



Grand Army of the Republic.

WHAT IS A GAR RECORD?



Introduction

Introduction

The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) was a nation-wide veterans' organization that existed from 1866 until the death of its last member in 1956. Membership was limited to honorably discharged Union veterans of the American Civil War. With thousands of local chapters and hundreds of thousands of members to keep track of, a nationwide record keeping system was developed. Details on what types of records were kept and who managed them are discussed below.

Organizational Structure of the GAR

Three organizational levels of the GAR

The GAR operated at three organizational levels: National, regional (called a Department) and community (called a Post). Posts reported to Departments, and Departments reported to the National organization. Each level was headed by a Commander (the national leader being the Commander-in-Chief), who was assisted by various elected and appointed officers who managed the day-to-day business of the GAR. Posts met frequently (in many cases more than once a month), but the National and most Department organizations only convened as bodies once a year. These annual GAR conventions (Encampments) were typically held for a few days, and their locations varied each year.

Post Records

The Post was the primary GAR organizational unit, formed in a community, township or county to serve veterans in the immediate area. Although there was some variation in the naming practice for Posts in the early years of the GAR, a standardized naming system eventually evolved using a combination of a name and numeral. The namesake of a Post was chosen by the organizing members, with the selection often based on the name of a Civil War hero, popular politician, famous battle, important place, or patriotic theme. Posts could not be named for living persons, and no two Posts in a Department could adopt same name.

Application for Post Charter

Post Charter

To organize a new GAR Post, a group of not less than ten persons eligible to join the GAR had to submit an *Application for Charter* to the appropriate GAR Department (or to the Commander-in-Chief in regions not covered by a Department). If accepted, the applicants were assigned a Post number and (after 1869) were permitted to select a namesake to supplement the number as an identifier. The *Charter* (a large certificate granting the Post the authority to conduct business) was issued by the Department Commander. One of the most important documents held by a GAR Post, the Charter was kept on prominent display during meetings. In addition to proclaiming the name

and number of the Post, the Charter listed the names of the charter members and the date the Post was authorized. Charters and other Post records were to be surrendered to the Department in the event the Post disbanded. In some cases, more than one Charter exists for a Post. This was a common occurrence (especially in the later years of the GAR) when neighboring Posts opted to consolidate into one. The regulations of the GAR required that their original Charters be relinquished and a new Charter issued using a newly selected namesake (if desired) but retaining the number of the senior Post.

Post Officers

The elected and appointed officers of a Post were: Commander (P.C.), Senior Vice-Commander (S.V.C.), Junior Vice-Commander (J.V.C.), Adjutant (Adj.), Quartermaster (Q.M.), Surgeon (Surg.), Chaplain (Chap.), Officer of the Day (O.D.), Officer of the Guard (O.G.), Patriotic Instructor (Pat. Ins. or P.I.), Sergeant-Major (S.M.), and Quartermaster-Sergeant (Q.M.S.). Several of these officers were responsible for record-keeping.

Rituals, Rules and Regulations, Manual, and Blue Book (See National Organization records below)

The Post Commander delegated most paperwork to his officers. He was responsible for making sure all the books were in order, and that adequate supplies for the routine business of the Post were in stock. At meetings, he was expected to have in his possession copies of the *Rituals* and cards, *Rules and Regulations*, the *Manual*, and the *Grand Army Blue Book*.

Most Post records were maintained by the Post Adjutant (secretary) and the Post Quartermaster (treasurer), sometimes assisted by the Post Sergeant-Major and Post Quartermaster-Sergeant, respectively.

Form "A" Adjutant Report

The Post Adjutant and Quartermaster were required to submit a quarterly (in later years semi-annual) report called a *Consolidated Form A and B* to the Department. *Form A* was the Adjutant's responsibility. It contained a roster of the Post officers, muster roll of new members or transfers, membership gains and losses. Column headings for the muster roll included: Name, Age, Birthplace, Residence, Entry into Service (Date, Rank, Co., Regiment or Ship), Final Discharge (Date, Rank, Co., Regiment or Ship), and Cause of Discharge. The list of membership losses included a column heading for the cause of the loss of the member. *Form B* was the Quartermaster's responsibility. It summarized the financial state of the Post, and was divided into the following sections: Receipts, Disbursements, Report of the Relief Fund, and Value of Post Property. Copies of these forms were kept in the Department files, with duplicates sometimes kept by the Post.

Form "B" Quartermaster Report

Record-keeping duties of the Post Adjutant

The regulations of the GAR required the Post Adjutant keep the following "books properly prepared":

1. The Rules and Regulations of the Grand Army of the Republic and the By-Laws of the Post, to be signed by every comrade on his becoming a member.
2. A Descriptive Book, ruled to embrace every fact contained in the application as well as the date of acceptance and muster, and a column for general remarks

3. A Journal of proceedings of the Post, after the same shall be corrected and approved.
4. An Order Book, in which shall be recorded all orders and circulars issued by the Post Commander.
5. A Letter Book.
6. An Endorsement and Memorandum Book.
7. A Black Book, in which shall be recorded the names of all rejected candidates; also all members of the Grand Army who have been dishonorably discharged.

Post By-Laws *By-Laws* for GAR Posts are booklets containing rules of conduct for the organization. Not all Posts created these documents, especially in cases where the Post was a small one. Published *By-Laws* typically follow a standard format, containing objects of the organization, rules for membership, titles and roles of officers, and various sections on the conduct of Post business. *By-Laws* booklets also sometimes contain current rosters of officers and Post members.

Post Descriptive Book The *Descriptive Book* and *Minute Books* generally contain the most important information relating to the activities and membership of the Post. *Descriptive Books* were commercially printed and were often purchased by Posts for ease of record keeping. The columns allowed the Adjutant to transfer information from new member applications into a single volume of membership records. Column headings in the *Descriptive Book* included:

Contents of the Post Descriptive Book Entry Number, Name, Age, Birthplace, Residence, Occupation, Entry into Service (Date, Rank, Co., Regiment), Final Discharge (Date, Rank, Co., Regiment), Length of Service, Cause of Discharge, Date of Muster into the GAR, When Honorably Discharged, When Suspended, When Dropped, When Dismissed, When Reinstated, Nature of Wounds Received, When and in What Engagements Wounded, and Remarks.

Post Minute Books (a.k.a., Journals) *Minute Books* (also called *Journals*) contain summaries of the minutes of meetings and other Post activities. These records were typically maintained in bound blank books or ledgers, with no standardized format. In some cases, eulogies for deceased comrades, orders, resolutions, and other special items are found in these books.

Post Cash Book, Ledger & Receipt Book The Post Quartermaster was responsible for the Post finances, and was directed to maintain a *Cash-Book*, *Ledger* and *Receipt-Book*. As a matter of practicality, these records were sometimes managed in a single volume. Requisitions for supplies were processed using a standardized form called a *Form I*.

Form "F" The Post Surgeon was responsible for keeping records of wounds and other war injuries reported by comrades in the Post. If directed, he was required to submit a *Medical Report* called a *Form F*) to the Department Medical Director. The Post Surgeon maintained a record book known as the Post *Medical Descriptive Book*. Preprinted volumes of this type were commercially available, helping to simplify the record-keeping. Typical column headings included:

Contents of the Post Medical Descriptive Reference Number from the Post Descriptive Book, Number (for reference by the Post Surgeon), Name, Where Born, How and Where Serving When Wounded, Rank, Regiment/Battery/Vessel,

Book Name of Army or Squadron, Branch of Service, How Often Wounded, Age When Wounded, Date When Wounded, What Engagement Wounded In, What Part of the Body Wounded In, What Are the Permanent Results of Wound if any, What Kind of Missile, and Remarks.

Chaplain and Patriotic Inst. Records The Post Chaplain and Post Patriotic Instructor were not required to keep record books, however, routine reports were expected from them. Standardized blank forms were provided by the GAR for this purpose.

Post Orders and Order Book GAR Posts also issued a variety of paper ephemera, including letters and certificates. *Orders* (sometimes compiled in an *Order Book*) were issued by the Post Commander to announce important directives or actions. Copies of official *Correspondence* (often on custom printed letterhead) are often found as loose sheets, but might also be archived in a *Post Letter Book*. Records of disciplinary actions are uncommon, but when found are usually in records of *Court Martial*. Names of men who were rejected from membership or dishonorably discharged from the GAR were banned from re-applying for membership, and their names were kept in a *Black Book*.

Applications for Membership Records pertaining to changes in the membership status of a GAR comrade were often retained by the Post. Common among these were *Applications for Membership*. When an applicant was accepted into the Post, the information provided on the application form was copied into the Post's *Descriptive Book* and also submitted to the Department on *Form A*. Comrades who relocated to another place of residence and wished to transfer to another GAR Post were issued a *Transfer* card or certificate from their former Post. This allowed them to request membership in the new Post without having to go through the full application process. *Certificates of Absence* are less common, and were granted by a Post to a comrade for a specified period of up to a year, provided he paid his dues in advance. *Certificates of Honorable Discharge* are also not common, and were granted to comrades in good standing who, for various reasons (often health related), could no longer continue as dues-paying members of the organization.

Transfer Card
Certificate of Absence
Certificate of Honorable Discharge
Post Rosters *Rosters* for Posts were not routinely published. Some were prepared for special occasions, such as when their Department hosted a National Encampment. *Post Rosters* were also usually published in pamphlets of *By-Laws*, giving a glimpse of the Post membership at the time of publication.

Photographs
Film footage
Post flags and banners Miscellaneous Post records include historic *photographs* (especially group photos) historic *film footage*, *Post flags* and *banners* used in ceremonies and parades (often marked with the name of the Post), and legal documents including deeds. See the Public Records section of this report for other non-GAR records associated with GAR posts.

Personal War Sketches *Personal War Sketches* were sometimes compiled by Posts for living and deceased members. The Post Historian was usually tasked with assembling them. These short biographies were based on a standardized interview, with the responses hand entered on ruled pages in commercially produced blank books. The majority of these books were published in the 1890's by the firm of Louis H. Everts & Co. of Philadelphia, featuring elaborately decorated covers and pages customized with the Post name and

number. Space on each page was reserved to enter the Comrade's date and place of birth, highlights of his war record, his membership history in the GAR, and certification of authenticity of the record by the Comrade, Post Commander, Post Adjutant, and/or Post Historian. In addition to pages reserved for the personal biographical sketches, these volumes often contained additional sections for the inclusion of extended biographies, Resolutions of the Post for deceased Comrades, and records of burials.

Department Records

Journal of
Proceedings
(Department)

Departments were regional administrative units of the GAR. Their geographic area typically extended over one or more states. GAR Departments convened for a few days each year at a Department Encampment to conduct business. Department Encampments typically rotated from place to place each year, as a courtesy to the traveling members. Decisions and results of elections at Department Encampments were published annually in *Department Encampment Proceedings* (also called *Journals of Proceedings*). These volumes typically contain reports of the various Department officers, lists of Posts and the delegates to the Department Encampment (including Past Post and Department Commanders), and summaries of Department Orders issued over the course of the previous year. The officer reports often include details on the formation of new Posts during the course of the year, as well as information on Posts that disbanded or were suspended.

Department
Officers

The elected and appointed officers of a Department were: Commander (D.C.), Senior Vice Commander (S.V.D.C.), Junior Vice-Commander (J.V.D.C), Assistant Adjutant-General (A.A.G.), Assistant Quartermaster-General (A.Q.M.G. or A.Q.M. Gen'l.), Inspector (I. or Ins.), Judge-Advocate (J.A.), Chief Mustering Officer (C.M.O.), Medical Director, Chaplain (Chap.), and Council of Administration (consisting of the above officers plus five elected members).

The Department Commander delegated most paperwork to his officers. He was responsible for forwarding all reports and dues to National Headquarters, and was responsible for seeing to it that all orders received from Headquarters were properly published and obeyed. He and the Assistant Adjutant-General were responsible for endorsing and issuing *Charters* to Posts.

Department
Order Book,
Letter Book,
Endorsement &
Memorandum
Book

The Assistant Adjutant-General handled most of the record-keeping for the Department. He was tasked with keeping correct records of proceedings of the Department Encampments and meetings of the Department Council of Administration. He was responsible for handling correspondence and orders, transmitting reports to National Headquarters, and maintaining a Department *Order-Book*, *Letter-Book*, *Endorsement- and Memorandum-Book*, and files of all orders, reports and correspondence received and remaining in his office.

The Assistant Quartermaster-General held the funds, securities, vouchers and property

Form "I" of the Department, and filled requisitions drawn by the Assistant Adjutant-General. Requisitions for supplies were filled using a standardized blank form called a *Form I*.

Other standardized blank forms used by Department officers were as follows:

Form "C" *Form C*: Prepared by the Assistant Adjutant-General, was a consolidation of returns reported by Post Adjutants on *Form A*. It was forwarded to the Adjutant-General (National officer) via the Department Commander.

Form "D" *Form D*: Prepared by the Assistant Quartermaster-General, was a consolidation of returns reported by Post Quartermasters on *Form B*. It was forwarded to the Adjutant-General via the Department Commander.

Form "E" (or "E-2") *Form E* (later called *Form E-2*): Compiled by the Department Inspector, was a consolidation of returns reported by Assistant Department Inspectors on *Form H*.

Form "G" *Form G*: Prepared by the Medical Director, was a consolidation of returns reported by Post Surgeons (or Post Adjutants) on *Form F*. It was forwarded by the Medical Director to the Surgeon-General.

Form "H" *Form H*: Post Inspection Reports, were returns of inspections of Posts performed by Assistant Department Inspectors. The form changed over the years, but the typical form of the 1890's included the following questions:

- Questions in a Post Inspection
- Do you require the officers and members of your Post to wear the GAR badge at all meetings and parades?
 - How many GAR uniforms have you in your Post?
 - Do the members of your Post adhere strictly to the principles of the Order?
 - Number of members in good standing?
 - Is the work in the ritual committed to memory and properly performed?
 - Are the officers and guards uniformed and equipped?
 - Are the members uniformed and equipped?
 - How many muskets are owned by the Post?
 - Are the officers regular in their attendance?
 - Are the members regular in their attendance?
 - Do they exhibit an interest in the Post?
 - Are the records complete and well kept?
 - Are orders received, regularly read to the Post and on file?
 - Are they duly obeyed?
 - Have all reports and dues been forwarded?
 - Amount charged at muster-in?
 - Amount charged to members for dues quarterly?
 - Is there a relief fund for charitable purposes?
 - How much money is in the relief fund?
 - Amount expended for charity from Dec. 31, _____, to Dec. 31, _____ ?
 - Amount of money and securities in the hands of the Quartermaster?
 - Value of other property owned by the Post?
 - Is there a Corps of the W.R.C. connected with the Post?
 - Is there a Camp of the Sons of Veterans, and do you encourage the organization of the same?
 - What are the prospects of the Post?

Department
Chaplain &
Patriotic Inst.
Forms

Other standardized blank forms were used by the Department Chaplain and Department Patriotic Instructor. These forms had no letter designation.

National Organization Records

Journal of
Encampment
Proceedings
(National)

Rules &
Regulations

Grand Army
Blue Book

Manual

Ritual

Services

The National level of the GAR was the ultimate governing body of the order. National officers were elected and appointed annually to carry out basic business throughout the fiscal year, but the National level's function as a governing body was limited to just a few days a year when the annual convention (called the National Encampment) assembled. These conventions were held at different locations around the country from year to year, usually hosted by major cities. The National Encampment was the ultimate authority in matters of GAR business. Decisions and elections made at the National Encampment were published as books of *National Encampment Proceedings* (also called *Journals of Proceedings*). The National level of the GAR also published *Rules and Regulations* which were updated as necessary. Annotated versions of the Rules and Regulations -- known as *Grand Army Blue Books* -- contained guidelines for the governance of the GAR at all levels of the organization, along with summaries of official policy decisions and opinions made by national authorities. The National level of the GAR also published the *Manual* (a digest of the regulations for officers) and the *Ritual* (standard ceremonial practices), which provided guidance for conducting meetings and inducting new members. A book of *Services* was also issued, providing guidelines for the conduct of Memorial Day services, officer installations, funeral services, Post inspections, etc. Copies of these volumes can be found at major libraries, and a many are available online in digital form.

National Officers

The elected and appointed officers of a National organization of the GAR were: Commander-in-Chief (C. in C.), Senior Vice-Commander-in-Chief (S.V. C. in C.), Junior Vice-Commander-in-Chief (J. V. C. in C.), Adjutant-General (A.G.), Quartermaster-General (Q.M.G.), Inspector-General (I.G. or Ins. G.), Judge-Advocate-General (J.A.G.), Surgeon-General (S.G.), Chaplain-in-Chief (Chap. in C.), and Council of Administration (consisting of the above officers and one elected comrade from each Department). National Aides-de-Camp were also appointed to assist the Commander-in-Chief as necessary.

National Officer
Reports

National officers were expected to “present to the National Encampment, at each annual session, full and detailed reports, in print, of the operations of their respective departments, and when retiring from office shall deliver to their successors all moneys, books, and other property of the Grand Army of the Republic in their possession, or under their control.” The annual officer reports were published in the *Proceedings* of the National Encampments, providing valuable insights into the workings of the GAR each year.

The Commander-in-Chief was charged with enforcing the *Rules and Regulations* of the

General Orders

GAR, along with orders of the National Encampment and Council of Administration. He issued *General Orders* as necessary to accomplish this (among the most famous of these was General Order No. 11, issued by C. in C. John Logan in 1868, proclaiming Memorial Day). The Commander-in-Chief and the Adjutant-General were responsible for endorsing and issuing *Charters* to new Departments. He was the presiding officer at National Encampments and meetings of the Council of Administration and had the authority to decide questions of law or usage (subject to appeal to a National Encampment).

Department Charters

Correspondence

The Adjutant-General was charged with the bulk of record keeping at the National level of the GAR. He was responsible for keeping correct records of proceedings of National Encampments and meetings of the National Council of Administration. He conducted *Correspondence* and forwarded *Orders* issued by the Commander-in-Chief. It was his responsibility to prepare the necessary blank books and forms necessary for the GAR to conduct business at all levels of the organization. Additional books and records were also his responsibility, if directed to keep them by the Commander-in-Chief or National Encampment.

The Quartermaster-General held the funds, vouchers and securities of the National Encampment, and filled requisitions drawn upon him by the Adjutant-General. He was responsible for distributing all blank books and forms developed by the Adjutant-General for conducting the routine business of the GAR, and charged a "reasonable and uniform price for the same."

List of National Encampments

A list of the years and locations of the National Encampments of the GAR is provided below:

1866 – (1 st) Indianapolis, IN	1867 – (no encampment)	1868 – (2 nd) Philadelphia, PA
1869 – (3 rd) Cincinnati, OH	1870 – (4 th) Washington, D.C.	1871 – (5 th) Boston, MA
1872 – (6 th) Cleveland, OH	1873 – (7 th) New Haven, CT	1874 – (8 th) Harrisburg, PA
1875 – (9 th) Chicago, IL	1876 – (10 th) Philadelphia, PA	1877 – (11 th) Providence, RI
1878 – (12 th) Springfield, MA	1879 – (13 th) Albany, NY	1880 – (14 th) Dayton, OH
1881 – (15 th) Indianapolis, IN	1882 – (16 th) Baltimore, MD	1883 – (17 th) Denver, CO
1884 – (18 th) Minneapolis, MN	1885 – (19 th) Portland, ME	1886 – (20 th) San Francisco, CA
1887 – (21 st) St. Louis, MO	1888 – (22 nd) Columbus, OH	1889 – (23 rd) Milwaukee, WI
1890 – (24 th) Boston, MA	1891 – (25 th) Detroit, MI	1892 – (26 th) Washington, D.C.
1893 – (27 th) Indianapolis, IN	1894 – (28 th) Pittsburgh, PA	1895 – (29 th) Louisville, KY
1896 – (30 th) St. Paul, MN	1897 – (31 st) Buffalo, NY	1898 – (32 nd) Cincinnati, OH
1899 – (33 rd) Philadelphia, PA	1900 – (34 th) Chicago, IL	1901 – (35 th) Cleveland, OH
1902 – (36 th) Washington, D.C.	1903 – (37 th) San Francisco, CA	1904 – (38 th) Boston, MA
1905 – (39 th) Denver, CO	1906 – (40 th) Minneapolis, MN	1907 – (41 st) Saratoga Springs, NY
1908 – (42 nd) Toledo, OH	1909 – (43 rd) Salt Lake City, UT	1910 – (44 th) Atlantic City, NJ
1911 – (45 th) Rochester, NY	1912 – (46 th) Los Angeles, CA	1913 – (47 th) Chattanooga, TN
1914 – (48 th) Detroit, MI	1915 – (49 th) Washington, D.C.	1916 – (50 th) Kansas City, MO
1917 – (51 st) Boston, MA	1918 – (52 nd) Portland, OR	1919 – (53 rd) Columbus, OH
1920 – (54 th) Indianapolis, IN	1921 – (55 th) Indianapolis, IN	1922 – (56 th) Des Moines, IA
1923 – (57 th) Milwaukee, WI	1924 – (58 th) Boston, MA	1925 – (59 th) Grand Rapids, MI
1926 – (60 th) Des Moines, IA	1927 – (61 st) Grand Rapids, MI	1928 – (62 nd) Denver, CO
1929 – (63 rd) Portland, ME	1930 – (64 th) Cincinnati, OH	1931 – (65 th) Des Moines, IA
1932 – (66 th) Springfield, IL	1933 – (67 th) St. Paul, MN	1934 – (68 th) Rochester, NY
1935 – (69 th) Grand Rapids, MI	1936 – (70 th) Washington, D.C.	1937 – (71 st) Madison, WI
1938 – (72 nd) Des Moines, IA	1939 – (73 rd) Pittsburgh, PA	1940 – (74 th) Springfield, IL

1941 – (75 th) Columbus, OH	1942 – (76 th) Indianapolis, IN	1943 – (77 th) Milwaukee, WI
1944 – (78 th) Des Moines, IA	1945 – (79 th) Columbus, OH	1946 – (80 th) Indianapolis, IN
1947 – (81 st) Cleveland, OH	1948 – (82 nd) Grand Rapids, MI	1949 – (83 rd) Indianapolis, IN

Public Records

Local and County Records.

Real Estate
Deeds

Larger GAR Posts owned the property and buildings used as their meeting halls, so *Deeds* and related documents may exist as public records. True copies of these documents were often entered in local official records, and can be checked to determine the book and page(s) in which they were recorded. Many Posts also owned (either by purchase or donation) plots in cemeteries. *Cemetery Deeds* to GAR plots were sometimes legally recorded in county records, or they may be referenced in records held by the cemetery (for example, minutes of a Cemetery Association). Cemeteries also sometimes maintained Lists of Soldier Burials, which can be a valuable resource for GAR burials.

Cemetery
Deeds

State Records.

Articles of
Incorporation

GAR Posts and Departments were legal entities, and in some cases they incorporated in the states where they intended to do business. Corporate files are typically maintained by the Secretary of State, where Articles on Incorporation and other filings are kept. Dates of incorporation and suspension of GAR Posts and Departments are sometimes available on Secretary of State websites, and in some cases, copies of actual documents can be downloaded.

Federal Records.

When the GAR dissolved in 1956, its National records were transferred to the Library of Congress. The badges, flags and official seal of the GAR were transferred to the Smithsonian Institution. Although the items are acknowledged as being in the Smithsonian collections, there has been difficulty in physically locating them.

Other Records

Newspaper Publications

National Tribune

The GAR had no official national newspaper, however, a number independently owned newspapers catered to the interests of Union Veterans of the Civil War. Foremost among these was the *National Tribune*, based in Washington, D.C., which is generally regarded as the national organ of the GAR (although it was not officially sanctioned). The *National Tribune* was published from 1877 to 1917, first as a monthly newspaper (until 1881), then weekly.

Other newspapers catering to the interests of Civil War veterans included the following (source: Library of Congress):

Other
Newspapers

American Tribune (Indianapolis 1880-1906)
Grand Army Journal (Washington, DC)
Grand Army Record (Boston 1885-1901)
Grand Army Review (New York, 1885-)
Grand Army Sentinel (Nashville, Tenn. 1885-86)
Great Republic (Washington, D.C. 1866-68)
Soldier's Record (Madison, Wis., 1866-76)
Veteran (Columbus, Ohio 1881-83)
Soldier's Friend (New York, 1864-70)

What is a GAR Record, version 2013.01

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