

Myth #109: U.S. Grant Did Not Get into Hot Water in Nevada by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

“General U. S. Grant paid Walley’s a visit after inspecting the famous Comstock Lode,” the David Walley’s Resort website claimed until April 2007. Included was a portrait photo of Grant in military uniform claiming that “while on tour of the west” the famous Union General visited Walley’s Hot Springs (then known as Genoa Hot Springs) just south of Genoa in Carson Valley. Beware of website history. This “George Washington slept here” promotional claim was not true. The promotion apparently dated back to the late 1970s when the resort and spa were resurrected after being closed for some forty years. Grant only visited Nevada once and he didn’t get into hot water at Walley’s.



In instances like these, I sometimes encounter the retort, “how do you know?” and “well, if it wasn’t true, it should have been.” People are inclined to believe misleading stories that make a place famous, especially if a well-known person allegedly visited there, and, of course, it helps to attract interest. However, I characterize the perpetuating of myths as playing tricks on the living and the dead.

In this case, Ulysses Simpson Grant, accompanied by his wife and son on a world tour, visited Nevada in October 1879. Grant had long since left the military as a Union Civil War hero and recently completed two terms as president of the United States (1869-77). His itinerary in Nevada was tightly scripted. Virtually every step he took was covered by the area’s newspapers, readily available for research on microfilm at Nevada historical societies and libraries.

On Sunday afternoon, October 26, the Grant family detrained at Truckee, California. A carriage conveyed the party to Tahoe City where they were met at 2:30 PM by a delegation of prominent Nevadans, including lumber tycoon Duane L. Bliss. They boarded Bliss’ steamship the *Meteor* and crossed Lake Tahoe to Glenbrook. There, according to the Carson City *Morning Appeal*, passage was taken on Bliss’ narrow gauge Lake Tahoe Railroad to Spooner Summit. Renowned stagecoach driver Hank Monk held the reins of Grant’s carriage as it traveled down Clear Creek Canyon to Carson City where a throng of people jubilantly greeted the former president at 7:00 PM.

Grant and his family ate supper and spent the night at Governor John Kinkead’s house, which served as the Governor’s Mansion. At 9:30 AM, Monday, October 27, Grant spoke to some 3,000 well-wishers at the State Capitol, noting that until his arrival in the Silver State he had visited all the states except Nevada and Florida. A reception followed the brief speech. Leaving the capital about noon, a Virginia & Truckee Railroad train transported the Grant family to world-famous Virginia City in about an hour’s time.

Grant spent two days in the Comstock area, making speeches, being photographed, and attending functions at Piper’s Opera House and the Savage Mansion. Early Wednesday morning, October 29, he traveled through Gold Hill and Silver City to visit the Sutro Mansion. Contrary to a historical marker at the Odeon Hall he did not pause to speak in Dayton. He traveled the length of the Sutro Tunnel and returned to Virginia City.

At 2:05 PM, the Grant family boarded a V&T special train bound for Reno, pausing briefly in Carson City, and then again at Steamboat Springs to pick up the Reno reception committee (contrary to the claim of Nevada Historical Marker #198, President Grant made no pronouncement that the hot springs were “nationally acclaimed”).

Following speeches and a reception in Reno lasting an hour and a half, the party boarded a Central Pacific special train bound for Omaha, Nebraska, en route to the Grant home in Galena, Illinois. A five-minute stop in Wadsworth witnessed the town band serenade the former chief executive with “Hail to the Chief” as he shook hands from the rear of the platform.

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At no time, did the Grant family deviate from their tight schedule and travel out of their way to Walley's Hot Springs (originally known as Walley Hot Springs). Genoa's weekly newspaper, the Carson Valley News, noted on Friday, October 24 that Grant was scheduled to arrive in Carson City on Sunday, remaining until Monday morning. There is no mention of a proposed trip to Walley's Hot Springs which would have taken the ex-president through nearby Genoa.

There is an editorial which cites a communication from "an enthusiastic Republican" who questioned the statesmanship of Grant, arguing no person should ever serve more than two terms as president. The editorial subtly endorsed the position that Grant, his administration marred by scandal and corruption, not be nominated by the Republicans in 1880 for the good of the party (and he was not).

The October 31 issue of the *Carson Valley News* noted Hank Monk was Grant's driver to Carson City and curiously included the height and weight of Grant, and the weight of his wife, Julia, and Ulysses Jr. However, if the Civil War hero and former president had visited Walley's Hot Springs, it would have made for banner headline news in the Genoa newspaper.

In the end, using myth as marketing hype is about not letting the facts get in the way of a good story.

Credits: top advertisement from the *Genoa Carson Valley News*, February 27, 1875; bottom advertisement from the *Gardnerville Record-Courier*, July 15, 1905.

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