Mormons and the Grand Army of the Republic

Kenneth L. Alford Ph.D.
Brigham Young University - Provo, alford@byu.edu

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Organized shortly following the end of the Civil War, the Grand Army of the Republic promoted veteran causes for over eighty years.

(Courtesy of Kenneth L. Alford)
CHAPTER 18

Kenneth L. Alford

MORMONS AND THE GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC

“Fraternity, charity, and loyalty.”
Motto of the Grand Army of the Republic

After achieving a tremendous victory at the battle of Austerlitz in 1805, Napoleon ordered a commemorative medal made for the participants. On the obverse was the image of the emperor; on the reverse was the name of the battle and the simple words “I was there.”¹ When the Civil War ended in 1865, there were over one million men serving in the United States armed forces; during the entire war, over two and a half million men served the nation.² They viewed themselves as soldiers who had seen “all the vicissitudes of war and had triumphed in the greatest cause that had ever brought happiness to the civilized world.”³ As the soldiers, sailors, and marines were discharged, it was natural to “desire that the friendships formed should be maintained through life,”⁴ as bonds forged in combat can be “the most enduring of any in this world, outside of the family circle.”⁵ Many of its members accorded the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) “the same loyalty and devotion that they did to the regiments in which they once fought.”⁶ The GAR—which grew from humble beginnings to become “one of the most powerful organizations of the country”⁷—helped to fill that need and gave each Union veteran an opportunity to proclaim that “I, too, was there.”⁸

OVERVIEW OF THE GAR

Like earlier American wars, the Civil War spawned a variety of veteran organizations.⁹ The first Civil War veteran’s society, the Third Army Corps Union, was organized during the war in March 1862. Similar societies were organized throughout the war and during the sometimes awkward peace that followed.¹⁰
The Grand Army of the Republic was officially organized in 1866 as a fraternal organization for everyone “who, on land or sea, honorably served their country” during the Civil War. The first GAR post was created on April 6, 1866, at Decatur, Illinois, and additional posts followed in rapid succession. A total of almost nine thousand local GAR posts were organized, and by 1890 there were over four hundred thousand members. (As shown in figure 1, the number of potential GAR members was extremely large—based on the number of Civil War veterans in the nation. Note that Utah’s Civil War veterans were not included.)

GAR membership was for male Union veterans—“a membership drawn only from the limited number who were privileged to wear the uniform of their country in the days of its great peril.” Any veteran who honorably served between April 12, 1861, and April 9, 1865, “in the war for the suppression of the rebellion” in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or a state regiment “called into active service” was eligible to join. While officially it “countenanced nothing of personal animosities against those who . . . so wrongfully arrayed themselves against their country,” former Confederate soldiers and sailors were not eligible and needed not

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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Figure 1. Number of men furnished for the Union Army by state, territory, and District of Columbia (from April 15, 1861, to the end of the Civil War). Note that Utah’s total (just over 100) is not listed. (Source: D. A. Ellis, Grand Army of the Republic: History of the Order in the U.S. by Counties [n.p.: Press of Historical Publishing, 1892], 22)
apply. Latter-day Saint Civil War veterans from Utah’s Lot Smith Cavalry Company would learn that initially they were not welcome to join the GAR either.

Beginning at Indianapolis in November 1866, the Grand Army of the Republic held an annual National Encampment, providing an opportunity for veterans from across the nation to assemble. During the first few years of its existence, the GAR played an active political role as well—nominating and supporting candidates for national, state, and local political offices. At the National Encampment in 1868, many GAR members recognized that the organization needed to remove itself from politics and be “placed upon a purely nonpartisan basis.” In 1869, the GAR’s Rules and Regulations were amended to require that “no officer or comrade of the Grand Army of the Republic shall in any manner use this organization for partisan purposes, and no discussion of partisan questions shall be permitted at any of its meetings.” The party politics that so marked the GAR’s earliest years slowly dissipated, and the organization was later able to report that it had “outgrown the mistakes of its infancy.”

The GAR was a quasi-military organization. Members wore a uniform—a double-breasted, dark blue coat with bronze buttons, and a black wide-brimmed slouch felt hat, with golden wreath insignia and cord. A bronze star badge hung from a small chiffon flag. The star in relief depicted a soldier and sailor clasping hands in front of a figure of Liberty. Members wore these insignia in their lapels, so they could be easily identified.”

Military vocabulary and motifs found their way into the organization in a variety of ways. New members did not simply join
Meetings were called encampments. Local organizations were described as posts rather than chapters and were named after Union Army heroes or prominent officers. Announcements and bulletins were issued as general or special orders. National and local leadership positions mimicked the military command and staff structure with commanders, adjutants general, chiefs of staff, aides-de-camp, surgeons, chaplains, quartermasters, quartermaster-sergeants, inspectors-general, officers of the day, judge advocates general, and guards. In recognition of the comradery that veterans felt during the war, GAR members referred to each other as “comrade” in correspondence and conversation. GAR posts provided companionship, a chance to reminisce, and opportunities to serve.

The constitution of the GAR specified it was to be loosely patterned after the organization of the United States Army during the Civil War with a national headquarters, departments (usually found at the state or multistate level), districts (often created at the county level), and posts (established in cities and towns). District organizations were “composed of one delegate for every ten members. . . . Each District was entitled to one delegate in the Department Organization, which [met] once in each year. The National Organization was to be composed of two delegates from each Department.”

GAR activity occurred primarily at the local level; district and department organizations actually existed for only a few days each year during state and national encampments.

Beginning in 1868, there were three degrees of GAR membership: recruit, soldier, and veteran. Each grade had its own “ritual, signs, grips, and passwords.” Recruits, for example, could not speak, vote, or hold office. The multitier membership system substantially reduced membership, though, and was generally abandoned after a few years. The GAR did not need an artificial rank system because all of its members had served in military units and earned real ranks. Rank earned during their military service “played no small part in determining rank in the GAR.”

So that women, especially the wives and children of Civil War veterans, could participate in activities to promote fraternity, charity, and loyalty, two GAR women’s organizations were established. The “Woman’s Relief Corps, Auxiliary to the Grand Army of the Republic,” was organized in Denver, Colorado, on July 25–26, 1883. The Woman’s Relief Corps was open to “the mothers, wives, daughters and sisters of Union soldiers, sailors and marines who aided in putting down the Rebellion.” Members were to be “women of good moral character and correct deportment, who have not given aid and comfort to the enemies of the Union” and at least sixteen years old. Local units were called corps (instead of posts).
Each corps was to be associated with a GAR post and “must bear the name of the Post to which it is auxiliary.”31 In 1896, the year Utah was granted statehood, the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic was established on a national basis.32 Similar to the Woman’s Relief Corps but with broader membership eligibility, the preamble of the new group’s Rules and Regulations stated that the organization was established for “the loyal mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, granddaughters and blood kin nieces of soldiers, sailors and marines, who served honorably in aiding and maintaining the integrity and supremacy of the National Government during the Rebellion, and ex-army [n]urses, and all lineal female descendants.”33 Local units of the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic were called circles (instead of posts), and five or more circles could be organized into a Ladies Department. Ladies circles could associate with a GAR post but were not required to do so. Unlike the Woman’s Relief Corps, Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic circles could select their own name.

THE GAR IN UTAH

The first Civil War veterans’ fraternal group organized in Utah—the Improved Order of Red Men—was established with seventy-one charter members on March 4, 1872, in Salt Lake City.34 The observation by historian John Gary Maxwell that “formal Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) posts in Utah did not exist until 1878” may be incorrect.35 The first GAR post in Utah was reportedly established at Camp Douglas prior to 1878 and was “composed of United States soldiers on garrison duty”; it was closed due to “a change of stations of the regiment.”36 If anyone recorded the date that the Camp Douglas GAR Post was established, that fact awaits discovery. One of the earliest references to GAR members in Utah, though, is a May 27, 1873, newspaper article in the Salt Lake Tribune regarding the observance of Decoration Day (Memorial Day) on May 30. The news report referred to GAR members and GAR committees but did not clearly state whether or not they were acting under the auspices of an organized Utah GAR post. It seems likely, though, that they could have been members of the GAR Post at Camp Douglas.

During the spring of 1873, GAR members solicited funds from the Salt Lake community at large to “decorate the graves of their fellow comrades” on the upcoming Decoration Day. Brigham Young and other Latter-day Saint leaders made donations which offended some of the GAR members. A “committee of three appointed from the Grand Army of the Republic,” chaired by Patrick Edward Connor (the first commander of Camp Douglas), resolved to return all donations received from “Brigham Young and other leading Mormons.”37

In a general committee meeting the previous evening “called by members of the Grand Army of the Republic at Independence Hall [in Salt Lake City],” General Connor declared that he desired “all loyal citizens to participate in the [grave-decorating]
ceremony, and those of the audience who chose to come he would like to meet him at his office after adjournment” (presumably to ensure that they met his definition of being a loyal citizen). The prevailing attitude of Utah’s GAR members toward The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can be seen in the resolution passed by that committee on May 26, 1873:

Inasmuch as the Grand Army of the Republic is about to commemorate the day [Decoration Day 1873], and decorate the graves of their fellow comrades, and it appearing that Brigham Young, the President of the Mormon Church, and other leaders of said church, which is disloyal, and in its principles and practices opposed to Republican Government, for the defense of which our fallen brethren gave their lives, have contributed certain sums of money to assist in defraying the expenses of such decoration, and it further being self-evident that said contributions were not made in good faith, but to subserve the ulterior sinister motives of said Brigham Young, and whereas the acceptance of said contributions would be an insult to the memory of our fellow comrades, Therefore it is Resolved, That the General Committee be and are hereby ordered

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Totals 7,441 432,510
to refund to Brigham Young and all other Mormon leaders, all moneys contributed by them for the purpose.38

The first permanent post in Utah—James B. McKean Post 1, whose namesake served as a colonel of New York Volunteers during the Civil War and as chief justice of the Superior Court of Utah Territory from 1870 to 1875—was mustered in at Salt Lake City on September 18, 1878, with George R. Maxwell, a former federal marshal and distinguished Civil War veteran, commanding.39 The George R. Maxwell Post 2 was created in Salt Lake City shortly thereafter.40 A third Utah GAR post, the John A. Dix Post 3 in Ogden (whose namesake was a well-known major general of New York Militia and former U.S. senator), was organized in a doctor’s office by General Paul Van Der Voort, GAR’s vice commander in chief, on April 25, 1879. The Ogden Standard newspaper noted that “all honorably discharged federal soldiers” were “cordially invited to be present.”41 It is doubtful that any Latter-day Saint veterans attended. In the nineteenth century, GAR members in Utah consisted of men “who had immigrated, usually men who had come to join mining or business ventures or who had arrived in Utah as appointed federal officers.”42 By 1888, there were still just three GAR posts in Utah Territory.43 In 1890, Utah had the smallest GAR membership and least number of posts of any state or territory in the nation.44 (See figure 2.)

While an exhaustive search of GAR membership in Utah is yet to be conducted, it appears that GAR members in Utah during the nineteenth century consisted exclusively of non-Mormon veterans. There are many possible reasons why non-Mormons may not have wanted to offer GAR membership to Latter-day Saints. First, Utah’s few Civil War soldiers were not viewed as authentic veterans. Utahns generally were perceived, not without cause, as having watched the Civil War from the sidelines. The Lot Smith Cavalry Company, Utah Territory’s only active duty Civil War military unit, faced no Confederate forces in battle and lost no soldiers in combat—plus they served for only ninety days. Even today, most Utahns are unaware of Utah’s limited military participation during the Civil War. Second, Utah GAR members generally believed that Mormons were disloyal to the Union—a charge which, if upheld, would have made them ineligible for GAR membership. Article IV of the GAR Rules and Regulations specified that “no person shall be eligible to membership who has at any time born arms against the United States,”45 and many Utah GAR members felt that rule excluded from membership any Mormon, such as Lot Smith, who had taken up arms during the Utah War, even if they later served honorably in the Union Army.
The Utah GAR saw itself as an organization which “stood up to maintain the honor of the flag on the picket line between two civilizations”—American and Mormon. A third reason was that the GAR was openly against the practice of polygamy.

**THE GAR AND POLYGAMY**

The GAR dedicated itself to the defense of freedom and the abolition of any form of slavery, which included, from the perspective of many GAR members, polygamy. Politically, GAR membership leaned toward the Republican Party, which may partially explain the antithesis many GAR members felt toward polygamy—the remaining vestige of the “twin relics of barbarism” denounced at Philadelphia during the first Republican National Convention in 1856.

From its earliest beginnings, the GAR officially invited “all honorably discharged soldiers and sailors . . . desirous of becoming members of the Grand Army of the Republic” to join its ranks. For an organization “whose cardinal principles [were] Fraternity, Charity and Loyalty” and which viewed itself “as one of the noblest in its works and purposes of any fraternal and charitable association known,” the Grand Army of the Republic in Utah took a dim view regarding extending membership to veterans who served during 1862 in the Lot Smith Utah Cavalry. Although it defined itself as an organization that welcomed “all who were among the Nation’s defenders, demanding no vows of allegiance except to the country and the flag,” the reality was more complicated when it involved Utah’s Latter-day Saint veterans.

Article I in the Declaration of Principles, GAR’s constitution, affirmed that “soldiers of the Volunteer Army of the United States during the Rebellion of 1861–5” had a responsibility to actively preserve “the grand results of the war, the fruits of their labor and toil, so as to benefit the deserving and worthy.” To many GAR members, this meant that they felt duty bound to oppose, as both oppressive and un-American, the Mormon practice of polygamy. Utah Civil War veterans who were Mormon were viewed as being neither eligible nor deserving of GAR membership. At the first National Encampment in 1866, E. W. H. Ellis, a member from Indiana, introduced the “Rallying Song of the Grand Army of the Republic” sung to the tune of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” The first and last verses expressed the righteous indignation that many non-Mormon GAR members in Utah would later express against the Latter-day Saints:

**[Stanza 1]**

There’s a mighty army gathering
throughout the East and West,
With banners gaily flaunting
they speed along with zest,
And the motto they are shouting,
“We fight for the oppressed,
As we go marching on.”

**[Stanza 6]**

The glorious hour is coming;
the day is drawing nigh,
When slavery and oppression
shall lay them down and die,
And universal freedom
shall be echoed through the sky,
As they go marching on.

In a July 1883 address to the National Encampment in Denver, GAR commander in chief Paul Van Der Voort directly identified polygamy as “a crime as hideous as treason, and as damnable as slavery.” He
explained that he and the GAR’s national surgeon general had visited the GAR Provisional Department of Utah on April 21 and 22 earlier that year as part of an 1883 Grand Army tour. After observing that he was “cordially received by as gallant a band of comrades as ever wore our badge,” Van Der Voort expressed his belief that “the organization in Utah have had many difficulties to contend with. They are upholding the banner of the Grand Army in what is practically a foreign and hostile community. They are in the front of an enemy, treacherous and defiant, and who are trampling daily under foot the laws of the land with perfect impunity.” Making direct reference to the practice of polygamy, Van Der Voort continued his verbal assault: “The Grand Army in Utah are the natural protectors of the glory and honor of the flag. They here . . . grandly illustrate the shining glories of our Order. Let us demand that earnest, true men who know and have faced the evil and sin day and night, shall be designated to codify the laws heretofore passed through the dictates of the leaders of this unholy Church. That it shall be written and declared that no Mormon shall vote or hold any office whatever . . . and that the emigration of recruits to build up this damning crime shall be stopped at once and forever.”

Van Der Voort saw the Grand Army of the Republic “as a factor on the side of the government in the contest waging against treason [polygamy].”

Following Commander in Chief Van Der Voort’s 1883 address, the national GAR Committee on Resolutions recommended that the National Encampment adopt the following resolution: “Resolved, That we heartily endorse and concur in the views so forcibly and eloquently expressed in the address upon the barbaric crime of polygamy, and we most earnestly invite Congress to devise such measures as will speedily and effectually remove that blot upon the morals and purity of the nation.”

Relations between Mormons and GAR members became particularly tense during 1885 and 1886. On the Fourth of July, 1885, many American flags in Salt Lake City were lowered to half-staff at locations across the city, including City Hall, the County Court House, the Salt Lake Theater, the Deseret News office, John Taylor’s home, the Garden House, and the Tithing Office. The July 8 issue of the Deseret News included a lengthy article entitled “Loyalty of the Latter-day Saints” in which Mormons were declared “the most loyal community within the pale of the Republic of the United States,” but “they have no reason for engaging in expressions of joy under existing circumstances.” Flags were flown at half-staff, the article reported, as a symbol of mourning for lost freedoms.
To Mormons, displaying the flag at half-staff represented their distress and frustration regarding the 1882 Edmunds Act and other laws aimed at curtailing polygamy. To GAR members, flying the nation’s flag at half-staff was, as the Salt Lake Tribune labeled it, “the mark of treason” and a “day . . . never [to] be forgotten.” The American flag was held in extreme symbolic and emotional esteem by GAR veterans, and the GAR went to great lengths to honor and venerate the flag. Historian Stuart McConnell called the flag “the object of a sudden and intense cult that would ultimately produce Flag Day and the Pledge of Allegiance.” To illustrate the depth of feeling members felt for the American flag, for many years GAR posts ended each meeting with a closing ceremony that included this exchange:

Commander.—Junior Vice-Commander, how may our country be kept undivided and our flag maintained unsullied?

Junior Vice-Commander.—By eternal vigilance, which is the price of liberty.

Commander.—Officer of the Day, what should be the doom of all traitors?

Officer of the Day (stepping in front of the Commander, smartly drawing his sword, and assuming the position of “guard,” as do all the officers.)—The Penalty of Treason is Death.

All the Comrades Respond.—The penalty of Treason is Death.

The tensions created on July 4 lingered for several days. On July 11, George R. Maxwell spoke during a meeting in the federal court house at Salt Lake City and vowed that “never again, so long as a member of the G.A.R. is alive in Utah will that flag be trailed (lowered) again.” The Tribune reported that several “Mormon hooligans” tried unsuccessfully to interrupt and “hoot” him.

The Deseret News responded the following week by commenting that “the idea of the Tribune being mad over the alleged insult by ‘Mormons’ to the American flag, is as supremely ridiculous as the assumption by the irresponsible blatherskites who turn the crank of that organ, that any insult whatever was intended.” Intended or not, GAR veterans were deeply offended by the action and remembered it for many years.

The following summer, as a partial response to the July 4 half-staff flag incident in 1885, Utah GAR members organized a series of “camp fires” (July 24, 29, 30, 31, and August 1) in a large skating rink in Salt Lake City and invited national GAR leaders to speak. GAR leaders traveling to the national encampment in San Francisco passed through Utah, so it was an easy adjustment to their schedule. Salt Lake City saw “delegation after delegation arrive by rail, proceed from the depot to the Grand Army headquarters in the city, and there give
utterance to the most pronounced opposition to what the Mormons are doing.” Characterizing the meetings as “anti-Mormon’ rabies,” the Deseret News reported that “the skating rink was filled to overflowing by members of the G.A.R. and others curious to witness the antics of the anti-Mormon ring.” Mormon historian B. H. Roberts reported that “a bitter anti-Mormon flavor was imparted to each camp-fire gathering—hatred and rage chiefly characterized what was said.” During one campfire meeting, Reverend Doctor Dunning, of Boston, said that “the boys in blue . . . would do it (fight) again, and bring freedom to the slaves of Utah—the women.” The U.S. district attorney for Utah declared that “the Mormon Church was steeped in disloyalty. . . . One of its prime purposes was the overthrow of the American home. . . . He had it from good authority that when Lincoln was assassinated and the news reached here (i.e., Utah) that Brigham Young then governor [sic] could not repress his exultation”—Roberts added in a footnote that it was “the revamping of an old slander many times refuted.” Charles W. Bennett, an attorney, charged that the citizens of Utah experienced less liberty “than anywhere else, [even] than in Russia, or in Ireland. . . . The people in Utah were as un-American as were Fiji Islanders.” One speaker, identified only as Colonel Jones from New York, declared that “a greater Power than man put slavery down, and the boys in blue were his chosen instruments for the work. He sent the boys in blue here [to Salt Lake City] to say to the country they would put polygamy down.” Many other GAR members spoke in a similar vein.

During the 1886 Twentieth National Encampment held at San Francisco soon afterward, the GAR’s national Committee on Resolutions considered and adopted a resolution that had originated with the James B. McKean GAR post in Salt Lake City and was forwarded to the national headquarters “with the hearty approval” of the GAR department of Utah:

Whereas, The preservation of the unity of the Government is the highest duty of all; and
whereas, it is the duty of citizens everywhere to try and enforce the laws; and whereas, any interference by a so-called ecclesiastical authority with temporal affairs is a menace to the institutions of the country; and
whereas, the Mormon leaders have for years taught, and continue to teach, their people to look upon the Government as an enemy, and continue an organization by and through which the laws are nullified and the flag insulted; now therefore, we, the members of the Grand Army of the Republic, in encampment assembled, recognizing the facts, demand that the flag be everywhere respected, and do resolve that it is the duty of the American people to require their representatives in Congress to pass such laws as will effectually release the Territories of the United States from the control of said organization, and will insure to every one the protection of the laws.

That same day, at a meeting of the Women’s Relief Corps, Mrs. Ida L. Lincoln, president of the department of Utah, introduced this companion resolution that was also adopted:

Whereas—There exists in these United States an organization professedly
independent of and hostile to the Government, known as “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” which already holds absolute political control of one great Territory, and is rapidly gaining ascendancy in two others. 

Whereas, This organization by its public teaching of the right to violate national law, when it conflicts with their religious practices, by its doctrines of State sovereignty so fully tested and settled by the civil war; by its overt acts of dishonoring the flag by trailing it in the dust, in contempt of national authority, and by half-masting the same on our national holiday, expressive of the sentiment, “Liberty is dead in Utah;” by these things it has inculcated disloyalty and arrayed itself against the principles of American unity; . . .

Resolved, That we deem it imperative upon us to enter our protest against the vile practices and the continued disloyalty of Mormonism, and call upon the loyal women of this Nation to encourage such legislation as shall most effectually suppress the evil.68

The following year during the 1887 national encampment, the same GAR committee debated an additional resolution regarding Mormonism:

Resolved, That the Grand Army of the Republic now, as in the past, views with detestation the determined purposes of the polygamous leaders of the Mormon majority of Utah to continue the nullification of National Laws. And we warn Congress and the country against the pending attempt to enlarge the powers of fugitives from justice by creating a State out of that Territory; which, if successful, would be rewarding treason for continued insult to the flag and nullification of wholesome laws; place in the Union a theocratic State antagonistic to good order and the welfare of the nation, and an enemy to the cherished principles of free government. All of which is at variance with every sacred principle of our Order.

After a vigorous debate, during which the national commander affirmed that “the Grand Army has repeatedly set its stamp of disapproval on such a treasurably organization [the Latter-day Saints], such a damnable outrage on society [polygamy] as exists in the Territory of Utah to-day,”69 the committee tabled that resolution because “its discussion would be foreign to the work and objects of the Grand Army of the Republic”—not because they disagreed with it.70

The Mormon practice of polygamy was a continuing irritant to Utah’s GAR members. Throughout the 1880s, Kate Field of New York City—described by the Washington National Tribune as “one of the most rarely gifted women of this or any other country”—was an outspoken critic of polygamy. The Salt Lake Tribune gushed that “it is no exaggeration to say that among the American women writers of today . . . no one has the breath, the vigor, the originality and the power of Kate Field.”71 Her “crusade against the Mormon iniquity [polygamy]” received the endorsement of the GAR’s national commander in chief and a “large portion of the G.A.R.” In September 1886, the McKean post in Salt Lake City unanimously adopted a preamble and resolution condemning Mormonism. The preamble asserted that their post “has been on outpost duty for years, and during
all that time has been surrounded by people of a community opposed to our government, at enmity with American institutions, hostile to our flag, and as in all human probability the unequal contest between the minority of citizens of Utah who are loyal and the majority of the Mormon Church will, without outside assistance, be protected until no soldier of 1865 will be alive.” The preamble continued by noting that the “careful, long continued, and intelligent study by Kate Field of the issues between the government of the United States and the Mormon power in Utah is well known to us as comrades and citizens... [and] invites the admiration of all good citizens, and richly entitles her to the gratitude of all members of the Grand Army of the Republic.” The McKean post formally resolved that “with gratitude to her we cordially and earnestly commend Kate Field to our commander-in-chief as the one especially fitted to present the facts... to the country; and we respectfully request that he commend her in her good work to our comrades everywhere.” GAR opposition to polygamy continued until Latter-day Saint Church President Wilford Woodruff issued the Manifesto in 1890.

**MORMON MEMBERSHIP IN THE GAR**

A resolution passed during the 1904 GAR state encampment extended to Utah’s Congressional delegation the “grateful appreciation of their kindly services” in “procuring the allowance and increase of pensions from the government for many of our worthy comrades” and hoped that “the patriotic efforts of our friends [in Congress] will be continued until every soldier in Utah who deserves and needs a pension shall have [the] same allowed him.” Little did they recognize that Utah’s major Civil War pension conflict would involve Mormon veterans from the Lot Smith Utah Cavalry who served just ninety days in the spring and summer of 1862.

Based on the war of words that existed between the GAR and Latter-day Saints during the 1880s, it is not surprising that there were apparently no nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint GAR members who served during the Civil War from Utah. There are many possible factors that may have contributed to Mormons finally applying for membership in Utah GAR posts—the end of polygamy, Utah’s receiving statehood, or a desire to secure a federal pension. Sentimentality may also have played a role, as...
expressed in this poem that was popular among GAR members:

There are bonds of all sorts
in this world of ours,
Fetters of friendship and ties
of flowers,
And true lovers’ knots, I wean;
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.74

Regardless of what the actual motivations were, Mormon Civil War veterans in Utah began applying for GAR membership after the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1907, Seymour B. Young, a nephew of Brigham Young who served as a corporal in the Lot Smith Utah Cavalry and was then serving as senior president of the Presidents of the Seventy in the Church, applied for GAR membership with the George R. Maxwell Post in Salt Lake City. His application was referred to a three-man investigating committee, which reported his application favorably “without having made such an investigation as is required by the rules and regulations” (according to the Department of Utah’s 1909 annual encampment record). The GAR post members voted on his application; his application was rejected, and his membership fee was returned to him. In 1908, the George R. Maxwell Post commander “ordered a new ballot on the same application,” and his application was “declared favorable.” Other post members questioned the legality of the second vote and demanded that the matter be “brought before the Department Commander, asking that the ballot be declared illegal and be set aside.” The Utah department commander referred the case to the department judge advocate for a legal decision. The judge advocate held that the second ballot “was void, and that the Commander should set it aside.”75

The historian Margaret Fisher claimed that by the summer of 1909 “although many [Mormon Utah Civil War veterans] had applied for membership, only two, Charles Crismon, Jr., and Dr. Harvey C. Hullinger, had been allowed admittance into the Utah G.A.R. Posts, which were comprised of men who had enlisted in other states but had later taken up residence in Utah . . . The Lot Smith Company, Utah Volunteers, who although eligible to become members of the Grand Army of the Republic, had been denied that privilege because of religious differences.”76

To complicate the issue regarding eligibility of Lot Smith Company veterans to join the GAR, an earlier ruling by the federal pension bureau board declared that Utah Cavalry veterans were ineligible to receive federal Civil War pensions. However, in December 1909, X. J. L. Davenport, commissioner of the federal Bureau of Pensions, reinstated veteran status when he announced that “at one time it was held that this company [Lot Smith’s cavalry] was not organized for service in connection with the war of the rebellion. Recently the secretary has reversed his former holding and now holds that the company was enlisted for service in that war, and that this last decision gives pensionable status to the members of the organization under the act of February 6, 1907. This would seem to place them in the same position as soldiers who actually served at the front during the war.”77 The pension
bureau’s reversal meant that veterans of the Lot Smith Company would be “restored to a pensionable status . . . with back pension from [the] date of [their] rejection.”78

Controversy regarding the GAR membership eligibility of Lot Smith company veterans climaxed after Harvey C. Hullinger and Charles Crismon attended the 1910 GAR State Encampment in Salt Lake City as delegates from the O. O. Howard Post in Salt Lake City.79 Thomas Harris, a fellow Utah GAR member, “questioned their rights to membership.”80 The Department of Utah convened a Court of Inquiry to determine whether Lot Smith Company veterans were eligible for membership in the Grand Army of the Republic.81 After conducting an investigation into the military records of Crismon and Hullinger, the Utah Court of Inquiry concluded that “all charges were unfounded, and the Lot Smith men have an equal standing with any honorably discharged Union soldier.”82

Unhappy with the ruling, the commander of the Department of Utah, Thomas Lundy, appealed the decision of his own Court of Inquiry to the national commander in chief in February 1911. The appeal included testimony provided by R. Oehler, commander of the Maxwell Post in Salt Lake City, that “no member of the Lott [sic] Smith Company is eligible to membership in the G.A.R. . . . for the reason they were only emergency men, called out to protect the property of the Telegraph and Overland Mail Co., and not commanded by an officer of the United States Army.” Oehler admitted that Crismon and Hullinger were receiving United States Civil War pensions, but he requested that their GAR membership should be voided because they “testified before the Court of Inquiry that
they were under the command of Gen. Cregg of the 6th Iowa Cavalry. You will see,” Oehler continued, “by the enclosed letter from the Adjt. [Adjutant] Gen. of Iowa, that no such man as Gen. Cregg ever received any commission from the State of Iowa.”83 Harvey C. Hullinger was a poor speller, as his original diary confirms; the general to whom the Lot Smith Utah Cavalry reported was General Craig—not Cregg, a small point indeed. Oehler pleaded for “a square deal” and called the commander in chief’s attention “to the fact that Utah never furnished a man for the suppression of the Rebellion.” He emphatically denied that the actions taken against Crismon and Hullinger were “a political or religious fight, as there are a number of Mormon members belonging to the G.A.R. of this Department who have settled in Utah since the Civil War . . . men [who] have honorable records of service in the Civil War and they are not objected to.”84 (Who those Mormon GAR members could have been has yet to be determined.)

The GAR’s national judge advocate general, Thomas S. Hopkins, reviewed the appeals file and issued his decision on July 7, 1911. In his “Statement of the Case,” Hopkins reported the facts “as nearly as I can make out from the record.” Summarizing the call of the Lot Smith Company “by express direction of President Lincoln,” Hopkins noted that

Charles Chrisman [sic], Jr., and Harvey C. Hullinger . . . were discharged upon the expiration of their terms of service.

These comrades were subsequently admitted to membership in one of the Grand Army Posts in Salt Lake City.

After the lapse of considerable time, the question as to their eligibility was raised, and, if I may judge by the record, considerable bitterness of feeling has grown out of the case. There have been numerous proceedings, including appeals and a Court of Inquiry . . . Most of the facts alleged and denied in the record of the case, . . . are immaterial, and need not be considered. I have examined the official records in the War Department and find the determination of the question very simple. In fact, the confusion in these proceedings from first to last has arisen because no one has taken the pains to go to the root of the matter by examining the official records, which, of course, are conclusive in a case of this kind.

The records of the War Department show that Lott [sic] Smith’s Company of Utah Cavalry was duly mustered into the military service of the United States and thus became a part of the United States Army . . .

This organization was not a militia company, and the question as to whether or not it was in “active service and subject to the orders of the United States general officers,” has no bearing upon the case.85

Hopkins concluded that “this organization [Lot Smith’s Utah Cavalry] was just as much a part of the Army of the United States as were any of the regiments that formed the great armies of the east and west,” and then rendered his decision, as follows: “I, therefore, advise you that inasmuch as the official records of the government show that these men were duly mustered into the military
service of the United States on April 30, 1862, and were honorably discharged therefrom on the 14th day of August, 1862, they are eligible to membership in the Grand Army of the Republic.”

The 1911 Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth Annual Encampment of the Department of Utah acknowledged the ruling by the GAR’s national judge advocate general, and the department commander sent Utah Department Headquarters General Order Number 5 to each post in Utah declaring both Crismon and Hullinger to be members of the GAR. The matter was declared as “now finally settled and put at rest, and it is the duty of all Comrades to acquiesce in and obey the said decision and order.”

With the Civil War veteran status of Utah’s Lot Smith Company volunteers firmly and finally established, many of the Lot Smith Cavalry veterans worked to establish their own GAR post within the Department of Utah; the John Quincy Knowlton Post was organized on October 9, 1911. It was “customary in the Organization of the Grand Army to name a newly formed Post after a departed officer, who served in the Civil War. The Utah volunteers were very anxious to call their Post after the name of their captain, ‘Lot Smith,’” but the names of both Lot Smith and First Lieutenant Joseph S. Rawlins (second in command of the Lot Smith Company) were unacceptable to the Utah GAR organizations because of their active involvement during the Utah War. As a compromise, the new post was named after John Quincy Knowlton, who served with Lot Smith during 1862 as a second lieutenant. The first commander of the John Quincy Knowlton GAR Post was Seymour B. Young.

**UTAH WOMEN AND THE GAR**

Prior to 1909, only two GAR ladies circles had been established in Utah (one in Salt Lake City and the other in Ogden). During the 1909 National Encampment in Salt Lake City, Della R. Henry, a female delegate from Missouri, was elected national president of the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic. While in Utah, Mrs. Henry met and befriended Nellie L. Lyon (an active Utah Ladies GAR member) and appointed Mrs. Lyon as the Ladies GAR National Organizer. Within two days of her appointment, Mrs. Lyon established two additional ladies circles in Utah. Early in 1910, she organized the Lot Smith Circle No. 5, which immediately created a great furor “in the state between those who favored the new organization of the wives and daughters of the [Lot Smith] Utah volunteers, and those who were opposed to giving the ‘Mormons’ recognition.”

In June 1910, Mrs. Henry visited Utah for the purpose of creating the Ladies of the GAR Department of Utah. While visiting Salt Lake City, Mrs. Henry “was made the object of a bitter attack by the [Salt Lake] Tribune for declaring the women of the Lot Smith [GAR ladies] circle eligible to admission to the state department. However, Mrs. Henry stood by her guns and is quoted as saying that she is surprised that a newspaper in a city like Salt Lake would deliberately resort to false and misleading statements to cause friction in an
organization like the Ladies of the G.A.R.” Mrs. Henry proclaimed, “I know nothing of local conditions, religious, political or otherwise, which may have prompted the attack upon me and the Ladies of the G.A.R. but I do know that it was unjust and unwarranted. Anyone who will take the pains to inquire must know that religion and politics are eliminated in the affairs of the Grand Army of the Republic, as well as in the Ladies of the G.A.R. . . . Our constitution and fundamental principles do not discriminate against religious sects, and any good woman who comes within the requirements, whether she be Jew, Mormon or Gentile, is acceptable, and, in fact, solicited.” Anti-Mormon elements within the GAR asked Mrs. Henry to delay admitting the Lot Smith Circle until an investigation could be held. The Lot Smith Ladies Circle was organized in November 1910, but only after it was renamed the General George Washington Circle in order to satisfy political sensitivities within Utah’s GAR membership. The spouses of several Lot Smith Utah Cavalry soldiers, such as Margaret Fisher (wife of Joseph Armstrong Fisher, who served as a private in the Lot Smith Utah Cavalry), actively participated in Utah circles of the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic. The John Quincy Knowlton GAR Ladies Circle was organized at Farmington, Utah, in June 1912, and additional Utah Department ladies circles were named after Seymour B. Young (February 22, 1926) and Joseph S. Rawlins (April 1, 1926)—members of the Lot Smith Company.

THE 1909 GAR NATIONAL ENCAMPMENT

The first decade of the twentieth century contained small indications that the general GAR attitude toward Latter-day Saints may have begun to thaw a little. The Department of Utah’s 1907 report to the national organization about the observance of Flag Day in Utah, for example, included the generally positive comment that “on that day the Mormon forgot who was Brigham Young and the Gentile turned from his alleged wrongs and with one accord all the people in their hearts sang hosannahs to ‘the flag that makes us free.’” Following the turn of the century, an idea took root and grew regarding the desirability of Utah hosting a GAR national encampment. Serious discussion and planning for Salt Lake City to host the 1909 National Encampment began in 1907. During the Forty-Second National GAR Encampment at Toledo, Ohio, in September 1908, Comrade George B. Squires from Salt Lake City, who had served during the Civil War as a colonel in the Fifteenth Connecticut Infantry, made an impassioned plea for the 1909 National Encampment to be held at Salt Lake City. Squires said he came bearing the invitation of the Governor of Utah, the County of Salt Lake, the City of Salt Lake, the Commercial Club of Salt Lake, and “a telegram from the President of the Mormon Church. They [non-Mormons] tell you that Utah is not loyal. It is loyal from the crown of its head to the soles of its feet, from the tops of its mountains to the depths of its mines—Utah is loyal. . . . I tell you boys, we are in earnest, in deadly earnest. We want you to come to us; we want to open our hearts and our homes to you. Every home in Salt Lake City will be at your disposal.” A counterproposal was made to hold the 1909 National Encampment in the District of Columbia, but when the vote was taken, Salt Lake City received 461 of the
565 votes cast; the 1909 GAR encampment would be held at Salt Lake City. Considering the GAR’s anti-Mormon rhetoric during much of the nineteenth century, it was somewhat surprising that the organization’s leadership voted to hold the August 1909 annual convention in Utah. The 1909 National Encampment was a tremendous success. (The story of the GAR’s 1909 gathering in Salt Lake City is related in the following chapter.)

SUMMARY

In the decades following the Civil War, hundreds of thousands of Civil War veterans joined the GAR; “the camp fires of the Grand Army [burned] from ocean to ocean. Thousands and tens of thousands . . . of soldiers [met] nightly in fraternal greetings.” Sadly, though, it took almost half a century for Latter-day Saint Civil War veterans from the Lot Smith Utah Cavalry to be accepted as GAR members.

The Grand Army of the Republic considered itself “the grandest association of soldiers and sailors ever formed.” Many members felt a deep emotional attachment to the GAR—feelings that were captured in the first and last stanzas of a poem published in 1893 entitled “When We Were Boys in Blue”:

O comrades of the battle years,  
When lighting was our trade;  
O, you who charge with loyal cheers  
‘Gainst many a gay brigade!  
‘Tis joy to grasp again the hand  
O’ rare and cherished few—  
Frail remnant of the mighty band  
Who once were Boys in Blue.  
And soon these glad reunions here  
Will be forever past—  
The broken ranks that close the rear  
Will cross the ford at last;  
But on the world’s illustrious page  
Of heroes tried and true,  
Will live enshrined from age to age,  
The glorious Boys in Blue.

Each passing year brought “an ever-increasing death-rate among the survivors.” As the historian Margaret Fisher wrote in 1929, “Relentless time is thinning the ranks. One by one they are answering the call of the Great Commander. One by one they fail to respond to the reveille. Taps are sounded above them, and life’s battles for them are ended; peace comes to the soldiers’ weary heart. A few years more and the last member of the G.A.R. will have received his final marching orders; will have gone to witness the last grand review.”

With GAR membership restricted to Civil War veterans, the organization had a limited lifespan. Individual posts were closed upon the death of the last living member. When the final member of the Grand Army of the Republic, Albert Woolson, died in 1956, nearly thirty years after Mrs. Fisher’s writing, the organization died with him. There have been many veterans’ organizations in our nation’s history, but as an August 1909 issue of the Young Woman’s Journal concluded, “There has never been such an organization [as the Grand Army of the Republic] and there will never be another.”

Kenneth L. Alford is an associate professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University.
NOTES

5. Journal of the Twenty-Third Annual Session of the National Encampment Grand Army of the Republic (St. Louis, MO: A. Whipple, 1889), 34.
8. By the mid-twentieth century, with an attendant proliferation of military decorations and the wars that generated them, soldiers sometimes came to view this phrase more cynically than proudly, dubbing awards for the nonvalorous aspects of service like the Good Conduct Ribbon and even some campaign medals negatively as “I was there” decorations.
10. Societies such as the Army of the Tennessee (1865), the Army of the Cumberland (1868), the Army of the Ohio (1868), the Army of the James (1868), the Burnside Expedition and the Ninth Corps (1869), the Army and Navy of the Gulf (1869), the Army of the Potomac (1869), and many others. See Beath, History of the Grand Army of the Republic, 12–32.
14. Interestingly, one woman, Sarah Emma Edmonds (born Sarah Emma Edmondson in New Brunswick, Canada; December 1841–September 5, 1898) was granted GAR membership. Passing herself off as a man, Edmonds enlisted as “Private Franklin Thompson” on May 25, 1861, and was “mustered into the 2nd Michigan Infantry as a 3 year recruit.” Acting primarily as a mail carrier, she saw action at the Battles of Second Manassas and Fredericksburg in 1862. “In the spring of 1863, Edmonds and the 2nd Michigan were assigned to the Army of the Cumberland and sent to Kentucky. Edmonds contracted malaria and requested a furlough, which was denied. Not wanting to seek medical attention from the army for fear of discovery, Edmonds left her comrades in mid-April, never to return. ‘Franklin Thompson’ was subsequently charged with desertion. After her recovery, Edmonds, no longer in disguise, worked with the United States Christian Commission as a female nurse, from June 1863 until the end of the war.” She later married Linus Seelye and had three children. “In 1876, she attended a reunion of the 2nd Michigan and was warmly received by her comrades, who aided her in having the charge of desertion removed from her military records and supported her application for a military pension. After an eight year battle and an Act of Congress, ‘Franklin Thompson’ was cleared of desertion charges and awarded a pension in 1884. In 1897, Edmonds was admitted into the Grand Army of the Republic, the only woman member.” See “Sarah Emma Edmonds,” http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/biographies/sarah-emma-edmonds.html.
18. It was not until June 10, 1889, that a similar fraternal organization, the United Confederate Veterans, was organized in New Orleans for veterans who served in the armed forces of the Confederate States of America. The purpose of that organization was to provide “a general organization of Confederates on

19. Except for 1867, a National Encampment was held every year from 1866 through 1949. The last National Encampment, the eighty-third, was held at the site of the first National Encampment—Indianapolis (August 28–September 1, 1949). There were just sixteen living GAR members; six were able to attend. Library of Congress, “National Encampments: Bibliography,” http://www.loc.gov/rr/main/gar/national/natlist.html. See also http://suvcw.org/gar50.htm.


24. Images of both the Medal of Honor and the Grand Army of the Republic bronze star badge may be viewed online at http://www.homeofheroes.com/moh/corrections/purge_army.html.


35. Maxwell, Gettysburg to Great Salt Lake, 269. Maxwell’s related statement on page 271 that “the judgment of GAR historian Mary Dearing that ‘prior to 1883 efforts to give the society a foothold in Utah had failed’ is incorrect” appears to be a disagreement over Dearing’s use of the word “failed.” Dearing’s statement reads, “Before 1883, efforts to give the society a foothold in Utah had failed; only two posts existed there.” See Mary R. Dearing, Veterans in Politics: The Story of the G.A.R. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 288. Although her count of Utah GAR posts established before 1883 is incorrect, Dearing correctly acknowledged that GAR posts were established in Utah prior to 1883.


38. “Soldiers Meeting,” Salt Lake Tribune, May 27, 1873, 3; emphasis added.


42. Maxwell, Gettysburg to Great Salt Lake, 272.


48. Ellis, Grand Army of the Republic, 8.
49. Mary Simmerson Cunningham Logan, Reminiscences of a Soldier’s Wife (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), 216.
51. Dearing spells his name “Van Der Voort.” Beath spells his name “Vandervoort.”
58. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 208; and Dearing, Veterans in Politics, 475. Dearing notes that “in the ceremony recommended by the G.A.R., the students rose as a leader brought the flag forward. With right hand uplifted in salute they repeated, ‘I pledge allegiance to my flag and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.’ Then the hand was extended, palm upward, and the pupils sang ‘America.’ In primary classes the tots repeated, more or less in unison, ‘I give my hand, my head, my heart to my country. One country, one people, one flag.’” For additional information regarding the GARs veneration of the American flag, see Maxwell, Gettysburg to Great Salt Lake, 283–87; and McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 228–29.
61. “Twin Relics of Absurdity,” Deseret News, July 15, 1885, 4. Concern over whether or not celebration of the 24th of July would bring similar flag-related problems disappeared when “on July 24, flags in Utah—and across the nation—flew at half-mast with the death of Ulysses S. Grant.” See Maxwell, Gettysburg to Salt Lake City, 287.
71. “Miss Kate Field,” Salt Lake Tribune, April 29, 1883, 3. The Tribune quotes or makes frequent mention of Kate Field during the 1880s and 1890s. See, for example, “Kate Field’s Monologue,” Salt Lake Tribune, September 7, 1884, 5, or “The Mormon Evil,” Salt Lake Tribune, December 7, 1884, 3.
72. “Honors to Kate Field,” The (Chicago) Daily Inter Ocean, November 8, 1886, 4.
74. Journal of the Twenty-third Annual Session of the National Encampment Grand Army of the Republic (St. Louis: A Whipple, 1889), 34.
75. Twenty-Sixty and Twenty-Seventh Annual Encampments, Grand Army of the Republic, Department of Utah (Salt Lake City: Grand Army of the Republic, 1909), 40–41.
76. Margaret M. Fisher, ed., Utah and the Civil War; Being the Story of the Part Played by the People of Utah in That Great Conflict with Special Reference to the Lot Smith Expedition and the Robert T. Burton Expedition (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1929), 144–45. Margaret Fisher was the wife of Joseph Armstrong Fisher, a soldier in the Lot Smith Utah Cavalry.
79. Fisher suggested that Harris’s objection to Crisman and Hullinger’s GAR membership was raised during the 1909 GAR National Encampment in Salt Lake City and not the 1910 GAR Utah State Encampment. See Fisher, Utah and the Civil War, 144.

81. Journal of the Forty-Fifth Annual Encampment, Department of Massachusetts, Grand Army of the Republic (Boston: Griffith-Stillings, 1911), 155.


83. Proceedings of the Twenty-eighth and Twenty-ninth Annual Encampment, Department of Utah (Salt Lake City: Grand Army of the Republic, 1911), 49–51. Oehler served as Commander of the Department of Utah in 1913.


86. Journal of the Forty-Fifth Annual Encampment, 156.

87. Proceedings of the Twenty-eighth and Twenty-ninth Annual Encampment, Department of Utah (Salt Lake City: Grand Army of the Republic, 1911), 34–35.


89. Fisher, Utah and the Civil War, 150–55.

90. “Lot Smith Circle Is Duly Organized,” Deseret News, April 6, 1909, 5; and Fisher, Utah and the Civil War, 144–47. Margaret Fisher was the first president of the Lot Smith Circle of the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic.


92. Fisher, Utah and the Civil War, 146–47.


98. The following table lists known Utah GAR membership figures for the years surrounding the 1909 GAR National Encampment in Salt Lake City. (These figures are extracted from the official GAR National Encampment Journals for the year following each date; not all journals were available for review.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>UTAH POSTS</th>
<th>UTAH MEMBERSHIP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jun 1904</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun 1905</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun 1906</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun 1907</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 1910</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 1912</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please see the following chapter by Ardis Parshall for a discussion of the GAR’s 1909 National Encampment in Utah.


103. Fisher, Utah and the Civil War, 140.

104. “In 1881 the GAR formed the Sons of Veterans of the United States of America (SV) to carry on its traditions and memory long after the GAR had ceased to exist. Membership was open to any man who could prove ancestry to a member of the GAR or to a veteran eligible for membership in the GAR. In later years, men who did not have the ancestry to qualify for hereditary membership, but who demonstrated a genuine interest in the Civil War and could subscribe to the purpose and objectives of the SUVCW, were admitted as Associates. This practice continues today.” See Grand Army of the Republic Records Project, http://suvcw.org/.