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Ulysses S. Grant

He sat bare headed in the open carriage as it slowly moved up cobblestoned Market Street, responding almost like a robot to the cheering yelling thousands of San Franciscans who were giving him the warmest, wildest welcome San Francisco ever had extended to a visiting dignitary.

He was preoccupied with other thoughts and seemed oblivious to the tumult. It was September 20, 1879.

Twenty five years earlier, on a cold and foggy morning in the spring of 1854, he had passed up that same street, unknown, friendless, and practically in disgrace. He had lost his army commission as a captain, and most of the mustering out pay that he had received when he left Fort Humboldt had gone to settle debts and pay for steamer passage to San Francisco.

There remained enough money for a stage ride to Knight's Ferry, where he had relatives by marriage. His unfamiliar civilian clothes were worn and the soles of his unpolished boots were precariously thin.

There were no cheers for him that day on Market Street, Not even a smile. He was a troubled stranger in a town which could not keep up with its own dizzy pace, and it had no time to waste on a seedy unknown like him.

And so, he left San Francisco, enduring in discomfort the long jolting ride to Knight's Ferry, a Stanislaus County mining camp and trading center founded six year before by

Dr. William Knight, who earlier had given his name to Knight's Landing in Yolo County.

The ferry that Knight operated across the turbulent Stanislaus River had eventually passed to the Dent brothers, John and Lewis, who managed it so profitably that by 1854 they were thinking about building a toll bridge across the river.

When the ex-Army captain, who was married to the Dent's sister, Julia, arrived that spring, the Dent brothers were glad to see him. They liked him, and besides, at West Point he had been described as "excellent in engineering and mathematics."

These proficiencies were put to good use, and he stayed in the little town, which later was the county seat for ten years, long enough to design as fine a covered bridge as there was in the west.

He moved on after that, with funds provided by the Dent brothers, to the Midwest where his wife and destiny awaited him. In eight more years, this man who had been a dejected failure at 34 would gain renown and adulation. Eventually, our nation, grateful for his great service in our most desperate time of need, bestowed upon him its highest honor.

Thus it was on that fall day in 1879, that he rode in glory up Market Street, reflecting in his mind about the fleeting events of the past. And he worried a tiny bit about the immediate future, too.

You see, in a few minutes he would have to deliver a speech to his adoring public, but that in itself was going to be problematic. Because ex-President Ulysses S. Grant, had only a few short hours earlier lost his fine set of false teeth

