The History
and Legacy of the

Grand Army of the Republic
in Massachusetts

by Ian Delahanty

The History and Legacy of the Grand Army of the Republic in Massachusetts

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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Secretary of the Commonwealth
State House, Boston, Massachusetts 02133

William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth

Dear Citizens:

In his second inaugural address, President Abraham Lincoln implored citizens of the newly re-united republic, "to bind the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

The American Civil War had exacted a terrible cost in blood and treasure. For the more than a million Union veterans who returned to civilian life, the hard task of re-building – of families, careers, and lives – lay ahead. Thousands sought solace and support in an organization destined to define not only how they perceived themselves as veterans, but how the nation perceived the conflict as a whole. The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), an organization composed of veterans who served in the armed forces of the Union, was to become one of the most influential political organizations in American history, driven by its core principles of fraternity, benevolence, charity, and patriotism.

Here in Massachusetts, the mission and purpose of the GAR was embodied in the activity of local "posts" both large and small. Sourced from records preserved in the GAR Memorial Room at the Massachusetts State House, this booklet provides a valuable overview of the history and legacy of this important and impactful organization.

William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth

Introduction

**Note: Unless otherwise noted, all artifacts and documents included as illustrations in this booklet are from the Grand Army of the Republic Memorial Room in the Massachusetts State House.*

By the time the American Civil War ended in 1865, some two million men had served in the Union armed forces. While a staggering 360,000 of those soldiers and sailors lost their lives in the war, upwards of 1.7 million Union soldiers returned to civilian life. As they reassumed familiar positions—husband, father, mechanic, farmer, and so on—they also came to terms with their new role as veterans. Over the last third of the nineteenth century, hundreds of thousands of these men joined an organization that not only defined what it meant to be a Union veteran but also did more than perhaps any other contemporary group to influence how the American public thought about the Civil War. That organization was the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR). Drawing from an abundance of textual, visual, and material items gathered from GAR units across the Commonwealth and preserved in the GAR Memorial Room of the Massachusetts State House, this brief work provides an introduction to the history and legacy of the organization.

Leather belt and bronze buckle featuring GAR Seal.

Like the armies and navies in which the organization's members had previously served, the GAR produced an immense amount of documents and material objects that have survived to the present. These items provide the historian with a rich source base with which to piece back together Union veterans' ideas about their service and its meaning. In 1869, for instance, the GAR adopted an official seal at its national encampment in New York. One year later, the GAR's national headquarters in Washington, D.C. issued a circular to all departments describing the symbolism behind the seal:

> In the center of the badge is the figure of the Goddess of Liberty, representing LOYALTY; on either side a sailor and a soldier clasping hands, representing FRATERNITY, and two children receiving benediction and assurance of protection from the comrades, representing CHARITY. On each side of the group is the National Flag and the Eagle, representing FREEDOM, and the Axe or Bundle of Rods, or Fasces, representing UNION. In each point of the star is the insignia of the various arms of

the service, viz.: the Bugle for Infantry, Cross Cannon for Artillery, Cross Muskets for the Marine, Cross Swords for the Cavalry, and the Anchor for the Sailors. Over the central group are the words, 'Grand Army of the Republic,' and under, the word and figures '1861—Veteran—1866,' commemorating the commencement and close of the rebellion, and also the date of the organization of the Order.

-Proceedings of the First to Tenth Meetings, 1866-1876, of the National Encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic (Philadelphia, 1877).

As the largest veterans' organization in post-Civil War America, the GAR combined the elements of a fraternal lodge, a charitable society, a lobbying group, and a booster club for American patriotism. In these capacities, the organization advanced the various needs and interests of Union veterans. Simultaneously, the GAR worked to convince a rapidly changing and increasingly skeptical American populace that its vision of the nation was best suited to meet the challenges of the future. Union soldiers and sailors were the true saviors of the United States, GAR members believed, and their sacrifices had not only preserved American democracy but also set the stage for the nation to exert a growing, positive influence around the world. Even at its peak, the organization enrolled slightly less than half of all eligible Union veterans, and inevitabilities of age meant that the GAR's influence could not long endure past the turn of the century. But in the three decades after the Civil War, GAR members exercised a decisive influence on veterans' status and the meaning of patriotism in American society.

Bay State veterans were among the first former soldiers outside of the Midwest to organize a GAR unit, or post. In September 1866, delegates from the

GAR membership badge. Prior to 1884, these badges were made from bronze melted down from guns donated by Congress to veterans' societies. After 1884, they were made from the melted down remains of captured Confederate cannons.

Photograph of members of E.W. Kinsley Post 113 of Boston marching up Tremont Street and onto Boylston Street during the 1904 national encampment. *Unofficial Proceedings in Connection with the Thirty-Eighth National Encampment, Grand Army of the Republic, held in Boston* (Boston: 1904).

Massachusetts Soldiers' and Sailors' Union, a political association, traveled to Pittsburgh to attend one of the first national meetings of the GAR. There, Major Charles Devens, Jr., Major Austin S. Cushman, and Chaplain A.H. Quint were initiated into the organization and authorized to organize posts in the Commonwealth. Major Cushman returned to his home in New Bedford, where he organized the Bay State's first GAR post (and for that matter, the first GAR post in the northeast). Chartered on October 4, 1866, William Logan Rodman Post 1 of New Bedford was the first of over 100 GAR posts (the smallest unit in the organization) established in Massachusetts. Each post elected a commander who reported to the state-wide department commander. Annual meetings of the Massachusetts encampment brought together elected delegates and past officers from GAR posts across the state. In turn, each post sent elected and honorary delegates to join the national organization's chief officers at the annual national encampment, where attendees gathered to debate issues of concern to veterans, to set

forth guiding policies, and to take part in the parades and festivities organized by the host committee.

While the GAR was a powerful organization at the national level, the post was the lifeblood of the organization. Post rooms occupied a number of different settings. Some posts were large and wealthy enough to build extravagant memorial halls, such as Lynn's Grand Army of the Republic Hall (today's Grand Army of the Republic Museum) where Frederick W. Lander Post 5 met after the building's completion in 1885. Lynn's GAR Hall, an imposing three-story, brick building, boasted a banquet room, kitchen, billiard room, library, and "Coliseum" that hosted public meetings and concerts. Smaller or less affluent posts typically rented a room that they shared with other fraternal orders in their town. Anywhere from a few dozen to several hundred veterans met regularly in their respective post rooms, where they paid dues, ceremoniously ushered in new members, and doled out charity, all in a space decorated with portraits, books, war relics, and other memorabilia reminiscent of the Civil War. Meticulous membership records were kept, and quarterly reports from each post were sent to the department commander in Boston.

Until 1894, the Massachusetts department headquarters moved around between various locations in downtown Boston. As construction of the Brigham extension to the Massachusetts State House neared completion in 1894, the legislature set aside Room 27 to serve as the new headquarters of the GAR's Massachusetts department. Presumably, the department's organizing documents and growing collection of ephemera were carted and carried on the short walk from its previous headquarters in Pemberton Square to its new home in the State House. Room 27 continued to serve as GAR headquarters until the state's last post surrendered its charter in the late-1940s. Today, decades of quarterly reports from scores of Massachusetts GAR posts remain intact and preserved in the GAR Memorial Room of the State House. The GAR Memorial Room also houses a rich collection of artwork, war relics, uniform paraphernalia, and post room décor and furnishings collected from posts across the state. Collectively, these records and items reveal the lives, values, and legacies of the Massachusetts men who joined the GAR.

Fraternity

While the GAR is most often remembered for its political clout, its function as a fraternal order for Union veterans was nonetheless significant. When the first Massachusetts department encampment (i.e., statewide meeting) was held in New Bedford's Mechanics Hall in May 1867, Department Commander Cushman proclaimed that the first purpose of the organization was the "preservation of those kind and fraternal feelings which have bound together soldiers and sailors who have stood together in many battles, sieges, engagements, and marches." Fraternal orders thrived throughout the United States after the Civil War, as members sought a ritual-laden, purportedly timeless retreat from the rapidly changing society around them. In its early years, the GAR conformed to this trend. The organization's allegorical initiation ritual, secret handshakes, and symbolic arrangement of furniture in post rooms mimicked Masonic practices, and for good reason: many of the GAR's founders were Masons.

Recreation of the ceremonial altar, Bible, and crossed swords arrangement used by an unknown Massachusetts post during "muster-in" ceremonies for new members.

This banner hung in the post room of Benjamin Stone, Jr. Post 68 in Dorchester.

Consider, for example, the "muster-in" ceremony by which new members joined a GAR post. Before entering the post room, each "Recruit" was blindfolded and detained by four "guards" at an "outpost." Once the post's commanding officer gave the order, recruits were marched single file into the post room, where members sat silently and according to their rank. At the center of the room, two crossed swords were situated atop an altar, and an open

Bible was placed on top of the crossed swords. Following a rigidly prescribed muster-in ceremony that included ritualistic speeches, songs, and salutes, each Recruit swore his oath, or "obligation," to the GAR with one hand rested on the open Bible.

This chair from an unidentified Massachusetts GAR post belonged to the post commander and most likely sat atop a raised platform.

Always situated in the center of the post room, the altar was a focal point of the ritualistic space. At the head of each post room, the post commander sat on an elevated platform, while the senior vice commander, junior vice commander, and chaplain sat in positions on the remaining three sides of the room to form a cross centered on the altar. Post members, or "comrades," sat on the perimeter of the room and were forbidden from passing in front of the altar or in between the altar and the post commander, whom they were required to salute when passing behind the altar. In some working-class posts, such as Brockton's Fletcher Webster Post 13, members voted to remove the elevated platform from beneath the post commander's chair in order to cultivate a spirit of equality among members.

GAR uniforms were also indicative of the organization's function as a fraternal order, albeit one with distinctly militaristic origins. Massachusetts members wore double-breasted, dark blue dress coats adorned with bronze buttons. In 1884, the national encampment adopted a lapel button emblazoned with the GAR seal, an addition that allowed members to recognize one another more easily but prompted the organization's detractors to mock its members as "bronze button heroes." A gold-wreathed "GAR" pin was affixed to members' dark blue wide-brimmed slouch hats.

Bronze lapel and sleeve buttons with gold-wreathed hat badge, part of a GAR uniform worn by Hiram Faunce of Captain Horace Niles Post 110 (Randolph, MA).

The GAR was also typical of nineteenth-century fraternal orders in its predominantly white, native-born, Protestant membership. Any honorably discharged veteran could join, but GAR activities were infused with evangelical Christian symbolism, which deterred many Catholic immigrant veterans from the organization. At the national level, most posts were segregated, and African Americans experienced both formal and informal discrimination within the GAR.

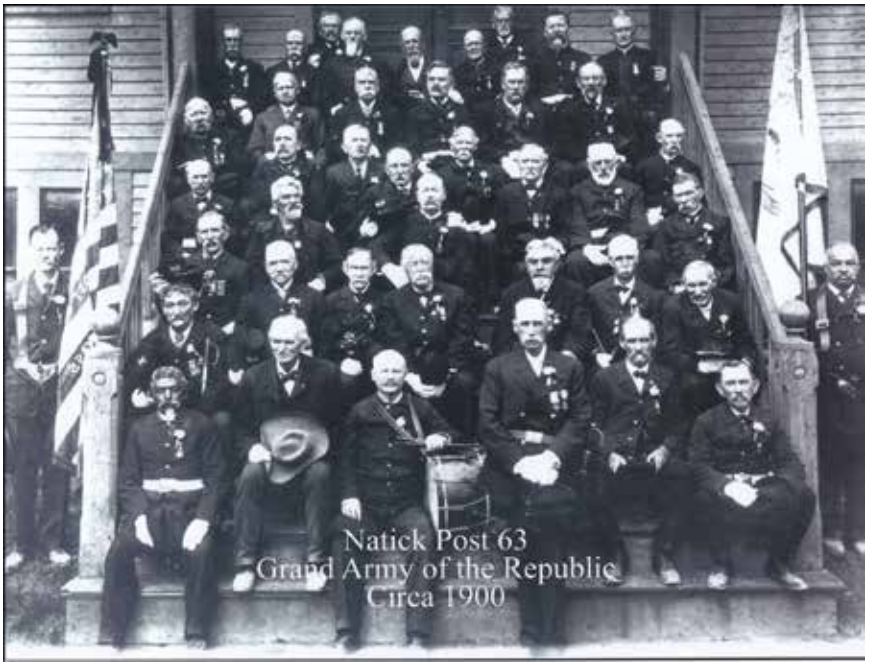
Women's contributions were integral to the GAR's charitable endeavors, but members of the Women's Relief Corps, an affiliate of the GAR, were assigned subordinate roles and were forbidden from post meeting rooms. While middle- and upper-class members tended to hold positions of leadership in the GAR, it bears emphasis that the demographics of a given post depended primarily on the demographics of the town or city in which that post was established. Brahmins comprised the core of Boston's Charles Russell Lowell Post 7, while Brockton's Fletcher Webster Post 13 was dominated by workers in the town's booming shoe industry. In fact, two-thirds of the Brockton post's membership were skilled or semi-skilled workers. Like tens of thousands of other members from mid-sized industrial cities, these members likely joined the GAR to socialize with fellow veterans and to assure that their funeral expenses would be covered, a benefit typically extended to members in good standing.

As much as the GAR resembled other fraternal orders of its day, its distinctiveness as a body of Union veterans was evident. In the first few years of its existence, the organization's initiation ritual was replete with references to camp life and other aspects of soldiering. A "camp sentinel" met the prospective member at the post room door and permitted him into the "camp." The "enlistment rite" for new members even included a staged firing

squad that "spared" the new member once he was found to be "a soldier and a brother." While the organization eventually altered this and other practices that called to mind unsavory secret societies, fraternal bonds in the GAR remained rooted in the shared experience of wartime service. Between 1861 and 1865, Yankees, immigrants, and African Americans had all marched off to war under the banner of the Bay State, meaning that fraternal bonds in Massachusetts GAR posts crossed lines of class, ethnicity, and race. In some Massachusetts posts like General Wadsworth Post 63 of Natick, native-born, immigrant, and African American veterans comingled at encampments and post meetings. By 1900, the Natick post counted on its roster black veterans of the 5th Massachusetts Colored Cavalry and 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry (Colored) as well as Irish-born veterans who had served in predominantly Yankee units. Speaking at the 1890 GAR national encampment in Boston, Commander-in-Chief Russell A. Alger proclaimed that "no matter what his color or nationality," every Union veteran with an honorable discharge should be embraced as a comrade.

Central to the organization's role as a fraternal order for Union veterans

Photograph of George W. Ward Post 10 (Worcester, MA) marching up Beacon Street to the corner of Park Street during the 1904 national encampment. *Unofficial Proceedings in Connection with the Thirty-Eighth National Encampment, Grand Army of the Republic, held in Boston* (Boston: 1904).



1900 photograph of General Wadsworth Post 63 (Natick, MA).
Courtesy of the Natick Historical Society.

were the myriad gatherings of GAR members beyond regular post meetings. At "campfires"—recreations of wartime encampments—members swapped war stories and relived an idealized version of camp life. Such gatherings might consist only of a few nearby posts, but statewide department encampments and the annual national encampment brought together Union veterans from across the Commonwealth and the country, respectively. Starting in 1866 and continuing almost without interruption until 1949, the GAR held an annual national encampment that saw as many as tens of thousands of members gather for several days' worth of parades, speeches, and debate on matters of concern to Union veterans. Massachusetts hosted the national encampment six times: 1871 (Boston), 1878 (Springfield), 1890 (Boston), 1904 (Boston), 1917 (Boston), and 1924 (Boston). The number of national delegates at these encampments climbed steadily over the years, from less than 100 in 1871 to 9,000 in 1878 to some 40,000 at 1890's encampment.

Campfires and encampments offered GAR members the chance to relive camp life, albeit on highly romanticized, fanciful terms. Speeches, songs, and cookouts replaced picket duty, drilling, and digging.

Muster Roll for General Wadsworth Post 63 of Natick, June 30, 1886. Benjamin Thomas (sixth name from top) was an African American veteran of the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry (Colored). Edward F. Cunniff and J.H. Hopkins (eighth and ninth names from top, respectively) were born in Ireland.

Women and children were allowed to visit campfires, where they found few if any reminders of the Civil War's carnage and destruction. But campfires and encampments could still be raucous affairs, as potentially thousands of veterans swapped (and argued about) war stories over drinks, despite the efforts of members of the WRC (many of whom were involved in the temperance movement) to discourage public drunkenness.

Ultimately, the meaning of fraternity to GAR members was both restrictive and capacious. The organization resembled its contemporaneous white, male, Protestant fraternal societies. But because the GAR championed the cause of the Union above all else, it could not wholly exclude the African Americans, immigrants, and women who contributed to the success of that cause. By the same token, the GAR was a veterans' organization whose members were bound together by the shared experience of military service. But few members wished to relive exactly what they had seen and done during the war, preferring instead the temporary retreat from the real world that GAR rituals and campfires offered them.

Ceramic commemorative mug from the 1900 national encampment in Chicago brought back to Massachusetts by an unknown Bay State delegate.

Postcard from the 1910 national encampment in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Sent to Medal of Honor recipient Charles Nelson Gardner of D. Willard Robinson Post 112 (Norwell, MA), the postcard features the GAR seal. Courtesy of the Massachusetts State Archives.

Medals worn by Massachusetts delegates to the national encampments of (from left to right) 1941 (Columbus, OH), 1942 (Indianapolis), 1944 (Des Moines), 1921 (Indianapolis), and 1906 (Minneapolis). Commemorative medals struck for national encampments usually featured either the current GAR commander-in-chief or a famous landmark of the host city.

Charity

Charity was both a foundational principle and a persistent course of action for GAR members from the time of the organization's inception. In his 1867 speech at the inaugural department encampment in Massachusetts, Department Commander Cushman devoted three out of the GAR's six "purposes" to some form of charitable work on behalf of veterans and their families. Cushman and his fellow GAR founding fathers were prescient, for until the federal government passed legislation in 1890 that guaranteed aid to all Union veterans and their dependents, many veterans had few places to turn but the local GAR post.

Recipients of the GAR's charity received a range of goods and services. Each post collected dues that, along with the proceeds of GAR fundraisers, went towards a relief fund. In addition to

Oak wood collection dish used by an unknown Massachusetts post. "C" (Charity), "F" (Fraternity), and "L" (Loyalty; not pictured) represent the GAR's motto.

Reports of Adjutant and Quartermaster

For Term ending Dec 31 1899

Headquarters Gen Wadsworth

Post No. 63 Dept. of Mass G. A. R.

Natick Jan 1 1900

Approved and respectfully forwarded to A. A. G., with $ 10.10 per capita due on 101 members in good standing.

D. H. Bracken

P. O. Address

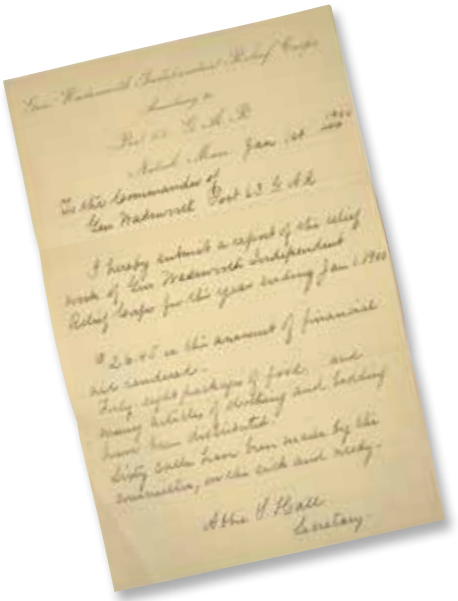
ROSTER OF OFFICERS.

Quarterly report for General Wadsworth Post 63 (Natick, MA), dated December 31, 1899. Note the $10.10 in dues from the post's 101 members in good standing.

their regular post dues, Massachusetts GAR members in 1900 paid a "tax" of a dime per quarter to the department. In increments as low as $1, posts distributed relief to needy members in good standing, with much of this money going towards food, fuel, and medical bills. For example, the $26.45 in relief dispensed by General Wadsworth Post 63 of Natick in 1899 purchased 48 packages of food as well as clothing, bedding, and the expenses of 60 calls on the "sick and needy." Typically, a member received charitable assistance from his post no more than three times. GAR relief also included assistance with finding employment for veterans whether or not

they belonged to the organization. Perhaps most important for working-class members was coverage of funeral expenses and the knowledge that at least some fellow post members would not only attend their funeral but also continue to provide aid to their widows.

Although they were refused membership in the all-male GAR and forbidden from entering post meeting rooms, women played a crucial role in the dispensation of charity through the WRC. Officially recognized by the GAR's commander-in-chief in 1881, the WRC administered GAR relief funds to needy members, a



Abbie Hall, Secretary of the General Wadsworth Independent Relief Corps, to the Commander of General Wadsworth Post 63, January 1, 1900. Note Secretary Hall's report on the relief work carried out for the year ending on January 1, 1900. GAR Memorial Room, Massachusetts State House.

Detail from a composite group photograph of attendees at the 1890 GAR National Encampment in Boston. Included here (lower right) are unidentified members of the Women's Relief Corps.

task in keeping with contemporary gender roles that identified women primarily as caregivers. At the 1890 national encampment in Boston, Massachusetts delegates boasted that the Bay State's posts had dispensed some $44,741.00 in charity during the previous year. With representatives from the WRC in attendance, GAR Commander-in-Chief Alger celebrated the "heroic women who are our strong right arm in war, and are now donating their time to our dependent comrades and their widows and children."

As was typical across the nation, the Bay State's GAR members were instrumental in the creation of soldiers' homes for Union veterans, most notably in Chelsea. In 1877, Massachusetts Department Commander Horace Binney Sargent used his Memorial Day address to "urge

upon the public mind the importance of providing for those [veterans] dying in poverty, of illness, and re-opened wounds. For these," he proclaimed, "a Soldiers' Home in Massachusetts must be established." In the coming months and years, Sargent and other influential GAR members lobbied the legislature to fund housing for indigent Union veterans. Their efforts bore fruit in 1881 when the state purchased the former Highland Park House atop Powder Horn Hill in Chelsea as the site for the Massachusetts Soldiers' Home. While receiving funds from the state, the Soldiers' Home continued to be supported by GAR fundraising, including a fair at Mechanics Hall in 1881 that brought in some $45,000. Edward W. Kinsley Post 113 of Boston

Portrait of Horace Binney Sargent, member of John A. Andrew Post 15 (Boston) and Massachusetts Department Commander, 1876-1878.

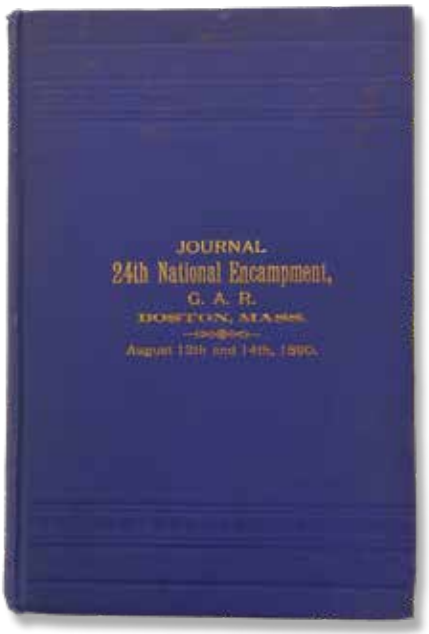
Framed photograph titled, "Our Vanishing Army, 1861-1865" (c. 1910). Scenes such as this reminded a generation born after the Civil War of veterans' deteriorating health amid increased federal spending on pensions.

took the lead in soliciting donations for the Massachusetts Soldiers' Home, and Sargent himself remained one of the institution's trustees even after he retired to Santa Monica, California. Since its establishment in 1882, the Soldiers' Home has provided housing, health care, and recreational services to Bay State veterans free of charge. The facility's aging infrastructure makes continued public funding more important now than ever.

The GAR's work to create a first of its kind federal pension system for veterans and their families constitutes the organization's most enduring legacy. The federal pension campaign began in earnest in the early-1880s. In the years leading up to that point in time, rapid industrialization had spawned a vicious boom-bust cycle in the

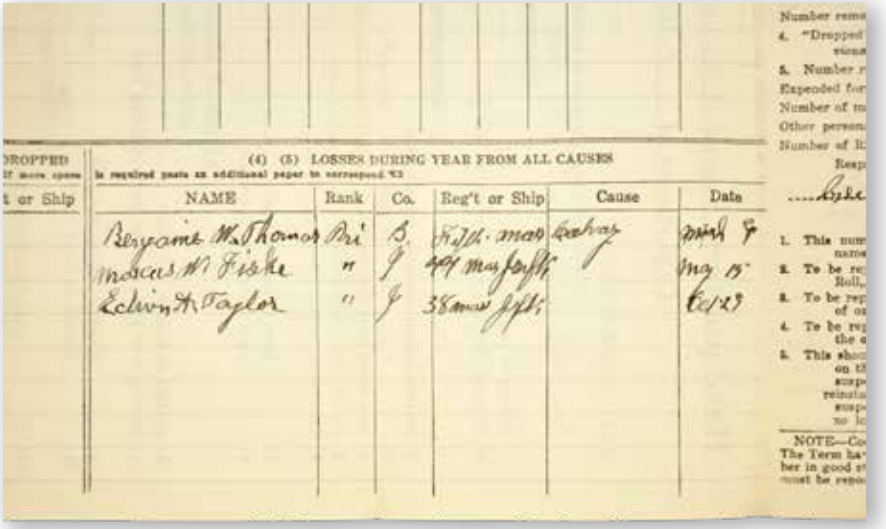
national economy that wreaked havoc with private charitable endeavors. With this in mind, GAR leaders worked first at the state and then at the national level to expand the pool of veterans eligible for public aid. By 1888, Massachusetts alone had expended over $19 million in aid for veterans and their families. The number of soldiers who could claim dependent pensions—public aid provided to disabled or otherwise needy veterans—expanded significantly over the 1880s. By the end of the decade, many GAR leaders viewed federal service pensions—public aid provided to all veterans, regardless of whether or not they were disabled or dependent—as their just due.

Massachusetts GAR members were at the center of the federal pension crusade. Members of Boston's John A. Andrew Post 15 formed the Service Pension Association to rally GAR posts around the country behind the movement for federal service pensions. By 1884, Post 15 had the support of nearly 1,500 posts nationwide. The rising tide of support among the GAR rank and file for a liberal service pension forced recalcitrant (and typically wealthier) posts to accept resolutions passed at the national encampments of 1888 and 1889 that pressed Congress to act on the issue. By this time, GAR ranks had swelled to over 400,000, and the "soldiers vote" was as potent a force in national elections as any other demographic group. Recognizing the groundswell of support



Journal, 24th National Encampment, G.A.R. (Boston: 1890). Included in this official account is a report by the GAR's pension committee in response to passage of the Dependent Pension Act.

for a liberal federal pension among GAR members, Congress passed the Dependent Pension Act in 1890. While the bill did not yield service pensions exactly along the lines that the GAR envisioned, it required only that recipients served in the Union armed forces for 90 days, received an honorable discharge, and could not perform manual labor. Neither a veteran's financial status nor his reason for being unable to work was to factor into his eligibility for a federal pension. As the GAR's national pension committee observed in its report to the 1890 national encampment in Boston, the Dependent Pension Act amounted to "the most



(4) (5) LOSSES DURING YEAR FROM ALL CAUSES

NAME	Rank	Co.	Reg't or Ship	Cause	Date
Benjamin W. Thomas	Pri	B	54th Mass	Cerebral	March 7
Moses M. Fiske	"	I	40th Mass		May 15
Edwin A. Taylor	"	I	38th Mass		Feb'29

Detail from quarterly report for General Wadsworth Post 63 (Natick) December 31, 1930. Here, the deaths of three Post 63 members—including Benjamin Thomas, an African American veteran—are recorded as losses. Note the shaky hand of the author, who was most likely in his 80s by this time.

liberal pension measure ever passed by any legislative body in the world" at the time of its passage.

By 1893, more than 966,000 Union veterans were in the federal pension system. In a little more than a decade and a half after its enactment, the Dependent Pension Act of 1890 provided annually more than $1 billion in aid to Union veterans and their families, making it the largest single federal expenditure to date. To GAR members, the thought that a deserving veteran should want for coal, food, a job, or a casket verged on treasonous. The provisioning of charity to deserving veterans was therefore an indispensable and unceasing task for GAR members. Yet the organization was far from static in terms of how it approached this task. Like American society as a whole, a majority of GAR members came to see that in an industrialized, capitalistic economy where employment was uncertain and wages struggled to keep up with the cost of living, private charity alone would never suffice. They therefore led one of the first successful national campaigns to ensure that the federal government would provide for the basic needs of a particular class of citizens. Viewed in this light, the GAR's federal pension campaign was a watershed moment not only in the history of the organization but also in the political and social history of the United States.

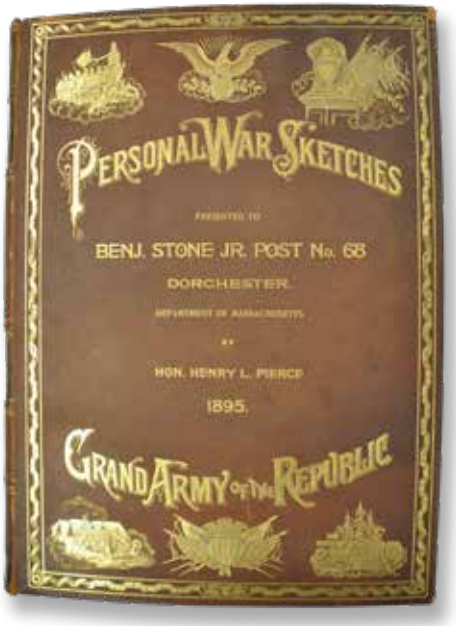
Loyalty

GAR members believed they were uniquely positioned to teach Americans about the meaning of loyalty, a term that they tended to equate with patriotism. During the Civil War, secession and rebellion threatened the very existence of the United States. In response, Union volunteers sacrificed their lives, health, and youth to restore the Union and to eliminate slavery, which most loyal Americans understood to be the cornerstone of the Confederate rebellion. Believing that their experiences gave them an unrivaled perspective on what was required of loyal, patriotic Americans, GAR members were intent on sharing that perspective with future generations.

One of the organization's first public patriotic campaigns was to formalize the observance of Memorial Day across the country. In 1868, GAR Commander-in-Chief John A. Logan issued General Order No. 11, designating May 30 "for the purpose of strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion." Massachusetts Department Commander A.B.R. Sprague forwarded Logan's order to the Commonwealth's GAR members, adding;

> The men of Massachusetts, the blood of whose sons was the first to flow in defense of the Nation's honor, will not be behind their brethren of other States in testifying by their presence and cooperation their interest in the occasion. Every comrade of the Grand Army should assist in the work, and every soldier's and sailor's grave should be visited.
>
> - *Early History of the Department of Massachusetts G.A.R., from 1866 to 1880 Inclusive* (Boston: E.B. Stillings & Co., 1895).

As Logan's and Sprague's words suggest, the GAR viewed Memorial Day as a solemn and sacred occasion; festivities and entertainment were discouraged, and any questions about the use of public money



Leather cover to the Personal War Sketches volume used by Benjamin Stone, Jr. Post 68 (Dorchester).

to fund Memorial Day activities provoked charges of disloyalty. After an 1881 Massachusetts department encampment adopted a resolution in favor of making May 30 a legal holiday, the legislature passed and Governor John Davis Long signed a bill to that end.

Preserving and disseminating war stories also aided the GAR in its efforts to keep alive the patriotic sentiments that animated Union soldiers during the war. While members chronicled their experiences in the war in countless ways, one of the most common means was recording them in a Personal War Sketches album. Thick, leather-bound volumes, these albums were maintained by a post historian; they provided each post member with space to document his unit and rank, battles, wounds, POW status, and other vital details of his service. Veterans could also include the names of comrades with whom they were close and list what they deemed to be the "most important events" of their service.

Ceramic bust, "National Favorite U.S. Grant," from an unidentified Massachusetts GAR post room.

Some entries were succinct. "Getting home with my own skin" was most important to Charles Babeuck of the 16th Massachusetts. Other entries reflected GAR members' zealous patriotism. William H. Brown proudly recorded that he was "able and willing to devote four of the best years of my life to help defend the old flag of my fathers and the unity of the Republic." Still other entries in the Personal War Sketches volumes spoke to some veterans' sardonic senses of humor. "My service was not very important as at the time was only 15 years of age and should have been at school," wrote a Dorchester veteran. In sketching out their war service, GAR members tended to focus on what part they as individuals or their unit had played in a particular battle or campaign. Each war sketch thus made tangible an individual soldier's contribution to the cause of the Union. When assembled into a single Personal War Sketches album, the dozens and potentially hundreds of sketches produced a collective account of how a given GAR post had helped to win the war.

GAR post rooms abounded in material objects that spoke to members' understanding of what it meant to be loyal. A bust of Ulysses S. Grant, for example, called to mind the general-turned-politician's humble origins and perseverance in the face of adversity. Grant was a particular favorite of the GAR, whose members helped propel him to the

Gavel carved out of wood taken from the site of the Battle of Lookout Mountain in Chattanooga, Tennessee. A bullet lodged in the wood during the battle. The gavel was used by Charles D. Sanford Post 79 (North Adams).

presidency twice and marched by the tens of thousands in his funeral train.

Battlefield relics served as cherished reminders of the places where GAR members' comrades had spilled blood in service to the Union. Members of Charles D. Sanford Post 79 of North Adams were brought to order by a gavel carved from a piece of wood in which a bullet lodged during the Battle of Lookout Mountain in Chattanooga, Tennessee. At the 1904 national encampment in Boston, a South Acton woodworker named Reuben L. Reed presented another gavel, this one made of "thirteen specimens of wood gathered from the battlefields of the Rebellion," to Commander-in-Chief John C. Black. Reed presented the gavel to Black in a box constructed of wood from Faneuil Hall and ornamented with "no less than sixty noteworthy pieces of wood, gathered from ships famous in the war and from historic spots in the vicinity of Boston," thus linking the gavel's Civil War-specific roots to Boston's Revolutionary-era heritage. One aged Bay State GAR member used a wooden cane carved from a fallen tree on the Gettysburg battlefield to assist him in walking to and from meetings. These relics exemplify how veterans crafted tangible reminders of their and their dead comrades' wartime sacrifices.

Seemingly mundane objects like a canteen assumed deeply symbolic importance in GAR post rooms. Soldiers, the saying went, "drank from the same canteen" during the war. That is to say, they shared the indelible experiences of combat and camp life. In his address to the 1889 national encampment in Milwaukee, Commander-in-Chief William Warner quoted from "The Canteen," a poem written by Irish-American Union soldier Charles G. Halpine under the pseudonym of Private Miles O'Reilly:

Civil War canteen used by George Edwin Johnson, 13th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. Johnson became Post Commander of Isaac B. Patten GAR Post 81 (Watertown).

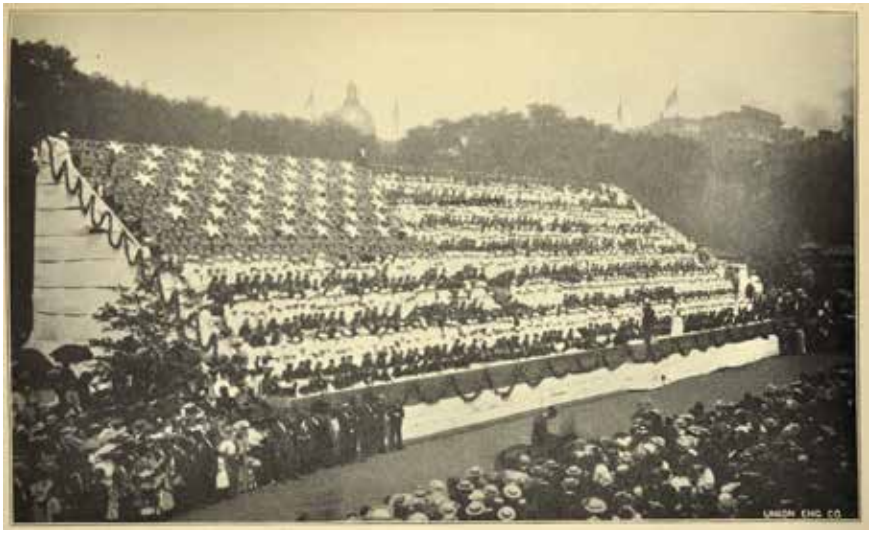
There are bonds of all sorts in this world of ours,
Fetters of friendship and ties of flowers,
And true-lovers' knots I ween;
The boy and the girl are bound by a kiss,
But there is never a bond, old friend, like this—
We have drank from the same canteen.

-Private Miles O'Reilly, "The Canteen," in *Baked Meats of the Funeral: Collection of Essays, Poems, Speeches, Histories, and Banquets* (New York, 1866).

Outside the post room, GAR members vociferously promoted their understanding of loyalty. Leaders made the tasks of teaching and exalting patriotism central to the organization's mission in 1866, when a new clause in the GAR constitution directed members to maintain

> true allegiance to the United States of America, based upon paramount respect for and fidelity to the National Constitution and Laws, manifested by the discountenancing of whatever may tend to weaken loyalty, incite to insurrection, treason, or rebellion, or in any manner impairs the efficiency and permanency of our free institutions, together with a defense of universal liberty, equal rights, and justice to all men.
>
> -Robert Burns Beath, *History of the Grand Army of the Republic (New York, 1888).*

But with the war fresh in mind and with the pension campaign foremost on the GAR's agenda in the 1870s and 1880s, there was little urgency to expound on the follies of secession, to insist upon public reverence of the flag, or to extoll the virtues of those who had donned the blue between 1861 and 1865. As the end of the century neared, however, the number of living Union veterans (and GAR members) started to decline; "Lost Cause" (i.e., Confederate-sympathizing)



Photograph of the "Living Flag" formed by 2,000 schoolchildren on Boston Common during the 1904 National Encampment. *Unofficial Proceedings, 1904 National Encampment.*

histories gained greater acceptance among the public; and seemingly ever greater numbers of immigrants with no direct knowledge of the Civil War arrived each year. These circumstances convinced GAR members that the nation was dangerously close to losing sight of the cause for which they had risked their lives. Thus, promoting the GAR's particular understanding of patriotism and loyalty took on added importance around the turn of the century.

While GAR-backed patriotic campaigns aimed to reach all segments of American society, they placed particular emphasis on children. In 1888, Wisconsin GAR members objected to the use of school textbooks that, they argued, justified secession and portrayed Confederate soldiers equally as if not more heroic than Union soldiers. By 1891, the national organization had formed a committee to study how school textbooks taught the Civil War, and over the next decade, individual posts across the country pressured publishers to produce unequivocally pro-Union histories. The textbook campaign quickly snowballed to include calls for making the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance and the flying of the American Flag mandatory in public schools.

The flag itself became increasingly prominent in the GAR's public displays of patriotism as the century drew to a

Badge worn by a Massachusetts attendee at the 1904 National Encampment in Boston. The Massachusetts state seal is encircled by the text "38th National Encampment G.A.R." A wreath links scenes of five historical sites in Boston.

close. Brockton's Fletcher Webster Post 13, for instance, did not incorporate the Stars and Stripes into its opening ceremonies until 1892. During the 1904 national encampment in Boston, 2,000 schoolchildren formed a "living flag" on Boston Common and sung patriotic songs as GAR members marched past. This was the third national encampment at which schoolchildren formed a living flag, although Boston's organizers believed theirs to be the largest yet assembled. For several hours on a steamy August day, the children who formed the living flag greeted columns of GAR marchers with songs like "Battle Hymn of the Republic," "American Hymn," and "Speed our Republic." According to one account of this patriotic pageant, "the greater proportion of the men in line removed their hats as they

passed the Living Flag, and in not a few cases the marchers gave ringing cheers for the singers." For the GAR the flag was a timeless, unchanging symbol of the nation that Union soldiers fought to preserve. As society underwent seismic changes around them, members strove to impress upon younger generations the values and ideals that had sustained them in that fight.

With the Civil War generation fading from view at the turn of the century, it was plain to see that immigrants and younger generations of Americans did not accept unconditionally GAR teachings on patriotism. Moreover, it was too easy for critics to point out the disjuncture between the GAR's criticism of school textbooks that depicted the Civil War as a war of northern conquest over the South and the GAR's full-throated support for American annexation of the Philippines and Cuba in the wake of the Spanish-American War. And yet the organization's patriotic rhetoric was more than just jingoism. Speaking inside Boston's Symphony Hall at the 1904 national encampment, Commander-in-Chief Black declared that immigrants "should be received hospitably and at once inducted into all that makes for the best grade of citizenship." Delivered at a time when many influential Americans were calling for severe restrictions on immigration, Black's words are indicative of the GAR's pride in having preserved a nation that welcomed and offered the hopes of a better life to outsiders.

At the turn of the century, the GAR's influence on how Americans made public demonstrations of loyalty to their country was unmistakable. Indeed, the vestiges of its patriotic campaigns can be seen in the present day. By 1900, most states had passed legislation that mandated the flying of the flag and recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance at public schools. Americans continue to observe Memorial Day, just as they still sing "The Star Spangled Banner" before public festivities like baseball games, a tradition born out of GAR practice. That all of these practices continue today is a testament to the GAR's lasting influence on our society.

Clipping from an unidentified newspaper from February 1938 with a photograph of "eight GAR men, last of civil war veterans." The veterans (including a former department commander and the then-senior vice-state commander) attended a "Lincoln banquet." Their ages ranged from 89 to 95.

Conclusion

In 1867, Massachusetts Department Commander Cushman observed that "there will be a time when, by the inexorable limitation to human life, the Grand Army will pass away and its activities cease." But the GAR's deeds, he predicted, would outlive its members: "Our Order will have left an imperishable legacy to posterity in its brilliant record of benevolence, fraternity, and patriotism," Cushman concluded. By 1900, enrollment numbers in the national organization were dropping precipitously, a trend that could be seen in any of the thousands of post meeting rooms across the country. Natick's Post 63, for example, had 204 members in good standing in 1888. A decade later, there were less than 130 active members in Post 63, and by 1910, only 66 remained. Almost every quarterly report between 1900 and 1910 listed the death of at least six members from the post. But the Natick group continued to meet for two more decades. In December 1929, an 85-year old veteran joined the post and died in the same quarter. Only with the passing of George B. Howe in 1935 did Post 63 surrender its charter.

Like Post 63, scores of Massachusetts posts surrendered their charters with the passing of their last surviving members in the 1930s and 1940s. The "inexorable limitation to human life" foretold by Department Commander Cushman more than a half century earlier had come to pass. But Cushman's prediction that the GAR's "record of benevolence, fraternity, and patriotism" would outlive its members had also come to fruition. By the mid-twentieth century, Union veterans and their families had received billions of dollars in aid from the federal government thanks to the GAR's pension campaign. This aid is to say nothing of the myriad smaller donations, doctors' visits, meals, and jobs provided to GAR members through their local posts. Over its eight decades of existence, the GAR also nurtured camaraderie and friendship among hundreds of thousands of Union veterans. At times—although perhaps not often enough—GAR bonds cut across contemporary racial, ethnic, and gender boundaries. Finally, the GAR did more than any other institution of its era to influence how Americans displayed and expressed their love of country. The documentary records and objects that survive in the GAR Memorial Room today are but a small fraction of the organization's "imperishable legacy" that Department Commander Cushman spoke of in 1867.

Acknowledgments

This brief overview of the history and legacy of the Grand Army of the Republic in Massachusetts originated in a museum exhibit put together under the auspices of the Massachusetts Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission. The author would like to thank Chair Robert J. Wolfgang and especially Vice-Chair Thomas R. Turner for the opportunity to assist in the Commission's efforts to commemorate the Bay State's role in the Civil War. Another Commission member, Michael Comeau, Executive Director of the Massachusetts State Archives, generously devoted time and resources to this project. The Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts graciously agreed to support the author's efforts to turn the museum exhibit into this brief history. Jeff Surette and Tom Blazej, both from the Secretary's office, lent their photographic and graphic design expertise to the exhibit and this work.

The Grand Army Memorial Room in the Massachusetts State House is a treasure trove of textual and material sources for anyone interested in the GAR. It also houses the Massachusetts Art Commission. Susan Greendyke Lachevre, the Art Collections Manager, and Paula Morse, Chair of the Art Commission, could not have been more generous in their support of this project or more hospitable as GAR quarterly reports and paraphernalia spilled across their already cramped space. Susan suggested that the museum exhibit be turned into a short illustrated history. Paula read over the manuscript twice, offering thoughtful suggestions to improve both its content and its arrangement. Of course, any errors or shortcomings in this work are the fault of the author alone.

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