

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

History of the Grand Army of the Republic or 'G.A.R.'

By **Anthony Waskie**, Temple University

After their service in the Union armed forces during the great Civil War had ended, many of the veterans who survived the turmoil were mustered out of service and had gone home. Some of these men began to pine for the friendships and camaraderie that they had shared during the war. Veterans' clubs began to spring up around the country. Many were local and most did not last very long but a few went on to become national organizations. One of these was the Grand Army of the Republic, or simply the G.A.R.

The very first organization founded by the veterans of the Civil War was the Third Army Corps Union which was founded during the course of the war in March, 1862, initially to provide burial services and embalming for the member officers. A number of similar organizations followed to provide services, fellowship and comradeship within military units, such as the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Society of the Army of the James, etc... On the day Abraham Lincoln died, April 15, 1865, a group of discharged army officers in Philadelphia formed a fledgling military group to provide an honor guard for Lincoln's body when he was to pass through the city. This group grew quickly into the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States or often known as the Loyal Legion or today as MOLLUS. Membership was confined to honorably discharged officers of the Union armed services. The Loyal Legion grew to become a prestigious military and social organization whose main purpose was to preserve the history of the Civil War through published Reports of Proceedings of personal memoirs and lectures, as well as a means of social interaction and companionship through a series of formal dinners, receptions and ceremonials that continue among the descendants to the present day.

In 1866 the United States, now united as one nation as a result of the Union defeat of the Confederacy on the battlefield, was waking to the reality of the consequences and recovery efforts from a much different kind of war. In previous conflicts the care of the veteran warrior was the province of the family or the community. Soldiers in previous conflicts, when war had been a community

adventure of local militia service, and their fighting unit had a community flavor, had gone off to fight until the next planting or harvest. But this time was different. The veterans had often endured bitter sacrifice, severe hardship and the bloodbath of industrialized warfare. By the end of the Civil War, military units had become less homogeneous; men from different communities and different states were brought together by the exigencies of battle where new friendships and lasting trust was forged. With the advances in the care and movement of the wounded, many who would have surely perished in earlier wars returned home to be cared for by a community structure weary from a protracted war and now also faced with the needs of debilitated veterans, widows and orphans. Veterans needed jobs, including a whole new group of veterans—the Africa American soldier—and his entire, newly freed, family. It was often more than the fragile fabric of communities could bear.

The Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) was founded by Benjamin Franklin Stephenson, M.D. an army regimental surgeon, and Chaplain Reverend William J. Rutledge. Both men had served in the Civil War in the 14th Illinois Volunteer Infantry, and had been tent mates during Major General William Tecumseh Sherman's Expedition to Meridian, Mississippi in February 1864. During the expedition they discussed founding an organization that the ... "soldiers so closely allied in the fellowship of suffering, would, when mustered out of the service, naturally desire some form of association that would preserve the friendships and the memories of their common trials and dangers."

Their discussions during the war and their correspondence following it resulted in the formation of the Grand Army of the Republic in Decatur, Illinois on April 6, 1866. This information and subsequent details are found in the *History of the Grand Army of the Republic* (New York: Bryan, Taylor, 1889) by Robert B. Beath (1889). Beath, a Philadelphian was Commander-in-chief of the Grand Army in 1883.

Membership and Organization

To become a member of the Grand Army, a man must have served honorably in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or Revenue Cutter Service (today's United States Coast Guard) between April, 1861 and December, 1865. He had to have been honorably discharged from the service and have never taken up arms against the United States. Membership was granted after the veteran applied to a local Post and was approved for membership by being voted in.

The local post officers were elected by the membership of the post. Each member was voted into membership using the Masonic system of casting black or

white balls (except that more than one black ball was required to reject a candidate for membership). When a candidate was rejected, that rejection was reported to the Department which listed the rejection in general orders and those rejections were maintained in a Black Book held at each Post meeting place or Post Hall. The meeting rituals and induction of members were similar to the Masonic rituals and have been handed down to the descendant organizations, including the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War.

Sarah Emma Edmonds was only woman known to have been admitted to full membership in the G.A.R., because she had served in the 2nd Michigan Infantry disguised as a man named Franklin Thompson from May 1861 until April 1863, and continued to live as a man in the post war period. In 1882, she collected affidavits from former comrades in an effort to petition for a veteran's pension which she received in July 1884. Edmonds was a member until she died September 5, 1898, and was given a funeral with military honors when she was reburied in Houston in 1901. A small number of women who had served as volunteer nurses during the war were awarded 'honorary' membership, including the war time nurse Clara Barton. The official war time Army nurse corps formed its own veterans' organization called the Association of Army Nurses, founded in Philadelphia. The Army Nurses met along with the Grand Army men at department and national 'encampments', but were not accepted as official members.

The organization's ritual was based partly on the traditions of Freemasonry, and partly on military traditions and practices. The Order as it was styled was divided into Departments at the state level and Posts at the local community level, and modified military-style uniforms were worn by its members. There were posts in every state in the nation (except Hawaii), and several posts were located abroad.

The order was governed by its rules and regulations, ceremonies and rituals as set down in regulations and adopted by the National Organization of the Grand Army of the Republic. The governing board consisted of elected officials: the National Commander-in-Chief who wielded much power and influence within the order as well as in the public domain; the Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief; Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief who assisted the work of the Commander and represented him when he was not present; the Adjutant who was the secretary of the order; Quartermaster; Medical Director, Chaplain, etc.

Every state (except Hawaii) featured local G.A.R. posts and their headquarters was called a Memorial Hall or Post Hall. These are forerunners of modern American Legion or V.F.W. (Veterans of Foreign Wars) and other veterans' post halls. Some posts

were even located in the former Confederacy. The posts were made up of local veterans, many of whom participated in local civic events.

Posts were formed when a minimum number of veterans (usually 15) applied formally to create a post. The new posts were assigned a sequential number within a department based on their chronological admission into that organization, and most posts adopted formal names which honored comrades, battles, or commanders; but it was not allowed to have more than one post in a department honoring the same individual (such as Abraham Lincoln) who by tradition had to be deceased. The name of the post was an essential element in the mythos of the order and the designation was made by vote of the local membership. In fact, these decisions were often rancorous and disputes between rival posts for a certain name were not uncommon.

The state-based departments held annual encampments or reunions based on the national encampment model. In addition, former military units, ships, and localities also held annual reunions called Encampments. The official governing body of the Department was the annual Encampment. Encampments were elaborate multi-day events which often included camping out with Campfire programs to evoke nostalgia for army life, formal dinners, parades, ceremonies, and memorial events. In later years the Department Encampments were often held in conjunction with the Encampments of the Allied Orders, including Camps of the Sons of Veterans and Reserve, which at the time were quasi-military in nature, often listed as units of the state militia or National Guard.

The first national gathering of the Grand Army of the Republic was held in Indianapolis, Indiana and was called an Encampment just as in their soldier days, and all subsequent yearly national reunions were so designated, comprising 83 National Encampments from 1866 until 1949 the last Encampment held in Indianapolis, when only six members could be mustered.

Thus, the veteran always had a variety of locales and events to visit, if he desired. In the glory years of the Order, participation in the department or national encampment was awarded by election, but again, as numbers dwindled, the event became more open. Often, an encampment or reunion was held at a former battlefield. There the practice of cutting branches from witness trees which had survived the battle to make G.A.R. walking sticks was popularized. In time, all Grand Army men carried a walking stick, often inscribed with his post name and numerals, or the battlefields where he had fought, or from which the cutting came.

Some of the large urban posts of the G.A.R. actually had massive post halls where large gatherings could be hosted. Some began to collect artifacts and relics donated by post members; others had a lending library for the membership. Often at the periodic Campfires or social gatherings where the former comrades reminisced about their war

service, musical and theatrical entertainments were performed and guests invited. A later practice of the G.A.R. was reciprocal visits by delegations from other posts. Sometimes partner posts became very close and took joint vacations and held family picnics together.

The G.A.R. pioneered funeral rituals and customs for its members. In keeping with the prevailing Victorian era mourning rituals, elaborate ceremonies were often employed for post comrades who had passed on. A funeral and burial ritual procedure was embodied in a G.A.R. manual which was strictly adhered to. A visiting delegation was gathered to represent the post at the funeral service where the G.A.R. ritual was read. In the post hall, the post bible was draped in crepe to signal the mourning process. A vacant chair was placed at the next post meeting to signify the passing of a comrade. The grieving family was accompanied to the place of burial where the G.A.R. official service was utilized, including a firing party to fire the soldiers' final tribute and the playing of Taps the final bugle call used to honor the fallen. The grave was decorated with floral tributes, a wreath was laid and a U.S. flag placed on the grave to symbolize the flag under which the veteran had served his nation.

Another custom which became popular in the Post- Civil War Era, was the placement of monuments by the posts of the G.A.R, military units, and the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, at first in cemeteries often at the site of the burial plots for veterans' to memorialize their service to the nation and honor their sacrifices, then later in public places. These monuments often took the form of a soldier guarding the graves of his comrades at parade rest. These types of monuments are often called silent sentinels. Soon, similar monuments were being placed in public squares of towns and cities where the memorials could be more readily seen and appreciated. They often became the focal point of patriotic functions, parades and ceremonies. Practically every county courthouse, park and market square boasted such a memorial to the service of the Union veterans of the Civil War. These can likewise also be found in the former southern states of the Confederacy to honor the Southern dead.

The G.A.R. reached its largest enrollment in 1890, with close to 500,000 members and close to eight thousand posts, ranging in size from fewer than two dozen members in small towns, to more than a thousand in some cities. By the end of the 19th Century, with dwindling numbers of veterans and as a result of its ground breaking and successful work on behalf of veterans' rights and benefits, almost every Union veteran enrolled in the G.A.R., including five presidents: Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Harrison, and McKinley.

As the veterans of the Civil War began to pass on, the membership of the Grand Army slowly dwindled away and posts were consolidated or disbanded. The G.A.R held its last National Encampment at Indianapolis, Indiana in 1949. Six surviving Comrades

attended that Encampment. The last member of the Grand Army of the Republic, Comrade Albert Woolson died in 1956 at 109 years of age, the sole officially listed survivor of the approximate 3 million men who had served in the armed forces of the Union.

In 1956, after Woolson's death the G.A.R. was formally dissolved. Some of its records went to the Library of Congress and some of its collections of relics, badges, flags, and official seals went to the Smithsonian Institution, as well as to local, state and military institutions. An example is the Grand Army of the Republic Museum and Library in Philadelphia. The G.A.R. Museum and Library preserves a large collection of relics, books and records the legacy handed down by Post #2 in Philadelphia and many items donated over the years since its founding in 1926.

G.A.R. Uniform & Badges

The G.A.R. uniform was a double-breasted or single-breasted dark blue coat with bronze G.A.R. buttons, and either a black wide-brimmed slouch felt hat, with golden wreath insignia and hat cord, or the 1872 U.S. Army pattern dark blue cap or kepi with the numerals of the post to which the veteran belonged in bronze numerals or embroidered on the front of the cap. The uniform regulations varied from Department to Department, and it was decided there what the rules for formal dress would be. Pennsylvania, for example required a single-breasted dark blue coat with a white vest underneath and the army cap, whereas Massachusetts required the double-breasted coat without vest and a dark blue campaign style broad brimmed hat. In fact, members could order the correct uniform from the Sears catalogue or shop for it themselves in the local department store. An official G.A.R. membership badge in the shape of a bronze star hung from a small silk American flag ribbon with thirteen stars in the upper left blue field that was always worn proudly on the left breast. The star in relief depicted a soldier and sailor clasping hands in front of a figure of Liberty. Members could also wear an official G.A.R. round lapel pin on the left side of the coat or worn on the left lapel of a civilian coat. In this manner, they could be more easily identified. The Grand Army men were extremely proud of their service in defense of the Union and the destruction of the scourge of slavery. They wished to be pointed out and honored. They referred to each other as comrade in official formalities, mostly in Post meetings and sanctioned events.

There was some controversy over the fact that the membership badge of the G.A.R. closely resembled the Army's version of the Medal of Honor, causing confusion and some animosity among some veterans. The issue was resolved with a re-design of the membership badge in 1884 until the fourth model was adopted and became for decades the icon which identified the order and distinguished its members.

The 19th Century and Victorian era was a period when great ostentation was favored in decorative motifs. The style was converted by the veterans into a vast myriad of military badges, ribbons, pins, rosettes, and other kinds of memorabilia that were liberally conferred upon the veterans for attendance and participation in post ceremonies, in parades, in reunions and all sorts of G.A.R. related activities. These various and sundry decorations were happily worn by the veterans on their uniforms and in some photos of the period, the Grand Army men seem to have been generously distinguished for their war service, but, alas, most of these medals and insignia were simply awarded for active participation in veterans' activities.

Principles

The organization of the G.A.R. was based upon three objectives: fraternity, charity, and loyalty. Fraternity, the first ideal was encouraged through regular, locally scheduled meetings and joint gatherings with members from other posts. Their Campfire was the most popular activity. Here, a group of comrades sat in their hall or around dinner tables, singing old war songs, recounting wartime experiences, and swapping accounts of their deeds. The annual state and national Encampments, attracted thousands of members. Cities in twenty-two states from Maine to Oregon hosted the veterans. Railroads offered special discounted rates and scheduled special trains. Many members who wished to relive their war years found quarters in tents provided by the U.S. Army or National Guard.

To promote its second objective, charity, the veterans set up a fund for the relief of needy veterans, widows, and orphans. This fund was used for medical, burial and housing expenses, and for purchases of food and household goods. Loans were arranged, and sometimes the veterans found work for the needy. The G.A.R. was active in promoting soldiers' and orphans' homes; through its efforts soldiers' homes were established in sixteen states and orphanages in seven states by 1890. The soldiers' homes were later transferred to the federal government.

Loyalty, the third ideal, was fostered through constant reminders to those who had not lived through the war of the significance of the G.A.R. in reuniting a divided nation. The organization spent much of its time soliciting funds for monuments and memorials, busts and equestrian statues of Union soldiers and heroes, granite shafts, tablets, urns, and mounted cannon. The G.A.R. also encouraged the preservation of Civil War sites, relics, and historic documents. Cannons and field-pieces were placed in many towns or courthouse squares and parks. The members also gave battle-stained flags, mementos, and documents to local museums.

In 1906, General Order No. 4 was issued from the National Headquarters of the Grand Army which summarized and encapsulated the meaning of membership in the order, and the desire to fill the ranks of the dwindling post of the order.

Membership in the Grand Army of the Republic is not a matter of sentiment, but of duty. Organized to promote the highest and best interests of the survivors of the armed forces of the Union in the War of the Rebellion, during the forty years of its history, it has broadened its work and exemplified the best qualities of American citizenship. With scarce an exception, every community in which a G.A.R. post exists has felt the quickening inspiration of that loyalty to country and to home which saved the Union and made the Republic a world power among nations of the earth. Quickly responsive to the magnanimous words of the great soldier, our comrade, Ulysses S. Grant (Grant was a member of Philadelphia's Meade Post #1), in his last days the order has given great effort to his noble sentiment 'Let us have peace.' We have helped to bind up the Nation's wounds, we have not failed to heed the cry of the widow and his orphan, and throughout the land we have upheld in practical form the glories of fraternity, charity and loyalty.

The Commander-in-Chief again urges upon his comrades the duty of recruiting our ranks. Soldierly assurances of renewed interest have reached the Headquarters and it is expected that the work will be pushed with great vigor. With a complete list of ex-soldiers and sailors outside of our organization in the custody of each post, intelligent effort will not fail if there be hearty interest in the mission of the Grand Army of the Republic. Push recruiting.¹

African American and Native American Veterans

Another remarkable aspect of the Grand Army of the Republic is its benevolent treatment of the African American veterans of army and navy service. Close to 180,000 African Americans served nobly in the armed forces of the United States during the Civil War. Their service was gallant and contributed significantly to the Union victory and preservation of the Union. Dozens of African American veterans had received the Medal of Honor for valor in combat. From the foundation of the order in a time of institutionalized prejudice and overt racism, the order was color-blind, and officially

¹ Philadelphia Inquirer. December 16, 1906

treated all veterans equally. Most posts were integrated, although there were all 'colored' posts in larger towns and cities, formed where the African American veterans lived and where they felt most welcome and comfortable, similarly to all German posts, or all Navy or all Cavalry posts in certain metropolitan areas. Philadelphia is emblematic with thirty-six posts in a large city, including three 'colored' posts located in African-American neighborhoods, an all-German speaking post in the German ethnic area, a post exclusively for Naval veterans; one for cavalry, others which attracted certain localized military units, such as the Pennsylvania Reserves post and the Philadelphia Brigade post.

In 1889 the Shawano Post sponsored a G.A.R. Post Joseph A. Ledergerber Post 261 (their white commander) at Keshena (Menominee Reservation) which was the first Indian G.A.R. organization in the United States with Joe Venus, the Agency clerk as Commander. A second Indian Post Oneida Post 228 which was founded in 1899. In Brown County it was named after the tribe. Peter Bread was first Commander.

Pensions

In 1862 President Lincoln approved a bill granting pensions for soldiers who received permanent disability as a result of their military service. An 1879 act was liberalized to include simplified conditions of payment. After that, the G.A.R. became a recognized pressure group. The fate of some presidential elections was dependent upon the candidate's support of G.A.R.-sponsored pension bills. President Grover Cleveland was defeated for re-election in 1888 in large part because of his veto of a Dependent Pension Bill. President Benjamin Harrison was elected at least partly because of his definite commitment to support pension legislation. The Disability Pension Act of 1890 insured a pension to every veteran who had ninety days of military service and some type of disability, not necessarily incurred during or as a result of the war service. Since most ex-soldiers were at least middle aged, the act became an almost universal entitlement for every veteran. For many decades the federal Government paid claims to all Union veterans of the Civil War and their survivors.

Political Considerations

The early days of the G.A.R. saw the organization grow, but the specter of politics nagged the order as a divisive issue. Naturally, the order contained veterans of both political parties and both sides sought to persuade their comrades on political issues during meetings and sessions at the local post hall. This debate led to a split within the order. Democrats and the Democratic Press saw the G.A.R. as an organ of the Republican Party and its political agenda. The press inspired a wave of popular prejudice against the order by publicizing its political work and even charged that it was plotting violence

against the Democrats. They feared the G.A.R. was becoming a vehicle for the interests of the Union Part, viz. the G.O.P. Eventually even reliable Unionist papers such as the New York Tribune under its redoubtable editor, Horace Greeley attacked the G.A.R. for its political work on behalf of the Republican Party out of a fear that the organization's policy of sustaining hatreds from the war would delay restoration of peaceful relations between the North and South. This conflict as well as procedural problems within the rules of the order where 'levels of membership' had met with disapproval and many new members decided to leave the G.A.R. and membership declined precipitously. It was at this point that the order wisely decided to approve a 'non-partisanship' pledge for all post business. The order would now concentrate their mission on 'benevolence and patriotism'. In response, new groupings of veterans of both parties were formed to pursue a political agenda. Among these veterans' groups were the 'Boys in Blue'; 'McClellan Legion' and similar. These clubs threw themselves into the current political dispute between the Radicals in Congress and President Andrew Johnson. Some veterans even volunteered to serve as volunteer guards to one side of the other. What began to bring the veterans to membership in the Grand Army was the lessening of political tensions after the election of 1876; the benevolence of the G.A.R. and outreach to veterans and their concerns; the granting of public land to veterans with the support of the G.A.R.; a new bounty bill, increasing pension benefits, and the entertainments available at the post meetings and reunions, such as the Campfire evenings where the old songs were sung, soldiers' tales told and comradeship revived. The new feelings of support and respect for the G.A.R. brought a number of prominent men to membership, including Grant, in 1877; Sherman in 1880; Hayes in 1881; Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain; James Tanner, a double amputee, who was later named Federal Commissioner of Pensions; and others.

Allied Orders

The G.A.R. initially created the Sons of Veterans organization in 1881 as their descendant organization; whose designation was later changed to the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW) to ensure the preservation of their sacred mission after the Union war veterans had all passed on. The G.A.R. also engendered several auxiliary organizations such as the Woman's Relief Corps, Ladies of the G.A.R. and Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War, 1861-1865, all of which are still active. A comparable organization for Confederate veterans was the United Confederate Veterans (U.C.V.) which in many ways paralleled the G.A.R., but the U.C.V. never generated the membership and support that the G.A.R. enjoyed. The auxiliary of the U.C.V. was the United Daughters of the Confederacy which still remains quite active in memorializing

the Confederate cause and the Sons of Confederate Veterans (S.C.V.), similar in function to the Sons of Union Veterans.

Records of the G.A.R.

After the order reached its zenith in the 1890's, the membership began to experience a steady decline due to age and mortality. The pace of decline accelerated into the early 20th Century. By the time of World War I, many posts began to decline precipitously as the Grand Army men reached their 80's and even 90's. When only a small number of G.A.R. men remained, the practice of closing the post, and surrendering its post books and records began. According to some Department rules, the posts which were becoming defunct, were supposed to notify the Department and forward all records there. But this practice was not always followed, especially in smaller towns and posts. Unfortunately this resulted in the loss of many post records. Sometimes, the post passed the records and memorabilia on to one of the new veterans' organizations, such as the United Spanish War Veterans (1899), soon to be renamed the Veterans of Foreign Wars (V.F.W.), and the American Legion (1919) to carry on its legacy. The haphazard procedures in closing the old posts was disastrous to the history of the Grand Army of the Republic, because there was never a central source for storing records and there was never a national membership list. In this way, many sets of irretrievable records of Union Civil War veterans were lost along with a wealth of priceless relics and memorabilia.

Selected G.A.R. files and records were placed in manuscript and archival repositories. The location of extant G.A.R. records can be determined by referring to *A Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961) edited by Philip M. Hamer and the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* (Washington: Library of Congress, began with 1959/61; ceased with index 1991-1993). And the Library of Congress and Smithsonian also maintain large collections relating to the G.A.R.

The areas of interest and possible research in the Grand Army of the Republic in such collections are many: the founding and growth of veterans' societies; social aspects and charitable activities of Civil War veterans; the establishment and development of orphans' and veterans' pensions, and the post-war political activity of Union veterans. Also, the collections have abundant information about the basic motivation and attitudes of Union Civil War veterans. Researchers and scholars can study the organization and activities of the G.A.R. as one of the first pension lobbies. They can trace the attitudes of Union veterans toward government and the civil service, and study the role of the organization in the social milieu of the Gilded Age and later. Represented in the collections are the general orders, and encampment proceedings of the national and state

departments and published documents of various posts. These publications highlight the G.A.R.'s inner workings and place them in post-Civil War American culture.

Legacy of the G.A.R.

With the growing respect for the veterans and their role in preserving the Union, so also grew membership in the G.A.R. The Order's focus on education, pensions, patriotism, and respect for the flag all contributed to the high position it occupied in the social fabric of the Nation. In 1890, the G.A.R. first called for its wartime marching song, *The Star-Spangled Banner* be named the national anthem, and for a national observance for Flag Day. It was the Grand Army that instituted the tradition of standing during the playing of *The Star-Spangled Banner*, and the salute to the flag.

The influence of the G.A.R. led to the creation of the Soldiers Homes for debilitated veterans of the late 19th century into the 20th Century, which subsequently evolved into the modern United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

The G.A.R.'s principal legacy to the nation, however, is the annual observance of May 30 as Decoration Day, or more recently, Memorial Day, now relegated to a long weekend on the last weekend in May. In 1868, General Order #11 of the G.A.R. called for May 30 to be designated as a day of memorial and commemoration for the heroic dead who had fallen while serving the Union in the armed forces and Major General John Alexander Logan, Commander-in-Chief of the G.A.R., requested members of all posts to decorate the graves of their fallen comrades with flowers. This idea came from his wife, who had seen Confederate graves decorated by Southern women in Virginia and elsewhere. By the next year the observance became well established. Members of local posts in communities throughout the nation visited veterans' graves and decorated them with flowers, flags and wreaths, and honored the dead with eulogies and ceremonies. The practice of placing flag holders on veterans' graves has in the last century become generalized and was taken over by local Veterans' Affairs offices in counties, as well as by the federal Veterans' Administration. This legacy of the Grand Army of the Republic is still maintained by the more modern veterans' organizations to this day, as well as for the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War. It was only after the First World War, when the aged veterans could no longer conduct observances, that the Civil War character of Decoration Day was replaced by ceremonies for the more recent war dead.

End of an Era

The Grand Army of the Republic was to be a unique organization: No child

could be born to it, No proclamation of President could bestow it. No University could issue a diploma from it. No act of Congress could award it, No wealth of an individual and purchase a membership. Its doors opened only on presentation of a military document parchment which certified to an honorable discharge from the armed forces of the Nation during the War against the Rebellion, and unlike any other organization, no new blood could be admitted. It had no predecessor and could have no successor. When the last member passed on, the 'order' would fade away forever, but the work and spirit of service would go on through their authorized descendant organizations.

The sounding of Taps for the Grand Army of the Republic marked the close of a great era in American History. They lived to see the country become a strong, unified Nation. They take their place in the ranks of the immortals who have gone before.²

² "Taps Sounds for the Grand Army of the Republic," the *Banner*, Fall 1956.