

June 28, 1999
American Presidents
C - SPAN

S - American

GREETINGS!

You must have considered including the extensive, 440 foot-long mosaic-tile memorial tile bench situated at the **General Grant National Memorial**, New York City, in your program of July 12.

Although just about as controversial, locally, as the presidency of General Grant himself, the bench was created over 25 years ago (1972-3) and includes references to the life of Grant, including his **four **** star** Generalship, his founding of the National Park Service, and his triumphal World-Wide tour, following his Presidency.

The bench was created as a community art project and has been highly lauded by the **American Institutes of Architects** and other professional agencies. However, in keeping with many crosscurrents in the United States, numerous individuals have been opposed to this project, and periodically agitate for its removal. These groups represent the Civil War Roundtable, certain members of the General's descendants (but not all) and some anti- quarians.

But as **Jerry Nadler**, the Congressman of this District has said, the Civil War was based on controversy, this nation's experiment in Democracy thrives in controversy and debate, so it is fitting that such a discussion exists. It can only serve to bring important attention to the now unfortunately ignored site and to some little-discussed issues of the Civil War, such as the real effects of Reconstruction and the missed opportunities.

I have complete documentation on the building of the bench, and on the two (2) major political attacks designed to remove it, the most recent in 1997. I know the history of its building (having been the architect on the site during construction and helped guide its design) and currently live in New York City.

If you've any questions or need for additional information, documentation, or anecdotes, please do not hesitate to contact me.

[REDACTED] NYC NY 10003 + [REDACTED]

+

Brief History of the Mosaic Benches at the General Grant National Memorial

The Mosaic Tile Benches at the General Grant National Memorial were constructed between 1972 and 1974. They run 400 feet along the sides and the rear of the building, and were created with the help of thousands of members of the local community. The National Park Service, the New York State Council on the Arts, Canada Dry Inc. and the J.M. Kaplan Foundation, sponsored the project to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Grant's signing the legislation that designated Yellowstone as the world's first national park.

The design is the work of Chilean-born American artist Pedro P. Silva, working with approximately 3,000 volunteers from various neighborhood institutions and visitors to the memorial, during three long seasons (May through November). He was assisted by artists Nelson Mercado, Warren Fox, Alan Okada, architect Moishe Shaw and architect Philip Danzig.

The colorful work remains a popular attraction with visitors to the memorial. *The New York Times* architecture critic Paul Goldberger termed the benches "Perhaps Manhattan's finest piece of folk art of our time." *The American Institute of Architects Guide to New York City* called them "Wonderful."

Approximately a third of the many hundreds of spontaneous designs interpret the achievements of General and President Ulysses S. Grant through contemporary eyes. These include "Star and Stripes," a 90-foot long flag incorporating the General's four stars; two benches extolling his role in founding the National Park Service and displaying such images as the N.P.S. shield, "Smoky the Bear;" three portraits of the General and a number of Native American themes. Another bench salutes the literary achievement of Grant, who, in his later years, published a highly regarded memoir of his war experiences. The exterior of the benches are covered with images of animals, recalling Grant's triumphal post-Presidential voyages around the world, and his favorite horse "Cincinatus."

A partial restoration of the bench was conducted in 1980 and again in 1994 by CityArts, Inc., the original producer of the work and a vigorous force in community arts in New York City.

More information may be requested by calling CityArts at (212) 966-0377, Pedro Silva (212) 465-5315, Philip Danzig (212) 674-3721. 70 E. 10 ST., NYC, NY 10003



People from the community working on "The Bench" in 1973.