

William T. Sherman in St. Louis – Remarks at the Sherman Commemoration Day, Calvary Cemetery, March 8, 2026, by Nick Sacco, Historian and Curator, Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site, National Park Service

Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman's partnership on the battlefield played a pivotal role in defeating the Confederacy, keeping a badly torn nation intact after four years of civil war. Off the battlefield, the two men had a close friendship shaped by very similar life experiences. Both men were born in Ohio. Both men attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Both men served in the U.S. Army during the Mexican American War, and both men left the Army in the 1850s to pursue civilian careers. Most notable for our purposes today, both men maintained deep attachments to St. Louis. Both called St. Louis home at various points in their lives. They raised their children, supported their families, and developed deep friendships with residents of this city. Both men aspired to make St. Louis their permanent home, but public duties and personal circumstances pushed them in different directions.

William T. Sherman's connections to St. Louis began in the summer of 1843. After completing a five-month furlough from the U.S. Army, he traveled along the Mississippi River to his duty station in Charleston, South Carolina. It was the first time the young officer had traveled in this region, and he kept an extensive travel diary. Sherman expressed wonderment at the hustle and bustle of St. Louis, taking interest in the sights, sounds, and activity of its riverfront. He noted an art gallery that captured his attention and visited the relatively new St. Louis Cathedral, what we here call the Old Cathedral today.

Sherman returned to St. Louis with Company C of the 3rd Artillery Regiment in September 1850 for deployment at Jefferson Barracks. He initially lived alone, but within four months his wife Ellen and newborn daughter Minnie joined him at a boarding house in the city.

Life was good. Sherman wrote to his father-in-law Thomas Ewing about St. Louis, remarking that “beyond doubt in time it will be one of the greatest places on the Continent.” He tried to get Ewing to move to St. Louis, arguing that it was not worth his time to remain in “that insignificant town of Lancaster,” Ohio.

Sherman remained in St. Louis until 1853, when he decided to resign his commission in the U.S. Army for better career prospects as a civilian. He decided to move his family to San Francisco, but the St. Louis connections remained. James H. Lucas and Henry Turner, two prominent businessmen and personal friends of Sherman’s in St. Louis, owned the Bank of Lucas, Turner, & Co. They looked to establish a branch in San Francisco and hired Sherman to work as the branch manager. Sherman managed the bank competently and responsibly. When a serious financial panic hit San Francisco in 1855, a run of creditors stretched many banks thin, with several forced to shut their doors. Sherman managed to keep his bank open and operating amid the panic while ensuring that all creditors received the funds they called in. The bank closed in 1857, but his responsible management of the bank limited the damage. Sherman then worked several different jobs, eventually becoming Commissioner of the Louisiana State Seminary of Learning & Military Academy (now Louisiana State University). However, events soon brought Sherman back to St. Louis.

The secession crisis that followed President Abraham Lincoln’s election in 1860 sparked open discussion of Southern independence. Staff and cadets alike at the Louisiana State Seminary openly supported secession, which Sherman opposed and considered treasonous. When state troops seized the arsenal at Baton Rouge on January 10, Sherman offered his resignation. He considered offering his services to the U.S. military, but a chance meeting with President Lincoln convinced him that Unionists were not prepared for the fight that the

secessionists were prepared to give. Sherman knew that any conflict would be long and bloody. An opportunity to become President of the Fifth Street Railroad Company brought Sherman back to St. Louis in early 1861. He followed events closely, occasionally visiting the federal arsenal in the city and witnessing the Camp Jackson Affair on May 10, a particularly scary event in which Sherman laid over his son Willie in a ditch as shots fired over their heads. He soon offered his services to the U.S. Army.

Sherman's return to the Army and his service in the Civil War made him internationally famous, but St. Louis remained on his mind. At the end of the war in 1865, business leaders in St. Louis spent \$30,000 on a mansion for the Sherman family at 912 N. Garrison Ave., just a little northeast of what is now the Fox Theater and Powell Symphony Hall. Over the next 11 years the Shermans lived on and off at this residence. Conflicts with Secretary of War William Belknap left Sherman feeling that he had little authority to command U.S. forces. In protest of Belknap's influence over the military and President Grant, General Sherman moved his Army headquarters to St. Louis in 1874. During this time, he wrote his Personal Memoirs at the home on Garrison Avenue, becoming one of the first generals on either side to tell his story about the war. The Shermans also purchased this cemetery plot at Calvary Cemetery, ensuring that their family legacy would be permanently commemorated in St. Louis.

General Sherman lived in New York City following his retirement from the Army in 1884, but he maintained connections to St. Louis. He was a founder of Ransom Post #131 of the Grand Army of the Republic and awarded honorary memberships in the St. Louis Commercial Club and the St. Louis Club. He attended a funeral pageant in the city for General Grant in 1885 and was elected President of the Grant Monument Association of Missouri. Sherman played a significant role in raising \$70,000 to erect a statue to General Grant, the first of its kind

anywhere in the U.S. Sherman preferred that the statue be housed at Forest Park alongside General Frank Blair's statue, but the board voted for 12th and Olive. The Grant statue now stands at St. Louis City Hall.

General Sherman was a complex person, far from perfect but more nuanced than the crude caricature he is sometimes portrayed as. He valued order, discipline, and vigorous enforcement of the law. His tactics could be seen as harsh and unforgiving, but his surrender terms to Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston were so generous that General Grant had to travel to North Carolina to rewrite those terms. He held racial prejudices against African Americans and despised abolitionist opposition to slavery in the United States. However, in later years Sherman defended Black voting rights. He was beloved and respected in the South after the war and was greeted by thousands of admirers during a tour of the region. And even though he displayed a strict military persona in his professional capacity, Sherman exuded a jovial disposition in his private life. He was a passionate supporter of the arts, a regular theater-goer who often attended the same play multiple nights, an avid reader, and a student of history. He loved to entertain and be entertained.

When General Sherman died in 1891 at the age of 71, city leaders prepared for his return to St. Louis and burial at Calvary Cemetery. On February 21, 1891, 12,000 soldiers, veterans, and dignitaries marched past tens of thousands of mourners on a seven-mile march from downtown St. Louis to Calvary, where Sherman's son Thomas, a Catholic priest, led the funeral ceremonies. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* called this event "the greatest funeral pageant ever seen in the West."

General Sherman asked that his epitaph read "Faithful and Honorable." In all facets of his life—as a military officer, citizen, and family man—William T. Sherman lived up to that

standard. As we reflect on General Sherman's life today, let us remember the ways St. Louis shaped his—and a nation's—legacy during the Civil War era. Thank you.