly change how Grant’s Tomb is situated in the landscape.³⁹ It is no longer possible to see Grant’s Tomb as an unobscured and isolated beacon or a place of straightforward symbolism; Grant’s Tomb today shares a space with many other structures and statues within a larger neighborhood context.

³⁹ U.S. National Park Service, *Analysis of Management*, 10.

Getting There and Seeing It
Grant's Tomb as a Feature of the Landscape

When I first moved to New York City in the fall of 2000, I loved that I was surrounded by people. I had a roommate; I shared a suite with twelve other students; I took classes, trains, elevators, and even read books always in the company of people. I was isolated where I grew up in Pennsylvania and there were days when the only person I saw besides my family was a farmer driving a tractor in the distance over a terraced field: over a rise, down it, and up again until sunset. But after three years in New York, I had enough of that constant company. I was obsessed with how to attain solitude, and the closest thing I came to achieving this goal was walking off Columbia's campus and down the hill on 116th Street to Riverside Park. And although there were usually plenty of people there, fewer of them seemed to ask me for directions, comment on the length of my skirt or request my support for various social causes. I had found a haven.

I would descend the stone steps near the 116th Street entrance and follow the path that snakes down towards that Hudson to the bird sanctuary, a forested path that was a seasonal home to nuthatches, catbirds and yellow warblers.⁴⁰ I never learned the northern boundary of the sanctuary—instead I always wandered past the end of the mulch path and each time had to decide whether to push forward through the brush and hope to intersect with the joggers' path or to turn back and resume the paved descent towards the river. More times than not I chose to fight through the bramble and squeeze through the fence, getting a little—but not *too*—lost and achieving that rare sense of solitude in the process. I knew to end my silent voyage by following the distant white spot through the trees; I

⁴⁰ The steps at the 116th entrance to Riverside Park were also the site of my first date with a college boyfriend; I asked him to “come to the park with me and smash this ugly pinch pot,” and we walked there and tossed my first clay creation down the stairs.

looked for Grant's Tomb.

Although it is not necessary to trespass through the underbrush in Riverside Park to get to Grant's Tomb, there really is no easy way to get there.⁴¹ From the park, one must cross Riverside Drive West—on a blind curve with no crosswalk—to get to the grassy patch in front of it. This patch, which does not have any sidewalks or pathways, must be traversed to get to the tree-lined plaza. The plaza is the first place that feels like part of the site; while the tomb has been visible through the woods in the park, from the path along Riverside Drive West, and from the grassy patch in front of it, it is only after putting one's feet on the concrete of the plaza that a visit to Grant's Tomb really begins. Kevin McGeary describes this entrancing experience: "I remember you approach the tomb across an open area. You're a fair distance back and then start walking towards it. I can remember that view, that long view down to the monument."⁴² Along the sides of the plaza are benches that are shaded by overarching trees, and often skateboarders, wedding parties or bands of unicyclists crisscross the area in front of the tomb. But nothing can overpower the silence that comes from Grant's Tomb and the way it saturates the air of that plaza; I never really remember crossing the plaza to the entrance to the tomb, but I always do.

Filmmaker Lev Kalman describes the walk he took frequently in the summer of 2002 that took him past Grant's Tomb from his apartment on 116th Street:

There's really big, tall apartment buildings that are sort of luxurious that are all along Riverside Drive. And then Riverside Drive starts to—it

⁴¹ The most sensible way to get there is to approach it directly from the East along 122nd Street and, in all fairness, this is what the National Park Service recommends—but who can resist walking through a park instead?

⁴² McGeary, February 19, 2010. See Appendix-6 for an image of the tree-lined plaza in front of Grant's Tomb.

bifurcates, right?—and...you leave those apartments pretty quickly and you cross over to this little mini park [Sakura Park], and then you walk along on the west side of the little mini park and pretty soon, as you start going downhill, then on your left is Grant's Tomb. And it takes a couple minutes to pass Grant's Tomb. And then you head down and suddenly you're at the kind of flat part again where there's a big parking lot, which I guess is for Fairway. But there's also a restaurant right there. And then for the last bunch of years there's the Dinosaur BBQ on your right and then Fairway on your left. And then it becomes that weird no-man's land again after Fairway.⁴³

This walk, Lev explains, is how Grant's Tomb secured a spot on his internal "map of places" and became located solidly within a particular self-defined neighborhood.⁴⁴ While a visitor to the area in the nineteenth century would be hard-pressed *not* to notice Grant's Tomb from a long way off, on Lev's walks the tomb is instead part of a network of what he calls "walking landmarks," or significant sites that one does not necessarily enter or explore individually but rather *walks by*.⁴⁵ As the twentieth century progressed, a visit to Grant's Tomb included luxury apartment buildings, an imposing Gothic church, a chain restaurant and a large grocery store with an even larger parking lot. What would the tomb's original designers think of such company or about the tomb's present-day ability to foster an experience in which visitors contemplate the memory of Grant?

Lev suggests that the position of Grant's Tomb within this shared neighborhood context makes its purpose more poignant. If one darts across traffic to the plaza in front of the tomb, a discovery awaits: the trees hide the sights and sounds of the outside world and draw visitors towards the tomb's entrance and an otherworldly experience. Such a

⁴³ Kalman, February 8, 2010.

⁴⁴ Ibid. For an examination of the freeform exploration of the urban landscape on foot, see the works of Guy Debord on psychogeography.

⁴⁵ Kalman, February 8, 2010. Lev's observation about walking landmarks is worth comparing to Maya Lin's submission essay for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial design contest in which she wrote that her design was meant to be a "moving composition" not just in terms of sentiment but also in the sense that the memorial landscape was meant to be experienced as a visitor physically moved into and out of the space created by the design.

space welcomes exploration—an adventure that, as Lev explains, can yield an inspiring experience that is essential to his creative process as a filmmaker:

We devote most of our energy not to coming up with ideas but to clearing out space in our heads for ideas. Spots like Grant's Tomb are perfect because they offer just enough stimulation. Like, the trick to creating blank space is to just kind of be stimulated by whatever's around you and let that sort of take over. And so it's perfect for that. Because there's things to talk about. There's things to look at. There's things to muse about and imagine, like ghosts popping out of it and all of that. And yeah, it can also easily be ignored—and [you] just sort of stop there and actually think about nothing. Suddenly an idea comes to you.⁴⁶

For Lev, the contemporary Grant's Tomb is not far from achieving its original designers' intent and is still well-suited for a personal search for meaning. While the openness of the space in the nineteenth century invited visitors to spread themselves out and stroll over the open grassy lawn, today the trees create a contemplative cocoon for those who get close enough to step onto its plaza. The site is also still capable of inspiring individual reflection: Lev provides an example of how the space can foster a process that begins with—but is not limited to—factual information. The minimal amount of interpretive materials at the site—what Lev calls “just enough stimulation”—allows visitors to consider the historical significance and purpose of the site without getting overwhelmed by information. A detailed story about the history of Grant's Tomb could be fascinating, but Lev recognizes that it could also inhibit the creative processes that naturally occur for him while he explores the memorial.

The neighborhood that retired firefighter Kevin McGeary described is defined by the boundaries of his former firehouse, Ladder 40, on 125th Street in Harlem.

Each firehouse has an administrative district. They also have a different response area that they go to. And in our case, Ladder 40, we went as far

⁴⁶ Ibid.

west as the Hudson River—to the West Side Highway and to the river. And we went as far east as Lenox Avenue. We went as far north as 135th Street and as far south as about 103rd Street.⁴⁷

Unlike Lev, Kevin traversed the neighborhood surrounding Grant’s Tomb by vehicle—often in a fire truck, siren blaring, on the way to a presumed emergency—and not as part of a walk on the way to an apartment where friends lived. Furthermore, Kevin’s experiences with the site occurred in the mid-1980s before the most recent restoration was completed in 1997:⁴⁸

The last time I would have been there it was—it was back in the early '80s when I went. 1984 is when I transferred to Ladder 40 in Harlem. So it would have been 1984, 1985. You know, we would pass [Grant’s Tomb] just on our way to stores or on runs. And yes, yes, there was definitely graffiti.⁴⁹

The site Kevin knew was one where the tiles of the plaza were cracked and weedy, the face of the tomb itself was colored by spray paint, and where homeless people regularly slept.⁵⁰ During this time Grant’s Tomb formally belonged to the National Park Service but it wasn’t until 1978—over 20 years after the National Park Service became the formal stewards of the memorial—that a Statement for Management was approved for the site.⁵¹ When the Grant Monument Association disbanded in 1959 and officially donated the tomb to the National Park Service, the tomb was left without a private advocacy group

⁴⁷ Kevin McGeary, interview by Sarah Dziedzic, Brooklyn, February 12, 2010. Transcript in possession of this researcher.

⁴⁸ The restoration project completed in 1997 is discussed in greater detail in the following section of this paper, “Visible and Invisible Histories: Issues of Restoration.”

⁴⁹ McGeary, February 19, 2010.

⁵⁰ See Appendix-7 for images of the vandalism that occurred at Grant’s Tomb.

⁵¹ While assessments and plans were drafted by the National Parks Service, the 1978 Statement for Management was the first to be approved. For more information on the early history of National Park Service activity at Grant’s Tomb, see U.S. National Park Service’s 1980 publication, *Analysis of Management Alternatives: General Grant National Memorial*.

devoted to its protection and care.⁵² As a result, the tomb became a haven for vandalism and other illegal activities.⁵³

The most notable aspect of Grant's Tomb for Kevin was not its role within the administrative district of his firehouse or, as with Lev, its interplay with the other structures and landmarks that surrounded it but rather its proximity to one very small area located above the Hudson along Riverside Drive West. Known as the Amiable Child Monument, this structure is approximately four feet high, is enclosed by a black wrought iron fence and stands across the street from the open space behind Grant's Tomb. Kevin tells the story of how he and the other firefighters of Ladder 40 became linked to the site.

[The Captain] was a runner. A road runner. He used to run through the area as his workouts. And that's how he came across this Tomb of the Amiable Child. I'm sure he—he had no idea what it was or where—you know, why it was there. At first, when he found it, it was in disrepair, I guess. I guess he researched it and decided well, we're going to take care of this.⁵⁴

The members of the firehouse took care of the monument by clearing out trash, pulling weeds, cutting the grass and generally maintaining the gravesite, a duty that was completed yearly on the anniversary of the boy's death, July 15. A nearby NYC Parks Department sign provides a brief history of the property where the monument and the neighboring Grant's Tomb now stand. The sign claims the area was once farmland owned

⁵² For a full history of the Grant Monument Association, including their formation, oversight of the "Grant Monument," dissolution and eventual reinstatement, see "About the GMA," Grant Monument Association, accessed March 29, 2011, <http://www.grantstomb.org/ind-gma.html>. Also see U.S. National Park Service, *Analysis of Management*, 14.

⁵³ Maria Baquero, a PhD student at the Mailman School of Public Health, offered a brief anecdote: while illegal activities went on at Grant's Tomb during the 1970s and '80s, it felt safer than other New York City public spaces such as Washington Square or Central Park because the plaza was relatively well lit. When she was a teenager in the early 1980s she traveled to Grant's Tomb from her home in Queens—a journey on the subway of over an hour—just to have a place to hang out with her friends. Maria Baquero, personal conversation with author, November 2010.

⁵⁴ McGeary, February 12, 2010.

by the relation⁵⁵ of St. Claire who had the monument erected after the boy's death in 1797. It summarizes quite eloquently: "[Grant's Tomb] is as grand a testimony to the accomplishments of a national leader as the monument to the amiable child is a modest and touching tribute to a young boy who never had the opportunity to grow into adulthood."⁵⁶



Figure 3 - The Amiable Child Monument. The inscription on the monument reads "Erected to the memory of an Amiable Child / St. Claire Pollock / Died 15 July 1797 / The fifth year of his life." *Photograph author's own.*

To reach this monument, one must follow Riverside Drive West around the west side of Grant's Tomb and follow the sidewalk that overlooks the Hudson River. The traffic on Riverside Drive West is one-way going south and cars come fast and head-on up the hill from 125th Street. Although this space overlooks the river, is surrounded by vegetation and is across the street from the park space behind Grant's Tomb, Riverside

⁵⁵ No source can confirm with certainty whether the land where the monument now stands was owned by the boy's father or uncle, or who was responsible for establishing the monument to St. Claire.

⁵⁶ The New York City Department of Parks & Recreation quotes this sign on their "Amiable Child Monument" website, accessed March 29, 2011, <http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/riversidepark/highlights/6417>.

Drive West feels more like a highway off-ramp than a welcoming path. The cars seem fresh from the New Jersey Turnpike and the George Washington Bridge fifty blocks north, speeding freely and unaware of the stop-and-go driving that awaits them at 120th Street as streetlights and two-way driving begin. When Lev described his walk, he clarified that it is no place for pedestrians: a person “wouldn't go the other way—the *west* way—around Grant's Tomb to get *anywhere*.”⁵⁷ Yet it is also easy to get there on foot by accident—there are no warning signs that the sidewalk on which one walks is all that is left of Riverside Park and that there will be no cross streets or egress of any kind for half a mile. Cars park along the sides of this enclosed street, and I have seen people napping in sedans and, once, men furtively hosting a game of dominoes on a card table in the back of a van, the rear doors open to the late afternoon air.

As the only reliable break in this long walk, the Amiable Child Monument serves as a focus of uninterrupted contemplative attention. It appears off to the side, a small enclosed urn whose text cannot be read without descending two small stairs and peering closely through the bars of the fence. The speculative tone of the informational sign and his legacy as “amiable” make his death seem especially sad and mysterious. Compounding this strangeness is the 1797 date of the monument; it predates other statues throughout the city that are similar in appearance—including Grant’s Tomb—by a *century*.⁵⁸ While Grant’s Tomb seems old at 115 years, the Amiable Child Monument at 215 years demands a significant reset of one’s measure of time.

⁵⁷ Lev Kalman, February 8, 2010.

⁵⁸ Many of New York City’s Neoclassical monuments and sculptures were built to “beautify” the landscape; this era of public art is referred to as the City Beautiful Movement (roughly 1893-1908). For this movement’s affect on the design of New York City parks and memorials, please see Roy Rosenweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 9, 436.

An individual grave site is rare in Manhattan and St. Claire is perhaps the only one.⁵⁹ The question of how he died was a popular subject for musing, and the favorite story among my friends was that St. Claire died during a game of hoop and stick, the boy running blissfully across the farmland towards the cliffs above the river until he reached the edge and fell tragically to his death. At the end of one particularly late night in college, my friends and I gathered in front of a large window that overlooked Riverside Drive and looked for Grant's Tomb in the lightening sky. "What do you think they all do up there?" someone asked, referring to Grant, Julia and St. Claire. "Do you think they're friends?" It's hard not to imagine some kind of camaraderie there between those three bodies—St. Claire, Ulysses and Julia—who are the only residents along this isolated stretch of Manhattan.⁶⁰

Steve Laise's connection to Grant's Tomb, while not focusing on the secret overnight interactions of the site's three permanent residents, does share the process of imagining the lives of historic figures. His most personal interaction with the space involved his organization of Civil War reenactment activities at Grant's Tomb about which he exclaimed good-naturedly, "I did it first!—I did it first!"⁶¹ Steve explained how army recruitment scenarios were well-suited to costumed interpretation at Grant's Tomb:

I did a lot of recruiting scenarios because that enabled me to interact directly with one member of the audience while the others always kind of looked around. But I used the actual recruiting documents. First of all, it focused the attention not just on me but on somebody in the audience... And it creates, in this case, not an artificial but a natural basis for an interaction because you're going down this list of requirements or

⁵⁹ "Amiable Child Monument," Riverside Park Fund, accessed March 29, 2011, <http://www.riversideparkfund.org/visit/amiable-child-monument>.

⁶⁰ Kalman, February 8, 2010.

⁶¹ Laise, November 2, 2009.

things that you need to determine about the recruit before he could be enlisted.⁶²

Steve emphasizes that this sort of scenario is based on real recruiting documents and not simply an episode of pretending. Historical interpretation is an opportunity for visitors at historic sites to experience the combination of artifacts and historical information in a place where their presence is appropriate. And Steve's availability to respond to the audience while wearing a historically accurate costume is the basis for an important opportunity for personal connection and understanding.

The audience can see a real person with the appearance of an historical figure... You interact. I mean, I'm not just like a statue. I'm, you know, talking to people. They can ask questions.⁶³

By serving as a link that connects a narrative of Civil War history to historic artifacts and procedures, and locates these elements at a site, Steve enlivens the elements, the visitors and the site itself with a physical energy and bodily presence. Moreover, he works to foster an individual, first-person experience with historical information, teaching participants *how* to interpret history and create meaning around events in the past. Participants can take part in this activity and imagine moving through the Army ranks and even attaining a monument in *their* name.⁶⁴

The ways my narrators have described the landscape of Grant's Tomb illustrate how the same physical environment can be perceived and read quite differently based on personal knowledge, interests and use of the site. Steve founded his interaction with

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ While such interpretive programs certainly do not aim to exclude women, they do emphasize the male experience and perhaps perpetuate the narrative of heroism achieved through war and battle. However, a recent program (March 15, 2011) at the General Grant National Memorial in celebration of Women's History Month focused on the life of Julia Grant, which allowed male and female visitors to imagine the Civil War experience specifically from a woman's perspective.

Grant's Tomb on the basis that it was a resource for helping visitors experience an activity—in this case, enlisting in the Union Army—from a distant era. In this way, Grant's Tomb was not a direct communicational resource but was the setting for an interpreted reenactment of a historical event, its landscape serving as an appropriate backdrop for an interactive lesson in Civil War history. Lev's perception of Grant's Tomb was that it continues to evoke essentially the same somber and reverent mood that the original designers aimed to induce despite drastic changes to the look of the area around the tomb that have occurred there over time. While its effectiveness at communicating this message from the past is unwavering, this speculative quietude that was built into the landscape by the site's nineteenth century designers becomes the basis for imagining lived experiences beyond even the topics of Grant and the Civil War. Kevin, drawn to the "smallest cemetery in New York City" despite its location adjacent to the largest mausoleum in North America reveals that the power of a site to illustrate the past does necessarily not depend on its size.⁶⁵ Grant's Tomb, at the time of Kevin's visits during the 1980s was tarnished, marred and thereby made ineffective at communicating to Kevin a message from the distant past. The Amiable Child Monument provided more direct access to distant historical memory and represented an opportunity—on a small, feasible scale—to clear away the signs of the present to reveal a vision of the monument's past.

⁶⁵ "Cemeteries: Who's Buried at Grant's Tomb?" Forgotten NY, accessed March 29, 2011, <http://www.forgotten-ny.com/CEMETERIES/grant/grant.html>.

Visible and Invisible Histories *Issues of Restoration*

When I first started to research Grant's Tomb, I sought to familiarize myself with the site's history; to get underneath its symbolic presentation of order, peace, and grandeur and see it as a built environment that would reveal parts of its social history to visitors. For example, one could see the influence of the nineteenth century City Beautiful Movement in its Neoclassical design; the touch of the 1930s Works Progress Administration in the trees that line its plaza; and the effect of celebrating multiculturalism in the 1970s through the presence of its mosaic benches. How did all of these visible indicators create over a century of historical perspectives and reveal what Grant meant to the generations of people who visited his and Julia's memorial during the 125 years after his death?

One complication of investigating the site's history in this way was that the visible evidence I sought in the landscape of Grant's Tomb had been obscured by a physical restoration project that happened there in the 1990s. The National Park Service had been unable to protect the site from vandalism and deterioration through much of the 1970s, '80s and early '90s, and the site became both physically and symbolically tarnished.⁶⁶ This eventually led the National Park Service to fund the restoration project, which was completed in 1997 exactly 100 years after the tomb's dedication. Restorations, like the design of memorials themselves, raise questions about which era a site should represent, what evidence of age should be preserved or erased, and what sorts of updates

⁶⁶ "Grant's Tomb: History," Grant Monument Association, accessed May 13, 2010, <http://www.grantstomb.org/ind-gma.html>. See Appendix-7 for images of the desecration of Grant's Tomb.

or improvements should be implemented.⁶⁷ But a consequence of such projects is the potential to complicate a visitor's ability to access historical memory and to formulate personal meaning at a commemorative site.

The urban planner, Kevin Lynch, explores the impact that preservation and restoration can have on one's ability to perceive the urban environment:

If anything is preserved, it tends to be what is the most expensive or most imposing or most symbolic of some classic period...[These preserved places] represent the continuum of time in a spasmodic way and give a distorted view of the past since they are composed of the buildings of prosperous classes in prosperous times.⁶⁸

This, indeed, describes the effect of the restoration at Grant's Tomb. The exterior of the structure was restored to John Duncan's original vision, incorporating also the additions of the 1930s that include interior paintings depicting Grant's achievements as well as additional statuary of his fellow Union generals.⁶⁹ Though the project occurred in the 1990s, nearly forty years after the National Park Service acquired the memorial from the original Grant Monument Association in 1959, the restoration seemed to restart the clock on the era of federal management, erasing all signs of age, neglect and disinterest. The memorial looked back to its distant origin and forward into a timeless eternity—an almost ahistorical historic site.⁷⁰ The final effect of this restoration was a pristine monument: a gleaming granite island along the west side of Manhattan that was also a symbolic landscape immune to the passage of time. Steve Laise summarized carefully

⁶⁷ In my research, I found very few sources that dealt with the issues presented by restorations. The most helpful (though rather outdated) sources were Kevin Lynch's *What Time Is This Place?* and John Brinkerhoff Jackson's Letter to the Editor, "'Sterile' Restorations Cannot Replace a Sense of the Stream of Time" in *Landscape Architecture* 66:5 (1976): 194.

⁶⁸ Kevin Lynch, *What Time is This Place?*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972), 31.

⁶⁹ For a more details about the restoration project completed at Grant's Tomb in 1997, please see Eric Reinert, *Grant's Tomb*, (New York: Eastern National Park and Monument Association, 1997), 12.

⁷⁰ See note 13, page 9.

that “it all kind of made it a neat package [for] the Tomb's hundredth birthday. And it came out looking rather nice.”⁷¹ By some measures, this was the intended effect: the restoration mended both physical and symbolic damages suffered during the tomb’s 100-year existence caused an accumulation of trash around the site, the defacement of the tomb’s exterior and the deterioration of the structure overall. Even today, and over the decade that I have been familiar with the site, the tomb seems eerily to *be* as it always *was*, a representation of the nation’s unwavering valorization of Grant and his unquestioned achievements towards unification, peace and equality.

Yet the era of neglect that transpired at Grant’s Tomb in the 1980s and ‘90s represents an important chapter of the site’s history that indicates that this impression of a perpetually pristine monument is inaccurate. That the tomb and the surrounding area were left without the financial support and oversight by the Grant Monument Association or the new owners, the National Parks Service, reveals a dramatic change in the public memory of Grant.⁷² In the same way that the tomb’s original design reflected Grant’s importance to his nineteenth century peers and prodigies, the tomb’s neglect a century later communicates a significantly different story about how Grant was remembered. From the time the restoration was completed in 1997, the landscape of Grant’s Tomb has been incapable of transmitting the story of this contentious era. Access to historical memory is, in the words of Lynch, “spasmodic,” and personal meaning is created onsite as much as from what is absent as from what is there. Kenneth Foote describes historical

⁷¹ Laise, November 2, 2009.

⁷² Likewise, the outcry to repair the tomb in the ‘90s reveals another change in public attitude. The need for repairs gained the support of the public through the prolonged diligence of a Columbia University undergraduate, Frank Scatturo, whose demands for a cleanup and restoration led the National Park Service to initiate and complete the project. Through this project the Grant Monument Association, which disbanded in 1959, reunified and is still active today. Frank Scatturo is currently running for Congress; I have not yet interviewed him for this reason.

sites that remain unmarked or events that are invisible on the landscape, and emphasizes that such invisibility is related to “issues of unresolved meaning and conflicts over memory.”⁷³ It is for this reason he argues that searching the landscape for meaning “relies as much on what is *invisible* as on what is visible.”⁷⁴

When I asked Lev Kalman, who moved to Morningside Heights in 2000 only 3 years after the project had been completed, about the restoration, he expressed surprise. Although Lev recognized that Grant’s Tomb fit into a particular network of buildings, or “walking landmarks,” that he passed on walks from 116th Street to 125th Street, knowledge of the restoration disturbed his sense of the role of Grant’s Tomb in the neighborhood as a permanently pristine representation of respect for Grant.

I can imagine what it would have been like before the restoration pretty well. And I guess it would have been used more...not necessarily for the enrichment of the spirit but... I just remember that once you got up there around 125th Street there was so much seedy activity, so I can totally picture Grant's Tomb being incorporated into that lifestyle. *And it wasn't. At all.* When we were [going to] school, no one would say, "Hey, let's go hang out at the tomb!" Or "...sneak into the tomb!" or any of that. That never happened in the way that it *did* happen for Riverside Park, and to a smaller extent to Morningside Park. And so that's definitely one effect of [the restoration]. It did seem pristine. It did seem off limits. There did not feel like there was an erased history. I would have assumed that there had sort of always been an endowment that had been cleaning the marble at Grant's Tomb while the rest of the area sort of fell apart.⁷⁵

Learning that Grant’s Tomb *had* been a regular member of the neighborhood and bore typical signs of the “seedy” activities that occurred at or around it was shocking and akin

⁷³ Foote, *Shadowed Ground*, 293.

⁷⁴ *Ibid* (emphasis added).

⁷⁵ Lev Kalman, February 8, 2010.

to learning that a seemingly uptight neighbor had an unexpectedly gritty or free-spirited past.⁷⁶

In lieu of knowledge of the tomb's actual history—most notably the openness of the original plaza and the accumulation of graffiti during the 1970's, '80s and early '90s—Lev generated a story of the site's history that supported his interpretation that Grant's Tomb had always maintained that “off limits” feeling. And while the site seemed more like a place to simply walk by or to enter and revere with silence, Lev suggests that this is not because of its national importance—apparent at monuments elsewhere by ample security and the comings and goings of many visitors—but conversely because its emptiness and isolation seemed to create a space where the spirit of Grant (and *not* teenagers or college students) could roam. As a result of this impression—that Grant's Tomb was somehow off limits and for Grant only—Lev thought of the site as “Grant's house.” He explains:

I don't feel when I'm at Rockefeller Center that the ghost of John D. Rockefeller is hovering over me in the way that I really *do* feel like Grant owns that little part of Morningside Heights. So that's a combination of architecture and site, and I think that those two things—they just fit so correctly with what I imagine Grant's personality would be that that's my answer. It *does* seem to me like the monument in New York that's most clearly tied to a real personality and a mood that doesn't change in the way that [other places in New York] seem to be malleable to whatever else is around.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ In a later conversation with Lev, he explained that learning that Grant's Tomb had once been a graffiti-covered hang-out spot for teenagers was “like learning that George Washington grew hemp.” Lev Kalman, personal conversation with author, March 31, 2011.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* I agree with Lev on his point that Rockefeller Center is not evocative of John D. Rockefeller. As another point of comparison, the Federal Hall National Memorial—another spacious Neoclassical memorial in Manhattan—does not particularly evoke George Washington, whom it aims to memorialize. It is instead, as Lev describes, affected by its neighboring buildings on Wall Street and has a present-day function as a National Parks Service administration building that trumps its status as a memorial to Washington, a relic of 18th century Manhattan, or a museum devoted to the history of the United States Congress.

Rather than feeling disoriented by the site's selective representation of its own history, Lev is able to skip over the dissonance that could have been caused by the gaps in the site's past to imagine cinematically a living Grant, sweeping up between the large Doric columns of his own tomb as though it were a New York City stoop. After all, as Lev speculates, how else could the eternally pristine tomb have been so well-maintained if it were not for a secret organization funded in perpetuity by Grant's "hidden treasure" or even by the ghost of Grant himself?⁷⁸

By contrast, Kevin McGeary knew of the site's deteriorated condition in the 1980s and commended the National Park Service for their management of the restoration project, which minimized the amount of historical interpretation onsite and represented directly the intent of the original designers.

I think usually the people who build these things in the first place get it right the first time around. Whatever was there from the get-go... whatever was appropriate at the time that they built the tomb... I mean, there are times when they do things that add to it, improve it, I guess. But always I think it was in the context of what the site should be in the first place. And we should be trying to maintain these things instead of trying to improve on them or change them in some other fashion.⁷⁹

For this reason, Kevin also takes particular issue with what is perhaps the most overtly anachronistic element of the site: the mosaic benches that line three sides of the tomb that were part of a community project completed by CITYArts in 1974.⁸⁰ The benches aimed to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Grant's creation of the Yellowstone National Park

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ McGeary, February 19, 2010.

⁸⁰ Amy Appleton, CITYArts Program Coordinator, email message to author, March 3, 2011. The benches are the single largest public art project in the country and were designed by New York artist Pedro Silva. Restoration of the benches was completed in 1980, 1994 and again in 2008.

during his time as president and to cultivate a social space for community use.⁸¹ The freeform undulating benches surround the tomb on three sides and, from afar, look like a fallen multicolored scarf. Close up, they are quite beautifully decorated with images significant to Grant's life including animals and nature scenes that represent his support of the National Parks. For Kevin, these benches hinder his ability to see and experience what the original site designers intended; therefore, they do not belong onsite. Grant's Tomb is about the moment of its construction, the era of the past that is most distant; in order to access that knowledge a visitor must *see* it how it *was*. To encounter two times at once—the nineteenth century tomb and the 1970s mosaics for example, let alone graffiti or signs of deterioration—prevents real engagement with either.



Figure 4 - A depiction of Ulysses S. Grant on the mosaic benches that surround his tomb. *Photograph author's own.*

Kevin cites Fort Totten Park, owned by the New York City Parks Department,

⁸¹ Yellowstone National Park was the first “national park” and was established by Congress and signed into law by Grant on March 1, 1872 during his first presidential term.

and the National Park Service’s Gateway National Recreation Area as examples of sites that foster a connection to history without the clutter of the present that are able to reproduce that experience of connection again and again.

I think people tend to do the things that they enjoy over and over again. It's not like I have to see something fresh each time. There may be a few years in between whatever I've seen or done, so I think it's more just, I think, reconnecting... You had an enjoyable time in the past and hopefully you'll either have another one or a different experience. I'm interested in history and a lot of times there's other things tied into it, whether it's nature or it's tied up to something else that I've read about; I didn't realize there was a connection between the two. So now you go and decide to explore further what this connection was.⁸²

While sites may have interpretive programs that link historic and present uses, or historic structures with nature education, such combinations add to the experience of visiting the site by remaining distinct complements that do not ask visitors to reinterpret historic structures or events.

Yet, as Steve Laise explained, the original, historic purpose of sites may not always be so easily celebrated. He identified as a major flaw in the tomb’s original design its aim to communicate a reality of reconciliation that had not yet, by the end of the nineteenth century, been fully realized. Through its symmetrical and orderly Neoclassical style, the unification communicated by the funeral ceremonies, and the inscription on the tomb’s pediment—“Let Us Have Peace”—the designers rushed to set a certain memory in stone: the difficult transition from slavery to freedom was complete and should be celebrated. Steve explains:

That spirit of everything is okay between the South and the North is one of the things that Grant's Tomb is about. But the cost of that view was, “Let's just forget about the inconvenience of disenfranchising black voters. Let's put in a poll tax, it's okay. Literacy requirements, no problem. Whatever it

⁸² McGeary, February 12, 2010.

is that will prevent African-Americans from having political power is okay because we're really interested in getting along with the Southern politicians.” And it's really, in my view, it is nothing short of a national tragedy that we were so eager to reconcile—that we thought that was so cool to all be friends again—that we just forgot about the people that were going to suffer as a result.⁸³

The restoration, for Steve, is therefore a sad reminder of that historical cover-up; it reasserts a false harmony between the North and South and simplifies the historic and ongoing struggle of formerly enslaved people to gain their freedom and fight for civil rights. The site could, but does not, according to Steve, take responsibility for tackling such a complicated and truthful story.

Steve suggests that the difficulty of representing the past in the present could be brought into discussion through an exhibit in which visitors learn the history of groups whose stories may be excluded from, though inextricably linked to, the story of Grant and his tomb.

Just to pick one facet of the story, you can then go on and look at the reflections on the African American experience during the reconciliation and how we didn't like to think about that so much any more. And the Southern Renaissance, in literature, [is] an expression of that. And then how during the Civil Rights era and the Civil War Centennial there was a reemergence of "Let's *do* think about the African American experience again for a change and look at it in the contemporary context. Let's make sure that voting rights as promised in the Fifteenth Amendment are, in fact, available to everybody. Let's make sure that people can be educated equally so as to participate in the public process.” That's just one suggestion.⁸⁴

Steve is concerned with creating distinct points of perspective that allow visitors to move through time and American history in an orderly way; to, at each point along the historical trail, look back and see not always the same timeless and eternal image but the

⁸³ Laise, November 2, 2009.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

way that image changes. The way visitors think about Grant's Tomb changes, Steve explains, and to fail to acknowledge this onsite fails to give visitors the ability to recognize that their own perspective is one among many.⁸⁵ That perspective, in conversation with other perspectives of the past, "spurs debate" and "reshapes place over and over again."⁸⁶

Grant's Tomb is alternately a domestic space occupied by the spirit of Grant, a missed opportunity for teaching the lessons of social change from the Civil War to Civil Rights, and a near-perfect vision of nineteenth century architecture hindered by the evidence of more recent times. Narrators described two complicated movements that occurred at the site: how meaning from the distant past traveled, or failed to travel, to the *present*; and how visitors in the present traveled, or failed to travel, to the *past*. Narrators oriented themselves to the site in different ways, alternately anchored to one era—one which was either visible or not visible onsite—or freely moving between them, utilizing available pieces of the past to construct a sensible historical narrative, and endeavoring to fit Grant's Tomb into what they knew about New York City history, the Civil War, or nineteenth century monument-building. Where the site failed to provide information on the tomb's historical context, the visitors I interviewed drew from their own knowledge and experience to more clearly make sense of the appearance of those transmissions from the past.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Foote, *Shadowed Ground*, 6.

Conclusion

The landscape of Grant's Tomb was constructed to represent the sentiment of a generation who had lived through the Civil War, and who had witnessed Ulysses S. Grant as a General, President and as an enigmatic figure ailing in old age. Its design remembered Grant as a valiant hero but condensed individual memories of violence during the Civil War and its aftermath into a simplified story of reconciliation. One hundred years later, a physical restoration and repair project at the site of Grant's Tomb had a similar effect: the memories of an era when the tomb was vandalized and became decrepit were literally and figuratively erased, which enabled the site to resume a simplified story of reconciliation wherein only select parts of its past were represented. The experience of visiting Grant's Tomb—*the feeling it evokes*—is more than simply the effect of a well-designed and successfully-restored commemorative landscape; generations of visitors to Grant's Tomb have brought their complex experiences and memories to the site, forcing its meaning to change. That process of remembering past figures and events is ongoing, uneasy and perhaps at odds with the goals of a restoration project when, as I have, one looks to the landscape as a communicational resource.

The way that people interact with—and simply *see*—a physical landscape is critical to the way that they form personal meaning at the site and to whether monuments such as Grant's Tomb can be meaningful and relevant to individuals over 200 years after they were first built. When the landscape changes, the meaning conveyed by that landscape changes, and thus the restoration at Grant's Tomb created a new narrative of the site's history. The years of graffiti and structural damage at the site reflected the way in which Grant's meaningfulness to the nation's identity had faltered—and the absence of

this history onsite silences an era in which issues of disparity, crime and racism came to a head at the very site that prematurely celebrated peace and equality at the end of the Civil War. While I would not argue that vandalism should be preserved simply because it is *an* expression, this vandalism represents a prolonged era of civil unrest that challenged the dominant story that was told through the original architecture and landscape design at Grant's Tomb. As history and memory are interpreted and reinterpreted, once-visible elements can be made *invisible*. How can we know what a commemorative landscape no longer communicates about its past or about the history of the larger culture it aims to represent? While I followed a visceral indication—the haunting feeling—that hinted at a contentious past, not every visitor to Grant's Tomb will have such an outlet for his or her curiosity over history and meaning and the manifestations of those elements in the landscape.

While I had originally intended to use oral history as a way to document Grant's Tomb during its first few decades as a National Park Service site, and to give historical attention to an era I felt had been neglected, I found that the people I interviewed were eager to use the subject of Grant's Tomb in a different, and much more lively, way than I had anticipated. The invisibility of vandalism at the site served as an opening to describe and imagine other distant or seemingly inaccessible eras; it had been a joke among my colleagues that I was messing around in the wrong century—that in order to pursue my research, I would need to conduct the very first nineteenth century oral history séance. Fortunately, my narrators brought the distant past to me in our interviews as they continued the task of reworking the past to create new meanings in the present and helped me better understand how reading meaning from the landscape can leave out many

details of a site's physical and symbolic history. Grant's Tomb became a way to talk about a much larger span of time and to move beyond personal memories and lived experience to explore the less tangible process of meaning-making.

Oral history provided the opportunity to explore this connection between meaning, memories and personal experience. Experience is always comprehended through a individually-constructed context and the narratives in interviews are products of that process. Oral historian Alessandro Portelli explains this relationship:

Oral history...tells us less more about *events* than about their *meaning*...Memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings. These changes reveal the narrators' effort to make sense of the past and to give a form to their lives, and set the interview and the narrative in *their* historical context.⁸⁷

Talking about Grant's Tomb allowed my narrators to fit their own contextualized experience into parts of the past that were visible at the site, and to speculate about those eras of the past that were never visible or were actively made invisible over time. Creating meaning at Grant's Tomb and becoming part of that process of reworking and reinterpreting history can be as easy as conjuring what is missing or as difficult as ignoring what is plainly there.

Kevin McGeary strove to see Grant's Tomb as a direct expression of the generation of people who mourned his death because they knew Grant either as a person whose health they read about in the daily newspapers, as the president of their country, or as the leader of the Union Army in the Civil War. It was that generation who was responsible for the shape, size and overall ambiance of Grant's Tomb, and Kevin looked to the National Park Service to make that generation's message clear through their

⁸⁷ Portelli, *Luigi Trastulli*, 50, 52.

management of the site. The presence of the mosaic benches and the prevalence of graffiti on the tomb itself during the time Kevin worked nearby violated the site's intended purpose; when he looked at Grant's Tomb, he was not interested in seeing the 1970s or the 1980s. More exciting was the Amiable Child Monument from 1797, which Kevin helped maintain each year as a member of Ladder 40 in Harlem. The small monument, older than the neighboring buildings by over a hundred years, offered little information besides its original inscription: "Erected to the memory of an Amiable Child, St. Claire Pollock. Died 15 July 1797, the fifth year of his life." This grave was uncomplicated and evocative; a window to that sad and distant date when St. Claire died.

The original designers of Grant's Tomb may have attempted to build a monument that was similarly uncomplicated. Their design simplified the ramifications of the Civil War and glossed over the vast distance between the end of slavery and the beginning of civil rights. What was important at the time was to present a singular story of support for Grant and to create the appearance that this story was shared, even by people who were once bitter enemies. But, as Steve Laise noted, many other stories were left out of this simplified summary, and it is those stories that are so salient to him at Grant's Tomb. In his opinion, the long battle of former slaves towards equal rights is a story that belongs at Grant's Tomb in order to rectify the historic mistreatment and exclusion of African-Americans from the story of reconciliation. The presentation of this story at Grant's Tomb would also function symbolically as a reminder that there are multiple perspectives of the past—and of the present and future.

In Lev's experience, Grant's Tomb was more like a neighbor's house than a historical site, and was one of a series of buildings that was connected along an often-

traveled pathway. When the tomb itself was his destination, it was not necessarily a place for learning specific personal information about Grant or about his political and military career, but rather a place to enliven information that was gained elsewhere—through history classes, books and movies, or by observing other monuments in New York City. It is a place which, for Lev, Steve and Kevin, spurred imaginative engagement with historical information.

When the generation who lived through the Civil War formed their sentiments into a tremendous granite monument in Riverside Park, they perhaps never imagined that it would someday be the site of Civil War reenactments, mosaic benches that are New York City's largest public art project, or a "walking landmark" amidst its architecturally impressive neighbors. And without the oral history interviews discussed herein, future generations would have no record that Grant's Tomb prompted fantasies that Ulysses still lived—not just in memory but perhaps also in ghostly form, or that a community art project meant to complement and update the site jeopardized Grant's Tomb's style as a revered Neoclassical monument, or that the monument was a sad reminder of racial prejudices and unfair social policies that persisted after the Civil War and continue into the present.⁸⁸ These are opinions about a place that reflect historical events as well as the personal knowledge and experience of each visitor. How else can we know the process of making meaning at Grant's Tomb or other commemorative landscapes unless we ask?

While I used written and visual sources to trace the development of changes at Grant's Tomb, and inferred from various projects and funding sources *who* wanted to use

⁸⁸ Columbia University's current Manhattanville expansion project is one example of the persistence of debate over racial prejudices and issues of economic disparity in the neighborhood of Grant's Tomb.

the site for *what* purpose and *when*, I could not help but yearn for stories of the direct experiences of visitors, and a record of that changing perspective. And although I never found these stories, I am no less compelled to imagine them each time I revisit Grant's Tomb. David Lowenthal suggests this is so because "we need other people's memories both to confirm our own and to give them endurance."⁸⁹ As we attempt to connect our experiences with others', we work our narrative into the narrative of history and locate that experience at sites such as Grant's Tomb. Even if the information, in written or audible form, is not available at the site, the haunting feeling—the yearning to feel connected to history—remains.

More than simply learning about a figure of American history from a site dedicated to his memory, I became involved with Grant's Tomb, through both individual and shared experiences, in a way that is not explicitly intended at official sites of national commemoration. During the two years that I lived on Riverside Drive and 115th Street, I greeted Grant's mysteriousness like any attentive neighbor would—with gossip. My friends and I told each other what we knew about him, speculated on his intentions and motivations, turned what we learned in history classes about the Civil War, Reconstruction and the Gilded Age into myths about the reclusive Old Man Grant who lived in his palatial house up on the hill. And while this could be because of an admittedly unorthodox way of engaging with history, it also spoke to the power of that site to transcend the more static role of a monument.⁹⁰ I did not *know* Grant, and therefore I could not *remember* him in the way the generation who constructed the monument

⁸⁹ Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 196.

⁹⁰ See Appendix-8 for an example of an unorthodox engagement with history inspired by the landscape of Grant's Tomb.

could. But the fact that memory is so actively preserved and protected there was somehow tangible. Through that gulf of time and experience, Grant's Tomb and the area that surrounds it in Riverside Park formed an environment wherein stories and experiences could serve as two-way bridges that connected the past to the present. Such bridges bring the place to life.

* * *

Appendix

1 – Narrators

Steve Laise is Chief of Cultural Resources for the National Parks of New York Harbor, Manhattan Sites. His interest in history began with trips to historic sites with his grandfather, who was able to tell the history of the Civil War in such a way that those distant battles seemed to “come to life.” Steve was not directly involved with organizing the restoration project, but I was advised to contact him by Frank Scatturo, a Columbia University alumnus who was influential in garnering public support for the restoration project in the 1990s.

Kevin McGeary is Chief of Maintenance at Bishop Loughlin High School in Brooklyn, NY. He also oversees the maintenance needs of the Brooklyn Flea, which holds its weekly market in the Bishop Loughlin schoolyard. Kevin was a firefighter in the New York City Fire Department from 1981-2002 and was assigned to Ladder 40 in Harlem in the 1980s. He is an avid collector of antiques and has become the “family archivist,” collecting and compiling information about his ancestors.

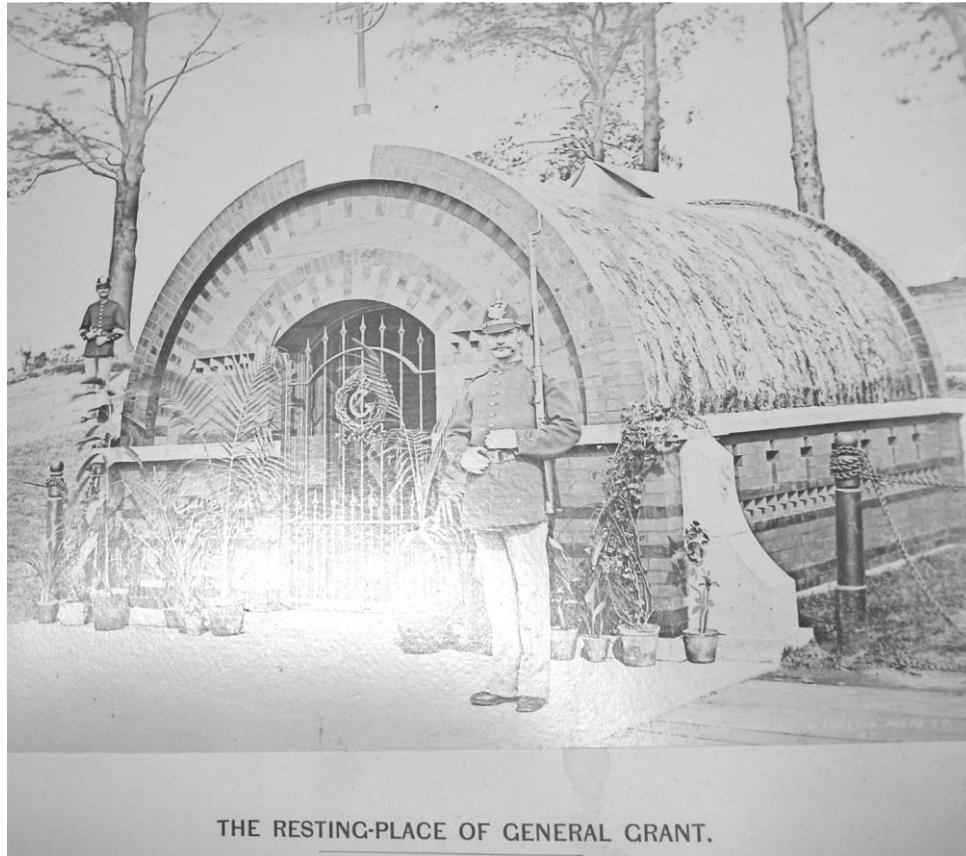
Lev Kalman is a filmmaker who lives in Brooklyn, NY. His films are fictional but deal light-heartedly with historical and social themes. He attended Columbia University as an undergraduate, where I met him in 2000. We both lived in Woodbridge Hall a few blocks from Grant’s Tomb from 2003-4 and have been close friends and creative colleagues ever since.

2 – General Grant National Memorial (Grant’s Tomb)



Grant’s 188th Birthday Celebration on April 27, 2010. *Photograph Author’s own.*

3 – The temporary tomb of General Grant was built in time for his funeral on August 6, 1885 and housed his body while the Grant Monument Association raised funding and organized a design competition for the official tomb; the temporary tomb was in use until 1897.



Grant's temporary tomb. From "The Seven Mile Funeral Cortège of General Grant in New York, August 8, 1885." *The original in this digital image is housed in Avery Classics, Avery Library, Columbia University. This copy is to be used for research and educational purposes only. Not for publication or further copying.*

4 – The following essay, "A Year After Death," appears in the United States Instantaneous Photographic Company's publication *The Seven Mile Funeral Cortège of General Grant in New York, August 8, 1885*. It illustrates the seemingly eternal fervor for Grant and the focus on memory and remembering that were a part of his original funeral ceremonies.

We once heard a celebrated orator say, "A dead man's great deeds are soon forgotten, that a nation is unmindful of the services rendered her by a faithful soldier; and his loved ones permitted to want, when the nation rolls in wealth and its vaults are overflowing." What mean[s] this packed throng of people, fine equipages, thunder of cannons, those wistful faces bent eagerly forward to hear every word of the orator, that death-like stillness in the hundreds of human beings, who have come from the remotest parts of the New World, eager to catch every syllable that falls

from the orator's lips? What's going on here? To whom are these great masses paying their respect? It cannot be the memory of a dead one, for are we not told that republics and people are forgetful and ungrateful to the memory of the dead? Let's get nearer this multitude and see what it means. We catch an orator's thrilling words as the wind shifts towards where we stand, and he says in words of solid gold, "His deeds will live as long as the world lasts, in the hearts of every American." Who does this orator mean? We go still nearer, but the multitude is so dense that we are yet far away from the speaker, but we catch his words this time more distinctly, as he says in stentorian voice, "We come to do reverence and pay homage to the memory of Gen. U.S. Grant, who died one year ago. A man without an equal in this or any other land." We were a little surprised; here was another uprising of people to General Grant's memory, another ovation to his great worth, equal to the ceremonies on the entombment day a whole year ago, and *the fire in the hearts of the people was as bright for him to-day as it was on the day they put him under the ground one year ago, at this very spot.* The roar of the guns fired by the Battery Artillery of New York drowned our thoughts, and as the smoke rolled up in dense clouds heavenward, we remembered our great Statesman's remarks and wished he had lived at this time and seen the tremendous homage paid this day to a man who had died a year ago; and it seemed to us as if all the world was present in honor of his memory, and his tomb was literally obliterated with flowers from every State and from every class of people, and General Grant knows that (although he has left us) he still has a place in our hearts on this earth.

- United States Instantaneous Photographic Company. *The Seven Mile Funeral Cortège of General Grant in New York, August 8, 1885.* Boston, 1886 (emphasis added).

5 – The following postcard images show the contrast between the original placement of Grant’s Tomb in an isolated location versus its eventual position next to Riverside Church.



The original open landscape of Grant’s Tomb. *Postcard copyright 1910 Geo. P. Hall & Son.*



Grant’s Tomb in 1930 after the construction of Riverside Church, the George Washington Bridge and tree-planting along the plaza. *Postcard copyright Alfred Mainzer.*

6 – “...that long view down to the monument.” – Kevin McGeary



A view of Grant's Tomb from the south end of the plaza after walking through the grassy patch.
Photograph author's own.

7 – The only documentation of the defacement of Grant’s Tomb is on the website of the Grant Monument Association, grantstomb.org.



Graffiti and vandalism at Grant’s Tomb. *Images from Grant Monument Association.*

8 – Unorthodox Engagement with History



The author and her Halloween of costume of 2009: The Amiable Child with hoop and stick. *Photograph author’s own.*

Works Consulted

- Arnold, Matthew. *General Grant*. 2nd Ed. John Y. Simon, ed. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1995.
- Basso, Keith H. and Steven Feld, eds. *Senses of Place*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996.
- Benson, Susan Porter, Steven Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig. *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.
- Bernstein, Emily M. "An Uncivil War Over the Keeping of Grant's Tomb." *New York Times*. December 19, 1993.
- Blight, David. *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Center for Land Use Interpretation. *Upriver: Manmade Sites of Interest on the Hudson from Battery to Troy*. New York: Blast Books, 2008.
- Charlton, Thomas L., Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless, eds. *Handbook of Oral History*. New York: AltaMira Press, 2006.
- Columbia University in the City of New York. "Columbia University: A Brief History." Accessed April 6, 2011. <http://www.columbia.edu/content/history.html>.
- Cultural Landscape Foundation. "Commemorative Landscape." Accessed March 30, 2010. <http://tclf.org/content/commemorative-landscape>.
- Faust, Drew Gilpin. *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*. New York: Vintage Civil War Library, 2008.
- Foote, Kenneth E. *Shadowed Ground: American's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*, revised edition. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003.
- Forgotten NY. "Cemeteries: Who's Buried at Grant's Tomb?" Accessed March 29, 2011. <http://www.forgotten-ny.com/CEMETERIES/grant/grant.html>.
- Grant Monument Association. "Grant's Tomb." Accessed most recently April 6, 2011. <http://www.grantstomb.org>.
- Hamilton, Paula and Linda Shopes. *Oral History and Public Memories*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008.
- Huyssen, Andreas. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Jackson, John Brinkerhoff. *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Jackson, John Brinkerhoff. *Necessity for Ruins, And Other Topics*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980.
- Jackson, John Brinkerhoff. *Landscape Architecture*, 66 No. 5 (1976): 194.
- Laise, Steve. Oral History Interview. Interviewed by Sarah Dziedzic. Unpublished transcript. November, 9, 2009.
- Linenthal, Edward. "Epilogue" in *Culture and Belonging in Divided Societies: Contestation and Symbolic Landscapes*. Marc Howard Ross, ed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.
- Linenthal, Edward. *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- Lowenthal, David. *The Past Is a Foreign Country*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

- Lynch, Kevin. *What Time Is This Place?* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972.
- Kahn, David. "The Grant Monument." *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 41 No. 3 (1982): 212-231.
- Kalman, Lev. Oral History Interview. Interviewed by Sarah Dziedzic. Unpublished transcript. February 8, 2010.
- Kaseman, Keith. "Moving Beyond: The Design of the Pentagon Memorial." Presentation for the CUSP Speaker Series, Columbia University, March 28, 2011.
- McFeeley, William S. *Grant: A Biography*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981.
- McGeary, Kevin. Oral History Interview. Interviewed by Sarah Dziedzic. Unpublished transcript. February 12, 2010.
- McGeary, Kevin. Oral History Interview. Interviewed by Sarah Dziedzic. Unpublished transcript. February 19, 2010.
- Meinig, D.W., ed. *Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. "Amiable Child Monument." Accessed March 29, 2011. <http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/riversidepark/highlights/6417>.
- Perks, Robert and Alistair Thomson, eds. *Oral History Reader*, 2nd edition. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Portelli, Alessandro. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1991.
- Reinert, Eric. *Grant's Tomb*. New York: Eastern National Park and Monument Association, 1997.
- Riverside Park Fund. "Amiable Child Monument." Accessed March 29, 2011. <http://www.riversideparkfund.org/visit/amiable-child-monument>.
- Rosenweig, Roy and Elizabeth Blackmar. *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Ryden, Kent C. *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993.
- Savage, Kirk. *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.
- United States Instantaneous Photographic Company. *The Seven Mile Funeral Cortège of General Grant in New York, August 8, 1885*. Boston, 1886.
- United States National Park Service. "General Grant National Memorial." Accessed March 19, 2011. <http://www.nps.gov>.
- United States National Park Service. *Manhattan Sites: Long Range Interpretive Plan*. West Chester: Interpretive Solutions, Inc., 2009.
- United States National Park Service. *Analysis of Management Alternatives, Grant National Memorial*. New York: North Atlantic Region, 1980.
- Waugh, Joan. "'Pageantry of Woe': The Funeral of Ulysses S. Grant." *Civil War History*, 51 No. 2, (2005): 151-174.
- Waugh, Joan. *U.S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Steve Laise, Kevin McGeary and Lev Kalman for their willingness to be interviewed for this project, for their engagement with historical themes, and their patience as I worked with their ideas and narratives. Thanks also to the Oral History Master of Arts 2009-10 cohort, whose academic endeavors, thoughtfulness and companionship has been an inspiration throughout this project. Special thanks to Svetlana Kitto, who sometimes knew my thoughts better than I, and whose work is inspiringly honest. Also, for so many excellent ideas on space and place-making, special thanks to Becca Journey. For intellectual and artistic inspiration on the theme of time travel, I would like to thank Catherine Czacki. Likewise, thanks to Abby Walthausen for sharing my interest in 19th century funereal art and, along with Veronica Liu, publicly promoting my interest in Grant's Tomb and the Amiable Child Monument. The guidance and instruction from the OHMA faculty, especially Marie Scatena, Gerry Albarelli and Mary Marshall Clark, presented the challenges, necessity and utility of oral history, and I will be forever indebted for such generosity and commitment. Most of all, endless thanks to Brian Hamilton and Lev Kalman for hosting a party in their dormitory apartment one night in 2004 that ended with a Grant storytelling session that is perhaps the true origin of this oral history project; I will never have a better audience than both of you.