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**This great fraternity: Nebraska's Grand Army of the Republic,  
1867-1920**

Richard Evans Keyes  
*University of Nebraska at Omaha*

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**THIS GREAT FRATERNITY:  
NEBRASKA'S GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC,  
1867-1920**

**A Thesis**

**Presented to the**

**Department of History**

**and the**

**Faculty of the Graduate College  
University of Nebraska**

**in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Master of Arts**

**University of Nebraska at Omaha**

**by**

**Richard Evans Keyes**

**August, 1997**

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**THESIS ACCEPTANCE**

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

**COMMITTEE**

Charles A. Peterson History  
Name Department

Gene A. Girvan Political Science

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Tommy R. Thompson  
Chairman

April 10, 1997  
Date

## ABSTRACT

America's Civil War transformed the political, economic and social landscape of the nation. Nowhere did this transformation manifest itself so clearly as in the lives of the men who flocked to the Union colors. The world of combat created a landscape of death, dismemberment and disease, while destroying Victorian concepts of knightliness and romance. Veterans spent a lifetime in successfully reintegrating themselves into the nation's mainstream, while constantly harkening back to the discipline and organizational skills learned in the war. Their efforts came to fruition with the establishment of the Grand Army of the Republic in 1866, which became the most politically powerful veterans' group in American history.

In Nebraska a combination of factors--the Homestead Act, the state's fertile soil, and an exponential growth in railroad building--attracted thousands of ex-soldiers in the postwar period. After a series of false starts (and an apparently near-fatal involvement in Republican party politics), the Grand Army coalesced under the leadership of Paul Vandervoort into a dynamic and influential group after 1878. Its recruiting efforts reflected a substantial number of the new state's upper and middle classes. Grand Army men who engaged in politics tended to do so in the Republican party, while simultaneously denying any political involvement by the veterans' organization.

The Grand Army's first initiatives in the community focused on Memorial Day celebrations, campfires and reunions. These communitarian projects flourished throughout the 1880s and 1890s, crossing class and generational lines, while bringing the

veteran into the forefront of Nebraska's social and political life. Such actions bore even more fruit when the Grand Army began to press for soldiers' homes and local relief for indigent veterans in the 1880s. Eventually two soldiers' homes would be built in Milford and Grand Island, while county agencies provided some funds for the needy veteran. During this same period, the state group marched at the national Grand Army's side as it fought for disability and service pensions from the national government.

In the 1890s immigration from southeast Europe, labor unrest and the rise of Populism caused the state Grand Army to join in a national battle over school textbook treatment of the Civil War. This drive eventually became subsumed by a desire to inculcate the teaching of patriotism in the schools. Military instruction, patriotic programs and veneration of the flag were the focal points of Grand Army initiatives from around 1896 to the beginning of World War I. As their numbers steadily decreased, survivors embarked on a spree of monument building throughout Nebraska, symbolizing the end of the Grand Army as a political force and its entrance into American memory.

## DEDICATION

To my wife Renate whose love and support carried me through,

To David Wells, of Omaha, in whose heart “the boys” still live,

and to

The memory of my great-grandfather, Sergeant John Gabriel Evans,  
Company C, 137th Volunteer Pennsylvania Infantry:  
Stone Mountain, Antietam, Chancellorsville.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the wisdom, patience and counsel of Dr. Tommy Thompson and Dr. Harl Dalstrom, who kept me on course in the shaping of this work. I must also thank Dr. William Pratt and Dr. Gerald Simmons, whose enthusiasm and scholarly approach to history helped prepare me for this endeavor. Many thanks are also due to Mrs. Charlotte Smith and Mrs. Deborah Smith of Alabama, typists extraordinaire, who deciphered my handwriting and carried out the arduous tasks of revision.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| PREFACE .....  | i   |
| CHAPTER ONE  |     |
| The Soldier's Landscape .....  | 1   |
| CHAPTER TWO  |     |
| Something Besides Politics: The Rise and Growth of an Organization ..... | 28  |
| CHAPTER THREE  |     |
| The Strife and Clash of Parties .....                                    | 77  |
| CHAPTER FOUR   |     |
| The Imaginary Camp: Reunions and Campfires .....                         | 103 |
| CHAPTER FIVE   |     |
| The Bivouac of the Dead: Nebraska Celebrates Memorial Day .....          | 130 |
| CHAPTER SIX  |     |
| An Act of Slow Justice .....   | 161 |
| CHAPTER SEVEN  |     |
| Pensions Are Due Them .....  | 183 |
| CHAPTER EIGHT  |     |
| "No Room For Anarchists": Patriotism and the Schoolhouse .....           | 223 |
| CHAPTER NINE   |     |
| Of Monuments, Memory, and Time .....                                     | 256 |
| SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY .....  | 283 |

## PREFACE

This is a study of the Grand Army of the Republic, a veterans' group once so powerful and influential that it might better have been styled the Grand Army nation. In 1866 a group of veterans came together in Illinois after America's bloodiest conflict for the stated purpose of rekindling "Fraternity, Loyalty and Charity." In the process of gathering the "brotherhood of war," the Grand Army would ensure the permanent commemoration of their comrades through the pageantry of Memorial Day celebrations. In addition, as a key late nineteenth century interest group, the Army would see to completion the establishment of a pension system which became a precursor for today's social security administration, and work to inculcate military and patriotic training in the schools. The reunions and campfires of the Army enabled the members to exist comfortably in the heart of the post-Civil War era's social and political life. Before the last veterans passed away they would witness the erection of monuments symbolizing their own passage into American memory.

And yes, "the boys," as they were so fond of calling one another, still live. Interest in the Civil War remains high to this day, evidenced by the continued production of battle studies, regimental histories, "The Civil War" on the Public Broadcasting System, reenactors' groups, and a variety of popular newsstand magazines. But while preparing this manuscript, the mention of "GAR" or "Grand Army" seemed to elicit only puzzlement even from historically literate acquaintances. Memory of the soldiers is strong; remembrance of the veterans has withered. Perhaps this is appropriate,

considering that so much of what the Grand Army of the Republic was about as an organization was a lasting nostalgia for the unrecoverable days of their youth. A poem dedicated to Major S. Pierre Remington, 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry, eloquently captured this longing:

Backward, turn backward, oh, time in your flight,  
Make me a soldier boy just for tonight  
Major, come back from the echoless shore,  
And take command again just as of yore.<sup>1</sup>

This work focuses on the rise and spread of Nebraska's portion of that Grand Army nation, and centers on the years between 1878 and the First World War. Nebraska's veterans, virtually all of whom had arrived in the state after the war, formed a microcosm of the Union armies. I have therefore found it useful to contextualize their progress within the path taken by the national GAR. This is not a linear organizational history. While the Nebraska Historical Society contains an endless litany of statistical data, there is a singular lack of material which could flesh out the hidden conflicts and controversies which abound within any large society. One striking example of this void is a General Order published in 1879, listing the names of twenty-three members at Omaha Post #2 who were dishonorably discharged--with no explanation.<sup>2</sup>

Much has been written concerning the efforts of Confederate veterans to deal with feelings of despair, helplessness and alienation in the aftermath of a shattering defeat. But Union soldiers had also been transformed by their battle experiences. Victory would not prevent them from believing themselves to be strangers in a strange land. They would spend a lifetime in successfully reintegrating themselves into the nation's

mainstream, and in many ways would set the national/state agenda for forty years. The world of combat and discipline was the seedtime for the Grand Army. Within that regimented landscape, so foreign to the civilian community, may be found the cement by which the veterans reformed themselves after the war: fraternity, ritual, patriotism, the cult of the flag, Memorial Day and campfires.

## ENDNOTES

1. Michael Kammen, Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 104.
2. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1879, 36-37. Nebraska's annual encampments from 1877 to 1895 were compiled by Assistant Adjutant-General Brad P. Cook under the title, Unpublished History of the Department of Nebraska, Grand Army of the Republic (Lincoln: State Journal Company, 1895). Later encampment proceedings were published separately with varying places of publication. Titles were styled as Journal of the (Number) Annual Session of the Department Encampment, Department of Nebraska, Grand Army of the Republic at (Place). For ease of usage I have changed this cumbersome notation to the style above. In referring to National GAR encampments I have conformed to the usage in Stuart McConnell's Glorious Contentment, and will so note them as, Journal of the National Encampment, year, page number.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Soldier's Landscape

Appomattox accomplished what Gettysburg, Shiloh, and the Wilderness could not--it sent the men home. In the aftermath of Lee's surrender, soldiers by the tens of thousands returned to an uncertain world. Two events soon occurred, separated in time by six months and in distance by several hundred miles, which symbolized veterans' attempts to recreate a group identity. On November 14, 1865, thirty ex-Union soldiers met in the United States courthouse in Indianapolis, Indiana, for the avowed purpose of forming an organization which would include "the entire soldiery of the State." A subsequent circular expressed their heart-felt desire to "perpetuate the good will and harmony cherished in trial and triumph in the field."<sup>1</sup> In May or June of 1866--the exact date is shrouded--six Confederate veterans assembled in Pulaski, Tennessee, to form the Ku Klux Klan. Unlike their counterparts to the north, these veterans would not announce their goals and appeared in public covered by hoods and robes.<sup>2</sup> Thus did victory and defeat structure the responses of two otherwise similar groups in coping with the new nation their combat had created. The first had convened in the very paradigm of the rule of law, a federal court house; the second, self-described as "hungering and thirsting for excitement," had met in a private office in an obscure part of eastern Tennessee.<sup>3</sup> Five years previously, neither could have foreseen the path by which they would arrive at these destinations.

Wars and rumors of wars had troubled the young Republic since the time of Shays'

Rebellion in 1787. Debates over the Missouri Compromise had shaken Thomas Jefferson to the very core, prompting him to write that “This momentous question, like a fire-bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror.” Disregarding the warnings of some that a fratricidal conflict would involve “a war of extermination,” men would respond by the hundreds of thousands to secessionist proclamations and the guns of Fort Sumter.<sup>4</sup> Nothing had prepared these men for what they would face. The Revolutionary War had been too long ago and over-romanticized at that; the wars of 1812 and 1846 had been of short duration, involving only several thousands of soldiers.

Southerners had responded to conflicts over slavery in the 1840s and 1850s by flocking to state militias, and were therefore more readily organized in the aftermath of a perceived Yankee invasion at Sumter.<sup>5</sup> Historian Reid Mitchell has discerned four reasons for Confederate enlistment: racism and a fear of slave insurrection; defense of the South as a special “land of opportunity;” belief in the South as a separate culture; and a hatred for Yankees, “because [they] threatened to destroy the South's prosperity by restricting slavery.”<sup>6</sup> Certainly the distinctiveness of Southern culture rested upon slavery as an institution. One did not have to be a plantation owner to bear arms on behalf of a government which Vice-President Alexander Stephens proclaimed to be founded in defense of slavery. Southern soldiers at the battles of the Crater and Fort Pillow evidenced a frenzied disregard for the normal rules of combat by slaughtering black prisoners--actions which received the unreserved approval of “boy general” Willie Pegram and ex-slave dealer Nathan Forrest.<sup>7</sup>

The South could fight on the basis of defending their homeland from invasion. But Northerners also flocked to the colors, some on the basis of long held convictions, others impassioned by the excitement and pageantry of a local recruiting drive. Northern reaction to “the slavocracy” in the 1850s had been fueled in part by the appeal of free soil in an era when land became harder to obtain and tenancy rates were rising. But while slave owners were perceived as aristocrats tearing the Union apart, most northern soldiers proved equally antipathetic to abolitionists and blacks.<sup>8</sup> Something more than hatred would be needed to sustain them and the concept of the Union itself would provide the answer. Only a strong Union could protect freedom, a belief system so well developed in one soldier that he exclaimed, “If our country and our nationality is to perish, better that we should all perish, and not survive to see it a laughingstock.”<sup>9</sup>

Not all soldiers, of course, had a well developed political ideology. Rites of passage into the army were affirmed by standard rituals of unit departure. A centerpiece of these rituals was the presentation of a national flag, usually sewn by the community's women, to the unit commander. This ritual transformed the flag from a symbol of nationality into a tangible link between the soldiers and their wives, mothers, sisters. Regimental histories would later abound with references to the short life spans of color bearers, and struggles over the flags in battle, indicating a “devotion . . . far beyond what military rationality might seem to deserve.” This passion for the flag was common in all ranks. The title of General James Wilson's memoirs, Under The Old Flag, enunciated a phrase that became common in veteran discourse. Similarly, Private Phillip Lantzy



proudly announced to his parents, “I am Gone to Fight for the Stars and Stripes of the Union.”<sup>10</sup>

At first the army must have seemed much like an extension of their own families, with the spice of adventure thrown into the mix. Companies and regiments came from the same community, so one went to war with friends and family. Initially, officers were elected. Soldiers called themselves “the boys,” and were so referred to ever afterward by their officers and civilians.<sup>11</sup> Familiarity can lead to contempt, but if they did not feel that particular emotion, most soldiers believed themselves to be at least the equal in courage and military ability to their officers. The persuasiveness of those beliefs led William Sherman to complain that, “Each private thinks for himself . . . . I doubt if our democratic form of government admits of that organization and discipline without which an army is a mob.”<sup>12</sup>

Coming as they did from a society that valued personal liberty and autonomy above all, soldiers would soon face a paradox: in order to regain the autonomy they had once enjoyed they would have to relinquish it to their officers, to the requirements of military discipline, to the needs of their regiment. Even control over one's own body would be lost. An invasion by body lice compelled a Confederate soldier before Yorktown in 1862 to describe, “the feeling of humiliation with which we made the discovery we were inhabited.”<sup>13</sup> Before the first large battles of 1862 men saw comrades fall from diseases as varied as malaria, pneumonia and dysentery. By the war's end 224,580 Union soldiers would lie in their graves, felled not by the enemy's bullets, but by

a microbe. An additional 223,523 would receive early discharges due to disease.<sup>14</sup>

Soldiers looked to their home communities for support as they began to face the reality of war and the monotony of camp life. Their lives had become subsumed by massive armies and propelled forward in time and space by increasingly impersonal organizational processes. Civilian support had been given early on through parades, cheers and the music of town bands. Soon however, soldiers would feel ignored whenever on leave, become resentful of hometown opinions on military operations (expressed in newspapers and letters), and would articulate their antipathy to stay-at-homes, who were surely getting ahead in the race of life. Union soldier Henry Sys gave voice to this feeling when he wrote that in ten years, “the parvenu, made rich by lucky speculation, . . . would elbow down from place the soldier broken down or maimed, by long exposure or ghastly wound received on some battle field.”<sup>15</sup> The soldier's task in coming to terms with the civilian world would become more difficult still as he plunged into the maelstrom of death and battle. Some would give utterance to their disillusionment, as one Union soldier after Shiloh, “I have seen since I have been here what I never saw before and what I never want to witness again.”<sup>16</sup>

Notwithstanding Disraeli's comment about “lies, damned lies, and statistics,” the numbers on Civil War casualties are staggering. If they show nothing else, the figures demonstrate death's omniscience in the soldier's landscape. Battle deaths for both armies totaled 618,222, while casualties via wounds and disease amounted to 1,094,453. For every 10,000 soldiers, 182 died, versus a rate of 30 per 10,000 in World War II. Similar

casualty rates in this century's "Good War" would have resulted in over 1.8 million deaths. Eight per cent of all white males in the general population aged between 13-43 in 1860 would die in the war--six per cent of northern white males and eighteen per cent in the South. One of six Union soldiers died.<sup>17</sup>

Death had become something entirely different from a comfortable contemplation of life's end during a cemetery visit or while listening to ministerial clichés at the local church. It had become pervasive and mind numbing, able to shock the soul with its suddenness and in the manner by which it could literally fill the soldier's vision. An eyewitness to the aftermath of Chancellorsville called it "the most revolting scene I have ever witnessed," and went on to say,

Our line of battle extended over some eight miles and for that distance you see the dead bodies lying in every direction, some with their heads shot off, some with their brains oozing out, some pierced through the head with musket balls, some with their noses shot away, some with their mouths smashed, some wounded in the neck, some with broken arms or legs, some shot through the breast and some cut in two with shells.<sup>18</sup>

Another Union observer at the same battle was nearly overcome while viewing Rebel soldiers mutilated by artillery, calling it "a sight that should make a man weep."<sup>19</sup>

Battlefields became death gardens, bereft of the cleansing rituals of mourning and commemoration prevalent even in primitive cultures. Contemporary accounts noted bodies "black as negroes," pigs digging up skulls and corpses eaten by beetles.<sup>20</sup> Even generals were not immune from the spiritual malaise engendered by living among the dead. One account describes Ambrose Burnside after the bloody Union repulse at Fredericksburg, as by turns, "shocked and bewildered," "scheming," and "plunged in the

deepest distress,” to the point where he had to be dissuaded from personally leading a counter-charge.<sup>21</sup> Burnside may have become unnerved after viewing scenes described by a resident, where “the fields were blue in color before the Union troops left--next morning they were white,”--the implication being that the clothes had been stripped.<sup>22</sup> The carnage at Second Manassas impelled General Carl Schurz to patronize long suffering President Lincoln by writing, “I do not know whether you have ever seen a battlefield. I assure you, Mr. President, it is a terrible sight.”<sup>23</sup>

Generals could nevertheless retire to their tents, consciences assuaged by staff and aides--and a liquor ration. Lower ranks were not so fortunate. The Twentieth Maine's Joshua Chamberlain spent a night in Fredericksburg, unprepared by any civilian experience, foreign to any lesson which might have been taught him in the safe, pristine world of a Bowdoin professoriate:

[Chamberlain] was cold in the wintry night. A whole 'cacophony' of sound began to be heard over the battlefield moans and calls from the wounded rising and falling, 'of which, 'he remembered, 'you could not locate the source . . . a wail so far and deep and wide, as if a thousand discords were flowing together into a keynote weird, unearthly, terrible to hear and bear. Bodies lay all over the field, and it was difficult to tell which were living and which were not . . . Chamberlain found room to make his bed between two dark motionless forms, with a third near his head. He used the light shelter the dead men provided out of necessity; 'the living and the dead were alike to me,' he later recalled...<sup>24</sup>

Mistreatment of bodies proved equally distressing in a world where the living and the dead were so closely conjoined. A Union soldier bitterly condemned the actions of teamsters as, “...shameful. I have seen them, if the coffins were a little short, get into them with their boots on, and trample them in even stepping on their faces.”<sup>25</sup> Shoddy

handling of corpses paled in the reflection of life's final fear--to lie in an unmarked grave. Only 2,487 of more than 15,000 grave sites were properly identified at Fredericksburg. Clara Barton would later report that forty-five percent of the nation's 315,555 Union soldier graves were unidentified and 43,973 soldiers had no known graves.<sup>26</sup> So did the soldier see death pervasive and triumphant, with an anonymous resting place as the final reward for dedication, perseverance and courage. Such events formed a deep chasm between the soldier and his community. Although an exhibition of Antietam photographs had shocked viewers in New York and other major cities, black and white stills could not come close to duplicating the soldier's landscape.<sup>27</sup> Nor could the soldiers communicate their feelings home except with euphemisms. Friends had "gone to mother," "gone to their long home," or taken "their last sleep." A son wrote his father, calling a fire fight on the Rappahannock, "one of the prettiest sights of the war."<sup>28</sup> But other factors were also operating to forever change the "boys" from what they had once been.

Small town individualism, political egalitarianism and a mid-Victorian culture mixed with the romanticism of Sir Walter Scott's novels all combined to form the initial reactions of the volunteer soldier. Historian Gerald Linderman has described them as follows:

They were the sons of farmers and landholding gentry; the sons of smalltown shopkeepers and mechanics; the sons of city artisans and of commercial and intellectual elites. Those young men were white; were the possessors of basic schooling; were imbred with an American-Victorian morality; and if not men of means, were confident of their ability to gain that status.<sup>29</sup>

The central element in the soldier's daily life was the company--a company which had

been recruited from his community, consisting of friends, relatives and acquaintances. While such an environment went far in keeping the soldier in touch with the mores and values of home, it also initially resulted in Civil War companies that “began with all the discipline of a lodge of Elks.”<sup>30</sup>

As the war began civilians and soldiers believed in courage as the essence of one's manhood and the operational means by which armies would achieve victory. A member of the Richmond Howitzers noted that, “In a thousand ways he is tried . . . every quality is put to the test. If he shows the least cowardice, he is undone. His courage must never fail. He must be manly and independent.”<sup>31</sup> Fear could neither be acknowledged or shared with others, while Virginians and New England Brahmins joined together in extolling the virtues of knightliness. The war of 1861-63 granted “paroles” to prisoners of war, based on the belief that a man could give his word not to take up arms until formally exchanged for an enemy of equal rank.<sup>32</sup>

If the army is a place where men give up their individuality in the service of a common cause, then courage could be the means by which those same men retained an individual control over the course of battle. Bravery could insulate one from warfare's depersonalization and the trauma of actual combat, while leading to an admiration and even a feeling of kinship with the enemy. Confederate General George Pickett and his men were so stirred by the charge of the Irish Brigade at Fredericksburg that, “we forgot they were fighting us, and cheer after cheer at their fearlessness went up all along the lines.”<sup>33</sup> But advancements in military technology soon tested courage's limits. Rifling

of musket barrels enabled units to engage one another with accuracy at distances from 300-400 yards. One student of Civil War battle tactics has estimated that during a “typical” firefight 1.8 Confederates per minute would be hit and 1.5 federals.<sup>34</sup> Generals would continue to order futile frontal assaults even into 1864.

Fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers and friends had sent the men away with what Linderman has called “a language of heroism . . . an idiom of elevated sentimentality.”<sup>35</sup> But while northern communities--Gettysburg and Sharpsburg excepted--remained physically unscathed by the war's increasingly hard hand, soldiers participated in the transformation from a limited war with limited objectives into a “remorseless revolutionary struggle,” symbolized in all its brutality by Grant's 1864 Overland Campaign. Less than two years after the charge of the Irish Brigade which had elicited such admiration from Pickett's men, the same two armies met at Spotsylvania's fabled “Mule Shoe” salient in a rainstorm. The maelstrom of a conflict that lasted a full day and part of a night was indescribable, but men made the attempt anyway. A Sixth Corps staff officer “never expect [ed] to be fully believed when I tell what I saw of the horrors of Spotsylvania,” horrors never to be forgotten:

...the federal officer who had 'both eyes shot out, the ball passing just back of the eyeballs. He stood blind and helpless, never uttering a word of complaint, but opening and closing the sightless sockets, the blood leaping out in spouts.'

To advance was impossible, to retreat was death . . . clubbed muskets, and bayonets were the modes of fighting for those who had used up their cartridges, and frenzy seemed to possess the yelling, demonic hordes on either side. Men fired into each other's faces, were shot through the crevices of logs, bayoneted over the top of the works.

This battle was the worst slaughter I ever saw . . . Such groans! Such cries! and such pitiful call for water and other assistance; but none could go to them, for the enemy would not let us go and we would not let them go.<sup>36</sup>

Courage was still very much in season, but knightliness had disappeared, as ephemeral as the belief system which had engendered it. Exceptional courage by the enemy had once drawn admiration; at war's end soldiers were firing at color bearers on the ground.<sup>37</sup> Men had once thought that courage could protect the soldier--but the best had died anyway. Soldiers came to applaud decisions not to attack, as when General George Meade declined to conduct a frontal assault on well defended Confederate positions at Mine Run, Virginia, in November 1863.<sup>38</sup> A new rigor had to be imposed on the soldier in order to sustain the operational necessities of daily contact with the enemy inherent in the Overland Campaign, the siege of Petersburg and the fight for Atlanta.

Where company officers had once been elected by their men, boards of officers were now constituted to examine and weed out the incompetent. Corps badges, initially instituted as a means for soldiers to identify their battle positions, came to be used more and more as a way to confine men to their company area. Especially striking was the acceleration of executions of deserters, particularly after 1863, when the ranks of men joining became composed of substitutes, conscripts and bounty-jumpers. One New York farm boy who signed up in mid-1863 was astounded to find himself with a group of "irreclaimable blackguards, thieves and ruffians."<sup>39</sup> As warriors like Grant, Sherman and Sheridan came to the fore, their philosophies and world-views began to have more of an impact on soldier beliefs. The limited war concept of George McClellan was replaced by



Grant's assertion that victory could only come to "the side which never counted its dead." Battles of army versus army became a Hobbesian "war of all against all," as Sherman declared that, "The entire South, man, woman, and child is against us, armed and determined." The war for the Union would culminate in the destructiveness of Sherman's March to the Sea.<sup>40</sup>

Changes in soldierly values were reflected in an unraveling of community ties. The burdens of conscription and the increasing desire to avoid becoming another name on lengthening casualty lists caused many of the well-to-do to hire substitutes, with no stigma attached. States paid substantial bounties to induce enlistments; regiments were no longer the close-knit community groups they once had been. The New York City draft riots, coming immediately after Gettysburg's 51,000 casualties, particularly enraged soldiers.<sup>41</sup> Some came to feel that the North, too, should feel the war's severity, exemplified by one Union soldier's statement that, "We would like to go back and fight northern cowards and traitors [better] than to fight rebels."<sup>42</sup>

The Northern elite were also worried about the soldier. Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote to his wife, expressing the fear that "when the soldiers returned the quiet rural life of the New England villages would be spoiled and coarsened."<sup>43</sup> If Henry David Thoreau believed that all wars were immoral, then James Russell Lowell was equally concerned with war's ability to raise up society's dregs. If evangelist Dwight Moody feared that the war might cause Christians to leave the church, then former United States Speaker of the House Robert C. Winthrop was truly delusional in believing that obedience to the Bible

would be replaced by “gallantry in battle.”<sup>44</sup> It was also a go-getting era back home, where fortunes could be won and lost in supplying the Union's war machine with clothes, shoes, ammunition, weapons, horses, mules and food. Soldiers saw much of this, and many came to believe that they embodied the cause far more than the civilian communities from which they had departed but several months or years before:

You at home cannot feel the glow of triumph as we do in the field; those of us who looked to the future with high hopes, staked life, reputation, honor everything in this contest-taking our lives in our hands we went out for what? for money? no; for power? no; for fame? no; only for an idea, for the idea of Union, Freedom, an intangible something always sought for by mankind . . . we have seen our hopes fading one by one . . . we have turned our eyes homeward and there, with heavy hearts, seen those who should bind up our wounds and cheer our drooping spirits, turn their heads against us . . . still we struggled on.<sup>45</sup>

Urged on by stout unionists such as Stephen Douglas, thousands of Democrats had answered Lincoln's successive calls for troops in 1861-62. But by the war's mid-passage in 1863 the Democratic Party had been infected with the defeatism of the Copperheads, exemplified by such men as Ohio's Clement L. Vallandigham and by papers like the *New York World*. The government responded to the newspapers by forbidding their delivery to front line troops on February 16, 1863.<sup>46</sup> But when the Democrats nominated George McClellan for President in 1864, running on a platform which called for an immediate end to the war, the administration had a new crisis to meet. Prompted by others, including Indiana Governor Oliver P. Morton, Lincoln ensured that thousands of soldiers were furloughed home to vote. Both sides wondered if the men would support the continuation of a war that placed them in such terrible danger. It was no contest--soldiers voted for Lincoln over McClellan by 78-22 percent, far exceeding

Lincoln's overall winning margin of 55.06 to 44.04 percent.<sup>47</sup> The boys had resoundingly voted for the cause and for themselves. They would never forget Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party. A marriage had been consummated, a critical link had been forged, leading to a Republican dominance of national politics lasting until 1932.

The man they reelected had for the war's duration placed all soldiers, living and dead, at the center point of the American experience. At Gettysburg's National Cemetery he had proclaimed the sanctity of that "final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live." With these words, Lincoln had validated the worth of and given true meaning to every death: whether by measles, typhoid, pneumonia, or bungled amputation; at Gettysburg's Devil's Den and Little Round Top, at Shiloh and Antietam, at Chickamauga and the Mule Shoe Salient; to all who died in the pestilence of Andersonville; to every general, and all the privates who lay in unmarked graves. As the war wound down he also remembered the living. At his Second Inaugural, Lincoln urged the nation to "finish the work we are in, to bind the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan." Given their doubts and even disgust with the home front, soldiers must have pondered civilian willingness to meet Lincoln's challenge.

But as Major General Joshua L. Chamberlain prepared to receive the arms and paroles of the Army of Northern Virginia on April 12, 1865, something altogether different crossed his mind. He reflected instead on "the dusky swarms" marching toward him, columns "crowned with [the] red" of their regimental battle flags--and perhaps also

crowned in Chamberlain's memory by the red of so much blood which both armies had shed together. He determined then to render a salute as General John Gordon's men passed by to stack arms,

men whom neither toils and sufferings, nor the fact of death . . . could bend from their resolve . . . waking memories that bound us together as no other bond;--was not such manhood to be welcomed back into a Union so tested and assured?

As Gordon's men passed by, there was not a sound of trumpet more, nor roll of drum; not a cheer, nor word nor whisper of vain-glorying . . . but an awed stillness rather, and breath-holding, as if it were the passing of the dead!<sup>48</sup>

In the war's final moment the old admiration for the courage and tenacity of the enemy had resurfaced, pointing a way to future reconciliation. And in comparing the marching columns to the dead, Chamberlain not only expressed a eulogy on the death of a nation that might have been, he also gave unconscious voice to the soldier belief that the living and the dead were forever joined, even as peace loosened death's dominion.

Walt Whitman's "concussion of young men on each other" had ceased.<sup>49</sup> As the soldiers prepared for their mustering out they looked for recognition. The nation prepared to render it, as parades and celebrations took place in villages, towns and cities. The largest of these was held in Washington, D.C. on May 23-24, 1865. The period of official mourning for President Lincoln had ended, and the nation's capital prepared to host the first and last formal gathering of the eastern and western armies. The neoclassical facades of the Capitol, the Treasury and the White House provided the backdrop as 150,000 prepared to march. The Romans, on whom the architecture was based, had believed in portents. And many who viewed a sign stretched across the front of the

Capitol saw something portentous there. Colonel Charles Wainwright observed “Among the last I noticed one: 'The only debt we can never repay; what we owe to our gallant defenders.' I could not help wondering whether, having made up their minds that they can never pay the debt, they will not think it useless to try.”<sup>50</sup>

The *New York Herald* certainly had no doubts about the veterans' status:

They are not only heroes, but they are heroes of the sublimist conflict in all history . . . from one end of the world to the other, the people thank our soldiers for having conquered in the people's cause . . . . Their remaining years may be passed in quiet usefulness at their homes.<sup>51</sup>

The Grand Review subsequently received much attention in soldier's memoirs and memories. They remembered Custer's horse--startled--dashing by the reviewing stand, Sherman's snub of Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, the pageantry of the review itself, streets lined with thousands of cheering throngs.<sup>52</sup> Most of all they noticed the differences between the style and demeanor of the Army of the Potomac and Sherman's westerners. A member of Chamberlain's Twentieth Maine, initially repulsed by the “ragged, dirty, and independently demoralized” appearance of Sherman's troops, later found an appreciation for them sufficient to proclaim, “Sherman is the man after all.”<sup>53</sup>

Soldiers were impressed by the very size of the occasion, for never had armies this large been formed on the North American continent. Mass of numbers and the sheer spectacle of the Review caused a member of the Twentieth Illinois to assert that, “Washington could not now be taken by an invading army of the combined world.”<sup>54</sup> Not all soldiers could attend--some had already been mustered out, some had been sent to Texas, and others were on occupation duty in the Southern states. The lack of any black

units in the parade provided a glaring omission. This was strange conduct indeed, considering that 186,000 African-American soldiers had constituted ten percent of all Union forces and that eighteen percent of them had died.<sup>55</sup> A message of exclusion had been directed to black soldiers, the beginning of a deliberate historical amnesia about their significant contributions to the Union cause. Historian Stuart McConnell has pointed out other exclusions: of Confederates, of women, of men who never enlisted. And if, he asks, the veteran was to be “honored in perpetuity by those who had not taken up arms,” then how would society deal with this group's “peculiarly narrow” makeup of whites, males, and occupants of rural areas who were mostly of German, British and Irish extraction?<sup>56</sup>

As the veterans mustered out, many received a sum of \$250, some of it representing pay they had not previously drawn. While this was a substantial sum of money for the era, the consumer price index had risen ninety-six per cent since 1860, substantially eating away the dollar's value.<sup>57</sup> It did not take long for the veteran to confront the fluctuations of a post-war economy striving to return to normality. As early as August 5, 1865, the *New York Herald* received a letter from an ex-cavalryman who plaintively asked, “What are the returned soldiers . . . to do for employment?” More telling yet was an advertisement which appeared in the *Herald's* “situation wanted” section:

Wanted - By A YOUNG MAN WHO SERVED IN the army for three years, at anything he can make an honest living. call 356 7th avenue.<sup>58</sup>

While many veterans returned to the communities from whence they came, just as

many had been infected by a wanderlust engendered by traveling with the armies. Noted earlier was the pre-war frustration with land availability in the old Northwest. However, enactment of four federal laws during the war turned the thoughts of many towards the central plains states and the far west. The 1862 establishment of the United States Department of Agriculture resulted in a series of annual reports fostering new farm methods and machinery. The Homestead Act opened up and encouraged agricultural settlement on the public domain. The Pacific Railway Act formed a great transportation and communication network, stimulating immigration and emigration to the Plains region. The Morrill Land Grant College Act would not have an immediate impact, but the future establishment of institutions of higher learning devoted to agriculture, engineering and commerce would serve as a beacon light.<sup>59</sup>

What qualities characterized the veterans as they returned home or made preparations to move west? They had been the product of vast organizational processes that had propelled them and their country from a Union to a nation, and had gained thereby a good sense of what it took to clothe, arm, feed and move large groups of men. Such skills proved extremely useful in the years to come as America made ready to leap into the forefront of industrialized nations.<sup>60</sup> Other words came to mind when cataloging the veterans: rank, order, discipline. These last have to be placed into context. They were not Prussian army veterans, as shown by the behavior and appearance of Sherman's soldiers at the Grand Review. In a few years the veterans would espouse "Fraternity, Loyalty and Charity" as their special watchwords, cloaking themselves in a softer visage

to the rest of the nation. Most of all, they were returning home firm in the belief that only their brothers-in-arms could understand the value of what they had experienced.

Walt Whitman believed that “The real war will never get into the books,” and went on to proclaim that,

The actual soldier of 1862-65, North and South, with all his ways, his incredible dauntlessness, habits, practices, tastes, language, his fierce friendship, his appetite, rankness, his superb strength and, animosity, lawless gait, and a hundred unnamed lights and shades of camp, I say, will never be written--perhaps must not and should not be.<sup>61</sup>

Whether civilians were ready to be regaled with stories of the true face of battle remained equally problematical, with Lincoln's assassination producing a true sense of bitterness.

Even prior to the war's end some professed their battle experiences to be a “dream.”<sup>62</sup>

The exhibition of Antietam photographs which had so transfixed New Yorkers led to a column in the *Times* which focused on civilian inability to comprehend the enormity of the soldier experience:

The living that throng Broadway care little perhaps for the Dead at Antietam, but we fancy they would jostle less carelessly down the great thoroughfare, saunter less at their ease, were a few dripping bodies, fresh from the field, laid along the pavement . . . As it is, the dead of the battlefield come up to us very rarely, even in dreams . . . These are all strangers . . . Each of these little names . . . represents a bleeding, mangled corpse . . . our sensations might be different if the newspaper carrier left the names on the battlefield and the bodies at our doors instead.<sup>63</sup>

The writer's sardonicism illuminated a truth the veterans would soon confront.

The man from the *Herald* had predicted (hoped?) “their remaining years . . . be passed in quiet usefulness at their homes,” reflecting perhaps the wishes of the governing class that, having brilliantly performed the arduous task of saving the Union, the veterans



would silently slink away. But the last public words of their much beloved Commander-In-Chief, now rapidly becoming an American saint, had abjured the American people to care for him who shall have borne the battle. Lincoln's Second Inaugural became the veteran's beacon, lighting the path to a comprehensive pension system. These men had experienced, felt, lived the power of massive organizational forces, for they had been the executors of the national will for five years. As courage had been the cement that had bound them together in battle, so would fraternalism become the glue by which they later formed themselves into a powerful political force. As their bonds of loyalty to one another had been intensified by the routines and sentimentalities of bivouac and campfire, so would they later replicate them as a social force to bind themselves to the public's heart. As so many of their comrades had ended in unmarked graves, so would the survivors ensure the permanent memorialization of these men in word and stone. As so many had died to literally protect the flag, so would that banner be placed in the center of the public school--the home of all future generations. It would remain unclear, though, for many years whether the veterans could successfully place their real war either in books or in the public consciousness.

They had come, these men, from a thousand places and more, from small town and large, from America and Europe. Few had previously been more than a hundred miles from home, and while pre-war America had offered opportunity, many had neither the resources nor vision to give themselves hope.<sup>64</sup> The war had confronted them with death, disease and terror; the army had provided them with a new home and family, a

sense of self worth and movement. At a relatively young age they had experienced the drama of their lives, had transcended their sense of place and time, as event after event moved upon them.<sup>65</sup> Now they had returned to the “real” world and real time. A season of hibernation from discussion and contemplation of the war began. During this period the veterans would focus on family, career and finding a new sense of place in a nation their combat had transformed. Many eyes turned westward, heeding Horace Greeley's advice and responding to a war-generated impulse of constant movement.

Some went to Nebraska.....

## ENDNOTES

1. See Oliver M. Wilson, The Grand Army of the Republic Under Its First Constitution and Ritual (Kansas City: Franklin Hudson, 1905), 12, 195. Wilson played an important role in the Indiana GAR during its early years. He later broke with the group and decried its “semi-moral sanctimonious gab of charitable righteousness.”
2. See Allen W. Trelease, White terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 3-4. Trelease notes that “all the evidence” supports the belief that initially “the Klan was designed purely for amusement.” White reaction to the ex-slaves took it down a far more ominous path.
3. Trelease, White Terror, 3.
4. Robert V. Bruce, “The Shadow of a Coming War,” in Lincoln The War President, ed. Gabor S. Boritt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 11, 22. Politicians seem to have been far more affected by premonitions of conflict than the public at large. As Bruce notes, no one welcomes a “Cassandra” into their living room.
5. Ibid., 20.
6. Reid Mitchell, Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations and Experiences (New York: Viking Press, 1988), 4.
7. Ibid., 5, 193.
8. Ibid., 13-15. For a superb discussion of the Republican Party's growing appeal in this era, see Eric Foner, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before The Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).
9. Mitchell, Civil War Soldiers, 12.
10. Ibid., 19-20. The United States Army would take note of this passion for the flag in the twentieth century by removing national colors from the battlefield altogether. As technology “deepened” the battle area, attempts to protect a flag only led to unnecessary loss of life. The Army currently uses much smaller and

less colorful unit pennants called “guidons” to denote unit positions in the battlefield.

11. Reid Mitchell, The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 5.
12. Gerald F. Linderman, Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat In the American Civil War (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 36.
13. Mitchell, Civil War Soldiers, 59.
14. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 115.
15. Mitchell, Civil War Soldiers, 68.
16. *Ibid.*, 77.
17. Maris Vinovskis, “Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War? Some Preliminary Demographic Speculations,” in Toward A Social History of the American Civil War: Exploratory Essays, ed. Maris Vinovskis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 4-9. The figure on casualties derived from wounds and disease is from Linderman, Embattled Courage, 124.
18. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 125. Logistical support for the care of the sick, wounded and dead was so lacking that much of it devolved upon the United States Sanitary Commission, a civilian organization that over the course of the war spent more than \$7 million.
19. *Ibid.*, 125.
20. *Ibid.*, 126.
21. Frances A. Walker, History of the Second Army Corps in the Army of the Potomac (New York: Charles Scribners, 1887), 188.
22. For a fuller account, see William H. Powell, The Fifth Army Corps (Reprint, Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Bookshop, 1984), 382-384.
23. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 126.
24. Alice Trulock, In The Hands of Providence: Joshua Chamberlain and the American Civil War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 97-

- 98.
25. Mitchell, Civil War Soldiers, 62.
26. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 248-249. Twentieth Century soldiers are required to be fingerprinted, to have full dental x-rays in their medical jackets, and carry into battle fire-resistant, metal identification tags--all for the purpose of identifying their remains. Thus are the fears of one generation carried into action in the next.
27. For a superb collection of photographs available to the American public, see William C. Davis, ed. The Image of War: 1861-1865, 6 vols. (New York, Doubleday and Company, 1984).
28. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 98.
29. *Ibid.*, 2.
30. Reed Mitchell, "The Northern Soldier and His Community," in Toward A Social History of the American Civil War: Exploratory Essays, ed. Maris Vinovskis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 80-81. Mitchell goes on to note that many companies performed lodge-like functions: forming debating societies, collecting monies for regimental libraries and holding prayer meetings.
31. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 7.
32. Patricia L. Faust, ed., Historical Times Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Civil War (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 558. Both sides eventually realized that the parole policy was prolonging an already unendurable conflict and it was terminated in 1863.
33. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 61-66. It is beyond imagination to believe a like event occurring in the Twentieth Century.
34. Paddy Griffith, Battle in The Civil war: Generalship and Tactics in America 1861-65 (Nottinghamshire, England: Fieldbooks, 1986), 39. This slender volume combines illustrations and narrative in a most striking manner to show the reader the landscape of civil war battles.
35. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 98.

36. Noah Andre Trudeau, Bloody Roads South: The Wilderness to Cold Harbor, May-June 1864 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1989), 174,182. For a detailed narrative of the war of attrition around Petersburg, see by the same author, The Last Citadel: Petersburg, Virginia, June 1864 - April 1865 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1991).
37. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 157.
38. See Robert G. Carter, Four Brothers in Blue (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 375; Letters of Colonel Theodore Lyman from the Wilderness to Appomatox (Boston: *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1922), 56-58.
39. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 172.
40. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 194, 206-207, 212. See also Charles Royster, The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson and the Americans (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), for an extended argument that the war was far more destructive even in the beginning than has previously been thought.
41. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 220-224.
42. *Ibid.*, 223.
43. Richard Severo and Lewis Milford, The Wages of War: When America's Soldiers Came Home - From Valley Forge to Vietnam (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 124-125.
44. *Ibid.*, 126.
45. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 219.
46. Severo and Milford, Wages of War, 144.
47. *Ibid.*, 148-149. Between 1874-1894 the Democrats battled successfully in the House and Senate, where the majority went back and forth. But at the Presidential level, only Cleveland and Wilson overcame the Republican hegemony until Franklin Roosevelt's watershed 1932 election which transformed the Democrats into the natural majority.
48. Joshua L. Chamberlain, The Passing of the Armies, an Account of the Final Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac, Based upon Personal Reminiscences of

the Fifth Army Corps (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915), 248, 258-265. Chamberlain's account remains a classic to this day, one of the finest soldier memoirs of any era.

49. Severo and Milford, Wages of War, 127.
50. Allan Nevins, ed., A Diary of Battle: The Personal Journals of Colonel Charles Wainwright, 1861-1865 (Gettysburg: Stan Clark Military Books, 1962), 527.
51. Severo and Milford, Wages of War, 128.
52. For a moving narrative, see Chamberlain, Passing of the Armies.
53. Stuart McConnell, Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 7.
54. *Ibid.*, 4.
55. Vinovskis, "Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War?" 9.
56. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 8-9. McConnell makes a valid point and then stretches it beyond the parameters of logic. Certainly, reconciliation with former enemies would become a prime focus of national debate in the years to come. And even though he admits the Grand Review was "hardly the place for such reintegration," he notes Confederate absence as a "defect" in the review. One is hard put to envision enemies clasping hands so soon after any such comparable conflict in world history, Chamberlain's generosity to the contrary notwithstanding. In 1865 no nation in the world even conceived of placing women in uniform, and McConnell's inferential criticism of their absence in the ranks smacks of "presentism" at its worst. Men who had not enlisted had made a conscious choice and could deal with it. The "peculiarly narrow" makeup of the veterans was hardly their fault--if it was a fault--as they reflected the demographic makeup of their time and place. In later years, immigrants from southeast Europe, Latin America and Asia have created a far different ethnic and urban/rural mix from the one that prevailed during the Civil War years. McConnell apparently faults the veterans for not mirroring America in the 1990s.
57. Severo and Milford, Wages of War, 129. See also, Scott Dereks, ed., The Value of a Dollar: Prices and Income in the United States, 1860-1989 (Washington D.C.: Gale Research Inc., 1994), 2. The Consumer Price Index had risen from \$1.00 in 1860 to \$1.96 by 1865.

58. Severo and Milford, Wages of War, 129.
59. Wayne D. Rasmussen, "The Civil War: A Catalyst of Agricultural Revolution," in The Economic Impact of the Civil War, ed. Ralph Andreano (Cambridge, Mass.: Publisher Schenckman, 1967), 78.
60. For a magisterial work which describes Northern ability to organize men and material, see Allan Nevins, The War for the Union, 4 vols. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947-1971).
61. Severo and Milford, Wages of War, 126-127.
62. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 266-267.
63. Quoted in William A. Frassanito, Antietam: The Photographic Legacy of America's Bloodiest Day (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978), 15.
64. See the early and erratic careers of Sherman and Grant, in Michael Fellman, Citizen Sherman: A Life of William Tecumseh Sherman (New York: Random House, 1995), and William S. McFeeley, Grant: A Biography (New York: Random House, 1981).
65. It almost became a cliché for participants to note afterwards that an hour seemed like a day, a day like a week, a week like a month.



## CHAPTER TWO

### **Something Besides Politics: The Rise and Growth of an Organization**

During the last weeks of his life Ulysses Grant turned his attention to the changes in American life brought about by the war he had done so much to shape and win. “After our rebellion,” he asserted, “when so many young men were at liberty to return to their homes, they found they were not satisfied with the farm, the store, or the work-shop of the villages, but wanted larger fields. The mines of the mountains first attracted them; but afterwards they found that rich valleys and productive grazing and farming lands were there.”<sup>1</sup> Grant, with his usual succinctness, attributed this movement to the “spirit of independence and enterprise” engendered by the war. This spirit owed much of its strength and vitality to the wartime efforts of Grant and his chief lieutenant Sherman, who had successfully orchestrated the movement of large masses of men through time and space to concentrate on Confederate strongholds.<sup>2</sup> If the fruitful but mainly untilled fields of the great Nebraska territory were ever to support a post-war veterans' organization, similar concentrations of men and women would have to occur.

The 1860 census counted 28,841 hardy souls residing in that portion of the Great Plains designated as the Nebraska Territory. The sparseness of settlement may be further adduced by noting the Territory's 75,995 square miles--an area equal to that of New England, with a population density of 2.63 inhabitants per square mile.<sup>3</sup> Nebraska had been viewed in previous generations as a highway to the far West; gold hunters, fur trappers and Mormons escaping religious persecution had all passed through its vastness.

An early settler described in an 1856 diary how initial dismay at his surroundings had been overcome:

. . . . the rolling prairies existing between the Big Sandy and Fort Kearney had been burnt off, so that as the caravan with which I was traveling passed along, a wide waste of desolation met the eye. The surface of the earth was black as charcoal . . . . It seemed as though nothing could live in that forsaken looking country . . . [But] when I approached the Platte Valley . . . my eyes were delighted with the sight that met my view . . . . It was a gorgeous spectacle, and it seemed to me, no valley on the earth could surpass it in agricultural possibilities.<sup>4</sup>

The agricultural possibilities were indeed there, nearly limitless in the rolling valleys fed by tributaries of the Platte, the Blue, the Nemaha, the Elkhorn and the Niobrara Rivers.

The Homestead Act of 1862 and its subsequent amendments attracted civilian and veteran alike; the railroads which soon traversed the previously trackless wilderness enabled new farmers to sell their products to the teeming markets of the East.

One early observer emphasized those Homestead amendments which provided “new and most liberal provisions . . . . by which the soldier, his widow and his orphans” were more easily allowed to secure homesteads, going on to praise that “nobler and higher doctrine” which rewarded the nation's defenders.<sup>5</sup> Everyone who served in the armed forces was eligible, with only a discharge certificate required as proof. Any service time counted towards the requirement that five years be spent upon the homestead. Soldier's widows could also avail themselves of these opportunities, even if remarried. Between 1871 to 1880, 37,389,746 acres of Nebraska soil were claimed under all provisions of the Homestead Act by veteran and non-veteran alike.<sup>6</sup>

In June 1857, a distinguished group of gentlemen arrived in Omaha to confer with

the powers of the town concerning the feasibility of that city as a major connecting link in a planned transcontinental railway. By December 2, 1863, their plans came to fruition when the Engineer of the road received a telegram from President Lincoln directing him to “formally break ground on the western boundary of Iowa,” opposite Omaha.

Continued progress on the railway by September 1865 enabled a contemporary to marvel at the “tide of immigration” sweeping through Nebraska, with improvements ongoing everywhere. The positioning of the Union Pacific route through Omaha led to a remarkable increase of westward travel through the region, as Omaha became both a destination and a point of departure for immigration further west.<sup>7</sup> Census figures bear this out as Nebraska's population jumped to 122,993 by 1870 (over four times the 1860 number) and almost quadrupled again to 452,402 residents in 1880.<sup>8</sup> Farms by the thousands now nestled comfortably in the rich and verdant soil, notwithstanding the onslaughts of locust and fierce winter snows. Nebraska's fecund soil, homesteaders' unceasing efforts, and the ever-growing Union Pacific and Burlington railway net all combined to help increase American sale and consumption of farm products from \$1.469 billion in 1860 to \$3.021 billion in 1880.<sup>9</sup> Almost as important from another perspective, the transportation system erected for the sale and distribution of hogs, cattle and corn would enable isolated veterans to find one another and re-establish the fraternal ties of wartime.

Veterans were not the only group coming together in an American society rapidly transforming itself from the Jeffersonian ideal of an agrarian republic to an urban-

industrial nation. In the 1830s ever-prescient Alexis de Tocqueville had urged the “independent and feeble citizenry” of the young republic to “learn voluntarily to help one another.”<sup>10</sup> Middle class Americans reacted to the sweeping changes in the country--the rise of corporations and trusts, the arrival of 11 million immigrants between 1870 to 1900, the ever increasing depersonalization of urban life, the generally bitter relations between labor and business--by forming fraternal beneficiary societies in unprecedented numbers. The last three decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the formation of 558 fraternal groups with an estimated membership in 1896 of 5.4 million males--roughly one in five of the adult population. A writer in the *North American Review* would term it “the golden age of fraternity.”<sup>11</sup> Earlier generations had reacted with alarm and hostility to the exclusiveness of the hereditary Society of Cincinnati and the Masons, viewing the former as “the scheme of an exclusive class to perpetuate a species of an American Nobility.”<sup>12</sup> But previous suspicions gave way to a yearning for titles and ritual. In a nation driven by sectional, social and economic discontents men may have hoped to become brothers again through ritual and organization. And a veteran, longing perhaps to become a Mason, would have looked askance at a group which refused entry to those who exhibited physical deformities.<sup>13</sup> He would turn then to his own kind.

But if ritual, organization and the rekindling of wartime camaraderie were to be prime attractions for the veteran in coming years, we must first look at the political exigencies which provided the Grand Army's initial impetus and which almost caused it to be stillborn. On April 15, 1865, a group of officers meeting in Philadelphia to issue

resolutions on Lincoln's death subsequently resolved to form a permanent organization for officers only, to be called the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States. As postwar political battles continued to focus over issues generated by the war and therefore of much interest to the veteran, a wide variety of unabashedly political soldiers' clubs were formed, styled variously as "Boys in Blue," "Soldiers and Sailors Leagues," "Conservative Army and Navy Union," etc.<sup>14</sup> Robert Beath, an early historian of the Grand Army, aptly summarized the underlying expectations of politicians and veterans as each side attempted to use the other for its own purposes:

[The veterans] had been led to believe during the war that the able-bodied men who had remained at home would cheerfully concede places of honor and profit to the veterans . . . [But] politicians entrenched in positions were not willing to surrender them to gratify merely sentimental whims and strongly objected to interference . . . . The returning veterans who desired to take an active part in . . . politics in 1865-6 were looked upon . . . as intruding upon a domain in which they had no right to enter. They were expected to be satisfied with the glories of their past martial life, and leave 'politics' to those who better understood that science.<sup>15</sup>

There are several versions of the founding of the Grand Army of the Republic. The most benign may be found in Beath's *History*: In 1864 Chaplain William Rutledge and Major Benjamin F. Stephenson of the 14th Illinois Infantry envisioned a postwar soldiers' organization "to preserve the friendships and memories of their common trials and dangers." The two men met in Springfield, Illinois, in March, 1866 and there wrote an extensive ritual for the proposed society.<sup>16</sup> The newly formed Grand Army's original constitution appealed to "earnest patriots, enlightened freemen and Christian citizens," with a view towards reviving the fraternal feelings of wartime. Article One emphasized the fledgling group's social welfare functions, hoping to provide support and care for

deceased soldiers' families, for disabled veterans, and any “in need of assistance.”

Stephenson and his cohorts proclaimed rather than hid their intentions to use the Grand Army as a political group by identifying themselves as a separate and special segment of American society, intending it to be,

For the establishment and defense of the late soldiery of the United States, morally, socially, and politically, with a view to inculcate a proper appreciation of their services to the country.<sup>17</sup> (emphasis added)

The constitution's proclamation of a political *raison d'etre* for the Grand Army was enhanced both explicitly and inferentially by a ritual requiring new members to enter the post under blindfold. They were then asked,

Are you prepared to take an obligation to sustain the cause of your country at all times--in camp, on the battlefield, or in the more quiet walks of civil life--with your arms, your voice, and your vote, against all her enemies, whether in high or low places? and are you prepared to unite with those who would secure by all proper guarantees the cause for which we risked our lives in this field?<sup>18</sup> (emphasis added)

After being led further into the post's inner sanctum, the recruits heard the whole encampment shouting in unison, “The Penalty of Treason is DEATH!” They were then required to swear a “most solemn and binding oath,” requiring them, among other things: to always keep the encampment's secrets; to never do wrong to a soldier or his family, nor “suffer others to wrong them;” most importantly, they were admonished to sustain their brethren “for all offices of trust and profit.” Here indeed was a political call to arms, later reinforced in the recruit's initiation by the Post Commander's reference to able-bodied men, “who never heard a gun fire,” holding political office. That same ritual ascribed soldier inability to gain employment as a “conspiracy” against him.<sup>19</sup>

It would appear, after comparing Stephenson's rhetoric regarding veteran welfare as the Grand Army's purpose with the themes of the ritual, that he intended the organization to be a social welfare agency whose success depended upon political activity. The embryonic group's promise to give preference to its own was heard by Indiana Governor Oliver P. Morton, then facing a hard-fought gubernatorial race. Morton, a tireless and efficient war governor whose efforts at obtaining soldier support for Lincoln in 1864 were so successful, saw an opportunity to permanently solidify the soldier vote in the Republican column. He sent General Robert Foster as an emissary to Stephenson in the spring of 1866. Stephenson, manifesting "great anxiety and zeal," imparted the ritual and constitution of the fledgling group to Foster who then returned to Indiana, where Oliver Wilson and others formed their own nucleus.<sup>20</sup>

The Grand Army's spread into the East and some of the Great Plains states in the 1860s and early 1870s met with mixed results. An 1869 attempt by Easterners to introduce membership grades (Recruit, Soldier, Veteran) became a fiasco as thousands of members simply dropped out, rather than pay a new initiation fee.<sup>21</sup> In an ironic and unintended obeisance to states' rights, Grand Army members demonstrated a sense of localism made manifest by their resistance to centralized inspections and an unwillingness to purchase supplies (ritual books, badges) from the national body.<sup>22</sup> A more telling explanation for defections from the nascent organization's ranks may have been provided by Indiana's Nathan Kimball, when he addressed the membership of his state after being named the Department Commander in 1866,

Let every member of the 'army' remember that he is a soldier: our Posts are camps of instruction, not debating societies. Let a strict military discipline be maintained and a willing respect yielded to the officers whom you have elected for your leaders.<sup>23</sup>

Kimball's urgings must have sounded both strange and unwelcome to the ears of men who were only too happy to have escaped from the rigors of "strict military discipline." These were men seeking to make new lives for themselves as they married and moved about a country with ever expanding economic opportunities. The defections of large numbers of Grand Army members in the early 1870s indicated an unwillingness to join any group proposing to reinstitute a code of military obedience which would overshadow the affection and camaraderie the "boys" had once--and still--held for one another. Nor too did they wish to join an organization in which current political battles played such a prominent role.<sup>24</sup>

On May 19, 1908, Thomas Creigh, the Department Commander of Nebraska's Grand Army of the Republic, addressed his comrades in the state's annual encampment at Hastings. There Creigh lamented the dearth of historical records surrounding the early years of Nebraska's Grand Army and noted a conversation with Comrade John C. Cowen, Nebraska's first Assistant Adjutant General (AAG). Cowen, apparently burdened by a failing memory, could only recall one official act--establishing a post at Yankton, in the Dakota Territory in 1867. "The earliest record we have," said Creigh, "is that of Sedgwick Post #1 at Kearney, which was chartered by the Department of Illinois, December 1, 1870, at Fort Kearney."<sup>25</sup> Mentions of Grand Army activities by Nebraska newspapers are sparse and unsatisfying, demonstrating by their rarity the comparative



unimportance of the group in the new state's social life. The *Omaha Daily Republican* noted without comment in early 1868 that “The Omaha post meets weekly, on Tuesday evenings at 7 o'clock, at the office of General Strickland.”<sup>26</sup> Other cities made claim to an early Grand Army provenance, among them Nebraska City in 1867 and Schuyler in 1870.<sup>27</sup>

An early and anonymous researcher of the group's origins, after culling local and national GAR sources, could only state with some degree of certainty that,

The Department of Nebraska was established July 10, 1867. Seven posts reported. The State of Nebraska and Territory of Dakota are embraced in this Department. No returns received and no dues paid. Provisional Department Commander is Silas A. Strickland.<sup>28</sup>

Strickland's weekly membership meetings at his office must have produced little in the way of organizational coherence or growth, as an 1870 General Order from the national group directed Nebraska's Commander and those of eight other departments to meet at Chicago's Sherman House on June 26, 1870. Strickland's subsequent failure to appear mirrored the localism manifested by so many other departments.<sup>29</sup> Within a year Nebraska would cease operations for reasons unable to be determined at the national headquarters.<sup>30</sup> An Adjutant General (AG) would later come upon a letter from a “former Commander,” in which the Commander proudly stated of the Grand Army, “It helps our party amazingly.” (original emphasis) Apparently disquieted, if not disheartened by this blatant partisanship, the AG went on to assert that,

This appeared to be at once the diagnosis of the disease of which the department died, and its epitaph. There are, however, plenty of good soldiers in Nebraska whose hearts and minds are capacious enough to contain something besides

politics, and there ought to be a fine Department organized before another year is over.<sup>31</sup>

An 1872 Inspector General's report by the national GAR echoed these feelings, if not a belief in a quick recovery, noting that the Nebraska comrades displayed, "a deeper interest in local political matters than in the work required for this order."<sup>32</sup> If Nebraska's Grand Army was to find a way out of its state of disorganization and dormancy, new leaders would be required, those with sufficient organizational skills to attract the growing influx of veterans into the state. The task also required subtlety and an ability to navigate the political shoals of a state that seemed to be rapidly acquiring a long term desire for Republican politicians.<sup>33</sup>

A United States Mail Service Agent named Paul Vandervoort provided the unlikely answer to an organization on the brink of final collapse. Vandervoort was born in Warren County, Ohio, on July 12, 1846. He served with the 68th Illinois Infantry during the war, and was taken prisoner in early 1864 at Jonesville, Virginia. He was discharged for disability in 1865. Vandervoort had initially joined the Grand Army in Illinois in 1866, before arriving in Omaha in 1873 to become the Chief Clerk Agent of the U.S. Railway Mail Service.<sup>34</sup> The extant photos of Vandervoort show a well-built man, clean-shaven in a bearded age, with a plump and contented face offset by eyes determined and hard. The hardness was combined with an unsurpassed ability to engage in political invective, exemplified by the following diatribe against the editor of the *Omaha Bee*, Edward Rosewater:

I abhor him as he walks along the street, the pestiferous pickaninny, with his nose

in the air trying to avoid his own odor, peering into some sewer hunting for more filth to put in his vile newspaper . . . reveling in a swill of abuse, calumny, falsehood and shame that a cultured South Omaha hog would not wallow in . . . Only in Omaha will he fester and pollute, disturb the public peace, rifle the tombs of the dead, invade the family circle . . . an ulcer, a canker that cannot be healed, one of the calamities that affects us because we are wicked.<sup>35</sup>

But before Vandervoort's leadership talents could be felt, certain changes had to occur at the national level. The disastrous experiment with grades would end in 1871--all members would now be at least theoretically on an equal footing as "comrades."<sup>36</sup> The ritual was modified in 1868 and again in the 1880s, with greater emphasis being placed on the themes of fraternity, loyalty and charity. Pageantry and allegory replaced the post commander's attacks on non-veterans holding office; initiates would no longer swear to sustain their country's cause with "your arms, your voice, and your vote."<sup>37</sup> Most importantly, the national constitution was amended in the early 1870s to read:

No officer 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, nor shall any nomination for political offices be made.<sup>38</sup>

While most members and future recruits welcomed the Grand Army's new tack, some die-hards, such as Indiana's Oliver Wilson, decried the changes. Wilson viewed the revised ritual as the work of power grabbing Easterners who "loved the pomp and circumstance of parade(s)," and saw the new organizational thrust as one which changed the Grand Army "from the broad open door of good fellowship to a close and secret conclave."<sup>39</sup> On its surface the Grand Army had removed itself from partisan political discourse. Time would see whether its members and leaders had only placed a cloak over

political involvement.

In August 1874, Paul Vandervoort succeeded J.E. Phillipott as the head of what was still considered a provisional department. Phillipott's brief tenure had apparently been undone by a belief that, "it {was not} possible to do anything without involving the Grand Army of the Republic in politics."<sup>40</sup> Undoing his predecessors' mistakes must have been an arduous--and unfortunately, unrecorded--task, as it was not until 1876 that Vandervoort could announce to the national encampment that seven posts had been formed in Nebraska and that on this basis a permanent organization would be founded during the next year.<sup>41</sup> When the new and permanent Grand Army met in Omaha for its first encampment on January 12, 1877, six posts were listed as being present and in good standing with 100 members:

|                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Phil Kearney Post #1 | Kearney                  |
| McPherson Post #4    | Fremont                  |
| Custer Post #7       | Omaha                    |
| Canby Post #8        | St Paul                  |
| Baker Post #9        | Columbus                 |
| Abe Lincoln Post #10 | David City <sup>42</sup> |

Little other business of note was transacted at the first meeting except to elect new officers and establish the state headquarters at the Custom House building in Omaha--certainly a more worthy address than General Strickland's office. Nebraska's Grand Army was on the verge of a spectacular period of growth, reflecting a similar surge on the national level. Grand Army regulations on membership eligibility appeared clear-cut. Any soldier or sailor who had served between April 12, 1861, and April 9, 1865, who possessed an honorable discharge, and who had been "subject to the orders of United



PAUL VAN DERVOORT  
Past Commander in Chief

Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1902

States General Officers” could join.<sup>43</sup> But membership was not automatic; applicants had to be recommended by a post member and a committee of three had to pass on his bona fides.<sup>44</sup> Blackballing of applicants would ensure that members could include and exclude at will. This process raises interesting questions: How similar were Grand Army members in terms of occupation? of length of service? in place of origin? Did Grand Army members reflect the socio-economic make-up of the state at large? Did Nebraska's membership provide a reflection or aberration from the membership to be found in other states?

Membership rolls of fifty posts were obtained. The years covered ranged from 1879 to as late as 1890, with the majority of years studied falling in 1880-1884, the period of the Grand Army's most explosive growth. More records were used from larger posts in urban areas since they provided a greater percentage of the total membership. Membership records used amounted to 2,421, slightly over twenty-eight per cent of the 18,607 members on the rolls in 1892, the year in which Nebraska's Grand Army reached its numerical apex.<sup>45</sup>

Determining place of origin for the membership provided some interesting conclusions concerning the composition of Nebraska's ever-burgeoning pioneers. In an area that had been a state for less than twenty years, it was only to be expected that no Grand Army member had been born in the Nebraska Territory, or in the adjacent states of Iowa, Missouri and Kansas. Five states bordering on the Great Lakes--Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Indiana--totally dominated Grand Army membership, forming

TABLE I. MEMBERSHIP GROWTH AND DECLINE, 1878-1898.

| <u>YEAR</u> | <u>NEBRASKA GAR</u> | <u>NATIONAL GAR</u> |
|-------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1878        | 175                 | 31,016              |
| 1879        | 722                 | 44,752              |
| 1880        | 1,983               | 60,634              |
| 1881        | 2,550               | 85,856              |
| 1882        | 4,014               | 134,701             |
| 1883        | 6,151               | 215,446             |
| 1884        | 6,020               | 273,168             |
| 1885        | 6,190               | 294,787             |
| 1886        | 6,011               | 323,571             |
| 1887        | 6,163               | 355,916             |
| 1888        | 7,190               | 372,960             |
| 1889        | 7,443               | 397,974             |
| 1890        | 8,137               | 409,489             |
| 1891        | 8,220               | 407,781             |
| 1892        | 8,607               | 399,880             |
| 1893        | 8,023               | 397,223             |
| 1894        | 7,602               | 369,083             |
| 1895        | 7,588               | 357,639             |
| 1896        | 7,264               | 340,610             |
| 1897        | 6,491               | 319,456             |
| 1898        | 6,446               | 305,981             |

SOURCE: Nebraska figures are derived from strength reports listed in the Journals of the National Encampment for the years shown. National GAR figures were compiled from tallies listed in Journal of the National Encampment, 1899, 93

TABLE II. BIRTHPLACE OF GAR MEMBERS (NATIVE-BORN)

| <u>STATE</u>  | <u>NUMBER</u> | <u>STATE</u>  | <u>NUMBER</u> |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| OHIO          | 472 (19.4%)   | NEW HAMPSHIRE | 16            |
| NEW YORK      | 392 (16.2%)   | TENNESSEE     | 11            |
| PENNSYLVANIA  | 277 (11.4%)   | W. VIRGINIA   | 9             |
| ILLINOIS      | 210 (8.6%)    | N. CAROLINA   | 9             |
| INDIANA       | 186 (7.6%)    | MISSOURI      | 9             |
| KENTUCKY      | 39 (1.6%)     | R. ISLAND     | 4             |
| VERMONT       | 39 (1.6%)     | S. CAROLINA   | 2             |
| IOWA          | 36 (1.4%)     | ALABAMA       | 2             |
| MICHIGAN      | 34 (1.4%)     | LOUISIANA     | 2             |
| MAINE         | 33 (1.35%)    | WASHINGTON DC | 2             |
| NEW JERSEY    | 31 (1.28%)    | GEORGIA       | 1             |
| MASSACHUSETTS | 31 (1.28%)    | FLORIDA       | 1             |
| CONNECTICUT   | 25 (1.0%)     | DELAWARE      | 1             |
| WISCONSIN     | 23            | KANSAS        | 1             |
| VIRGINIA      | 22            | UNKNOWN       | 174 (7.2%)    |
| MARYLAND      | 17            | TOTAL         | 1937 (80%)    |

SOURCE: Membership records, Nebraska Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska. Percentages are based on the total group studied (N=2,421).



TABLE III. BIRTHPLACE OF GAR MEMBERS (FOREIGN-BORN)

| <u>COUNTRY</u> | <u>NUMBER (N=310)</u> |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| GERMANY        | 113 (4.6%)            |
| IRELAND        | 61 (2.5%)             |
| ENGLAND        | 52 (2.1%)             |
| CANADA         | 43 (1.7%)             |
| SCOTLAND       | 12 (.04%)             |
| FRANCE         | 5                     |
| SWEDEN         | 5                     |
| NORWAY         | 4                     |
| WALES          | 4                     |
| BOHEMIA        | 3                     |
| DENMARK        | 3                     |
| SWITZERLAND    | 3                     |
| HOLLAND        | 2                     |

SOURCE: Membership records, Nebraska Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska. Statistically significant percentages are based as a percentage of the total group (N=2,421).

63.2 percent of the posts studied. The majority of members born in New York and Pennsylvania came from the western portions of those states. These would have been men, predominantly from the Old Northwest Territory, which was itself barely removed from the pioneer stage. Interesting too, would have been the stories of the somewhat anomalous members who had come from Virginia, North and South Carolina, Alabama and Louisiana. Foreign-born Grand Army men provided a mirror to the state's ethnic makeup. By 1890 German, Irish and English-born citizens would comprise 6.7 percent, 1.5 per cent and 1.4 percent respectively of the state's 1,058,910 inhabitants.<sup>46</sup> Virtually all of the foreign-born veterans came from northern and western Europe, non-threatening minorities whose successors from Russia and Southeast Europe would create much concern in Grand Army ranks by the turn of the century.

In 1896, the National Commander of the Grand Army emotionally proclaimed that,

I shall never forget that the only men who aided and shielded me in my escape from a Rebel prison had black faces. This is a serious problem in Southern Departments. But no honorably discharged veteran should be discriminated against on account of the color of his skin. There must be other and valid reasons for his rejection.<sup>47</sup>

Nebraska's encampment journals are bereft of debate over admission of blacks into the order, nor do they touch upon the national furor of the early 1890s over attempts by Southern GAR posts in Louisiana and Texas to segregate black members.<sup>48</sup> Several newspaper accounts from the 1890s do show a friendly spirit towards the black veteran in a state where the African-American population was small.<sup>49</sup> On Memorial Day, 1894,

Sweet Post #198 in Sargent (Cedar County) became “the first post in the country to invite a colored speaker” to deliver a Memorial Day address. The *Omaha Bee's* special correspondent certainly was satisfied, declaring the talk by Omaha's Dr. M. O. Ricketts to be, “one of the most acceptable talks we here listened to on such an occasion.”<sup>50</sup> In 1897 the United Veterans' Union, a companion group to the GAR, started up in Nebraska. The *Nebraska Veteran*, a paper published in the main by GAR men, spoke favorably of a group of black veterans who were considering the formation of a post. “It should be encouraged,” applauded the *Veteran's* editor.<sup>51</sup>

In the South of the 1890s state legislatures were busy passing statutes which effected a social ostracism of blacks that extended even into cemeteries.<sup>52</sup> But Nebraska's veterans had not forgotten the lesson of the battlefield: death makes all men equal. In 1898 the *Bee* noted the passing of two veterans from Omaha's George Crook Post #262. The funerals of Comrade Weir (black) and Comrade Perkins (white) would “take place under the auspices of the GAR.” The paper went on to state that, “All comrades are respectfully requested to attend, as a double funeral is a rare occurrence.”<sup>53</sup> (emphasis added) An Omaha researcher has recently conducted a random study of twenty black veterans buried in Nebraska.<sup>54</sup> Eleven were GAR members at posts in Omaha, Greeley, Hemmingford, Lincoln, Beatrice and Grand Island.<sup>55</sup> Black veterans almost certainly experienced discrimination in the Nebraska of the late nineteenth century. But they would not be segregated from their comrades in death. Six names of black GAR members, their lot numbers interspersed throughout the cemetery, are to be found in the

listing of veterans buried in Omaha's Forest Lawn Cemetery.<sup>56</sup> Stuart McConnell has characterized the GAR as a group, "preservationist rather than liberationist," more exercised over the return of confederate battle flags than southern mistreatment of blacks.<sup>57</sup> That may be so, and Nebraska's veterans orated as vociferously as any regarding President Cleveland's attempts to return the hard-fought banners. But in Nebraska the available evidence--scanty though it may be--suggests a welcoming spirit by Grand Army members towards black veterans.<sup>58</sup>

Like their comrades in other states, Nebraska's Grand Army posts were interested in attracting men to whom the war had been more than just an evanescent and passing experience. While the entrance requirements never so explicitly stated it, they might have read, "No sunshine soldiers need apply. Three month men not welcome." The term of service figures shown in Table IV demonstrate the overwhelming preference for men with over one year's time in the ranks. Transients who had come and gone in less than three months could hardly have gained those deeper emotional attachments which would have caused them to want to join the Grand Army ranks. Nor likewise would comrades to whom the war had been such a pivotal and ennobling experience wish to associate with passers-through in the central drama of their lives.<sup>59</sup> If enlisted men and noncommissioned officers made up the bulk (84.4 percent) of Nebraska's Grand Army, it was the officers who were at the forefront of leadership in the organization, and quite often in the political life of the state. Between 1878 and 1900 the great majority of Department Commanders were officers and state officials; seven of Nebraska's first

**TABLE IV. MILITARY TERMS OF SERVICE AND RANKS OF GAR MEMBERS, NEBRASKA (50 POSTS), PLATTSMOUTH, PHILADELPHIA, BROCKTON (MASS), AND CHIPPEWA FALLS (WIS), COMERFORD POST.**

| <u>TERM AND RANK</u>    | Nebraska<br>(N=2,421) | Plattsmouth<br>(N=102) | Post 2<br>Philadelphia<br>(N=1,367) | Webster Post<br>Brockton<br>(N=540) | Comerford Post<br>Chippewa Falls<br>(N=318) |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| <u>TERM OF SERVICE</u>  |                       |                        |                                     |                                     |   |
| More than 1 year        | 1,758 (72.6%)         | 87 (85.6%)             | 1,088 (81%)                         | 298 (64%)                           | 197 (71%)                                   |
| 90 days to 1 year       | 392 (16.2%)           | 4 (3.9%)               | 201 (15%)                           | 149 (32%)                           | 75 (27%)                                    |
| 30 to 90 days           | 25 (1%)               | 0                      | 47 (3%)                             | 14 (3%)                             | 3 (1%)                                      |
| Unknown                 | 244                   | 11                     | 20                                  | 77                                  | 42  |
| <u>RANK</u>             |                       |                        |                                     |                                     |   |
| Commissioned Officer    | 186 (7.7%)            | 12 (11.8%)             | 193 (14%)                           | 9 (2%)                              | 12 (4%)                                     |
| Noncommissioned Officer | 444 (18.5%)           | 27 (26.4%)             | 465 (34%)                           | 77 (16%)                            | 55 (17%)                                    |
| Surgeon or Chaplain     | 21 (.9%)              | 1 (.9%)                | 28 (2%)                             | 1 (.2%)                             | 4 (1%)                                      |
| Private or Seaman       | 1,602 (66.1%)         | 55 (53.9%)             | 541 (40%)                           | 352 (75%)                           | 238 (76%)                                   |
| <u>Support Role</u>     |                       |                        |                                     |                                     |   |
| (Adjutant, Cook, etc.)  | 61 (2.5%)             | 3 (2.9%)               | 124 (9%)                            | 31 (7%)                             | 6 (2%)                                      |
| Unknown                 | 107                   | 4                      | 0                                   | 70                                  | 3   |

SOURCE: Membership records, Nebraska Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska; Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 68.

twelve governors (1867-1907) were veterans, as were fifty out of 133 members of the Nebraska Legislature in 1887.<sup>60</sup>

There are no records which demonstrate that any posts practiced a form of exclusivity against lower class veterans, such as are mentioned by Stuart McConnell. However, the Plattsmouth post had a significantly higher percentage of officers, noncommissioned officers, and men who had served over one year.<sup>61</sup> But Nebraska's increase of the muster (initiation) fee in 1881 from one dollar to two represented a substantial sum for the time.<sup>62</sup> In comparing the socioeconomic breakouts depicted in Tables V and VI, one is struck by the fact that the occupational representation of Nebraska's Grand Army better reflects out-of-state posts than it does the in-state workforce as a whole. The socio-economic make-up of the Nebraska group also shows a more urbanized set of occupations than one would have anticipated in a state where nearly sixty percent of the population engaged in farming. Thus a portrait of the Nebraska Grand Army member emerges; he is from one of the old Northwest states, served more than a year in the army as an enlisted man, lives near a town, and has made a successful career for himself and his family.<sup>63</sup>

In 1890 some 28,000 veterans resided in Nebraska, out of which in that year 8,137 men had joined the GAR, leading to the obvious question: why did so many veterans fail to join?<sup>64</sup> Some answers suggest themselves. As early as 1882 Department Inspector-General James West reported to the national body that, "The members of this Department are principally homesteaders and pre-emptors of the public domain; financially poor..."<sup>65</sup>

TABLE V. OCCUPATION OF GAR MEMBERS, NEBRASKA, PHILADELPHIA, BROCKTON, MASS, AND CHIPPEWA FALLS, WI.

| OCCUPATION                       | NEBRASKA<br>50 POSTS<br>(N=2,421) | POST 2<br>PHILADELPHIA<br>(N=1,367) | WEBSTER POST<br>BROCKTON<br>(N=540) | COMERFORD POST<br>CHIPPEWA FALLS<br>(N=318) |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| High Status                      |                                   |                                     |                                     |   |
| White Collar                     | 216 (8.9%)                        | 250 (19%)                           | 38 (9%)                             | 26 (9%)                                     |
| Proprietors                      | 199 (8.2%)                        | 233 (17%)                           | 45 (11%)                            | 25 (9%)                                     |
| Low Status                       |                                   |                                     |                                     |   |
| White Collar                     |                                   |                                     |                                     |   |
| Semiprofessionals                | 139 (5.7%)                        | 428 (32%)                           | 35 (8%)                             | 24 (9%)                                     |
| Skilled Workers                  | 341 (14.1%)                       | 344 (26%)                           | 95 (23%)                            | 37 (13%)                                    |
| Semiskilled &<br>Service Workers | 167 (6.9%)                        | 52 (4%)                             | 174 (42%)                           | 14 (5%)                                     |
| Unskilled &<br>Menial Laborers   | 86 (3.6%)                         | 6 (.4%)                             | 10 (2%)                             | 65 (23%)                                    |
| Active-Duty Military             | 47 (1.9%)                         | 25 (2%)                             | 0                                   | 1 (.4%)                                     |
| Farmers                          | 1,121 (46.3%)                     | 11 (.8%)                            | 18 (4%)                             | 89 (32%)                                    |
| Unknown:                         | 105                               |                                     |                                     |   |

SOURCE: Membership records, Nebraska Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska; Stuart McConnell, Glorious Cententment, 59.

TABLE VI. OCCUPATIONS OF NEBRASKA GAR MEMBERS BY PERCENTAGE COMPARED TO PERCENTAGE OF THE NEBRASKA WORKFORCE IN 1880.

| <u>OCCUPATION</u>                    | <u>NEBRASKA<br/>GAR</u> | <u>NEBRASKA WORKFORCE<br/>SELECTED OCCUPATIONS<br/>(N=152,614)</u> |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| HIGH STATUS WHITE COLLAR             | 8.9%                    | 4.8%   |
| PROPRIETORS                          | 8.2%                    | 0.8%   |
| LOW STATUS WHITE COLLAR              | 5.7%                    | 5.3%   |
| SEMI PROFESSIONAL<br>SKILLED WORKERS | 14.1%                   | 6.8%   |
| SEMISKILLED AND<br>SERVICE WORKERS   | 6.9%                    | 4.1%   |
| UNSKILLED & MENIAL<br>LABORERS       | 3.6%                    | 7.7%   |
| ACTIVIE DUTY MILITARY                | 1.9%                    | 0.5%   |
| AGRICULTURE                          | 46.3%                   | 59.3%  |

SOURCE: Membership records, Nebraska Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska; Compendium of hte Tenth Census, 1356.

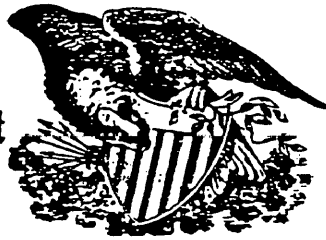


In that same report West complained of the inspector's "arduous and wearisome work" in a state where some posts lay 116 miles away from the nearest railway station.<sup>66</sup> G.W. Stultz, a successor to West as Inspector General, would later make note of "another class of posts, small village and posts that struggle," with a membership "scattered for miles in all directions."<sup>67</sup> Those of us living in the age of the Interstate Highway System must acknowledge the nearly insuperable obstacles a farmer/veteran would have encountered in driving to a monthly post meeting in a horse drawn wagon, over unimproved roads, and in a state which often suffered under harsh climatic conditions. The vagaries of weather would also lead to massive crop failures in 1885--called "the most discouraging year" by Department Commander H. V. Cole--resulting in a rash of membership suspensions.<sup>68</sup> Subsequent crop failures in 1890 would even cause the Grand Army to go into debt, as many posts found themselves unable to contribute toward operating expenses.<sup>69</sup> Farmers beset by in-state droughts and a national depression in 1893 would more likely have sought out Populism rather than the post room for solutions to their impending destitution.

Other factors played a part in the Grand Army's failure to gain a larger membership. Replication of military rules in a civilian fraternal order brought with it the same kind of bureaucratic nit-picking that many men must have hoped to forget. Assistant Adjutant General J.W. Leveringhouse complained in 1887 that many recent emigrants from the East had been unable to join Nebraska posts. Their old posts had ceased to exist, failing to provide the member with a transfer card.<sup>70</sup> Members were

# GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC

Department



of Illinois.

To all whom it may Concern--Greeting

Know Ye, That the <sup>In Chief</sup> ~~Commander of the Department of Illinois~~ reposing special trust and confidence in the patriotism and fidelity of  
*[Handwritten names]*

does, by the authority in him vested, empower and constitute them as  
**CHARTER MEMBERS,** of an Encampment of the Grand Army of  
the Republic, to be known as Post Number *[Handwritten]*  
District of *[Handwritten]* Department of *[Handwritten]* Illinois, and they are  
hereby constituted as said Post, and authorized to make By-Laws for  
the government of said Post, and to do and perform all acts necessary to  
conduct and carry on said organization in accordance with the Constitution  
of the Grand Army of the Republic.

Done at Springfield, Ill., this 13<sup>th</sup> day of  
December 1864

*[Signature]*  
Commanding Department  
In Chief

*[Signature]*  
Adjutant General.

TABLE VII. Yearly Tally of Posts in Nebraska, 1877-1903.

| <u>YEAR</u> | <u>NO. OF POSTS</u> | <u>YEAR</u> | <u>NO. OF POSTS</u> |
|-------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| 1877        | 5                   | 1891        | 255                 |
| 1878        | 5                   | 1892        | 367                 |
| 1879        | 26                  | 1893        | 267                 |
| 1880        | 39                  | 1894        | 268                 |
| 1881        | 56                  | 1895        | 265                 |
| 1882        | 65                  | 1896        | 271                 |
| 1883        | 110                 | 1897        | 274                 |
| 1884        | 170                 | 1898        | 274                 |
| 1885        | 190                 | 1899        | 270                 |
| 1886        | 195                 | 1900        | 270                 |
| 1887        | 221                 | 1901        | 267                 |
| 1888        | 213                 | 1902        | 239                 |
| 1889        | 254                 | 1903        | 232                 |
| 1890        | 265                 |             |                     |

SOURCE: Annual tallies of posts “in good standing” taken from reports made in the Journal of the National Encampment (1877-1903). Discrepancies were noted between numbers recorded in Nebraska encampment journals and the National GAR. This may have had more to do with the differing times of the reports than to shoddy record-keeping. The sharp decrease in 1893 reflects the hard times of the Depression. Advancing mortality rates prevented the Grand Army from ever going over 300 again.

chastised in 1882 for being, “not as active as they should be in recruiting.”<sup>71</sup> But within six years, Department Commander Henry E. Palmer, would announce a policy setting the Grand Army on a different path, apparently believing that quality was better than quantity. Referring to posts which had been forced to close, Palmer announced that, “we want no mushroom growth or fictitious representation,” further emphasizing the point by urging all comrades to “use the blackball faithfully and fearlessly.”<sup>72</sup> If current Grand Army records fail to show the numbers of applicants rejected, the similarity of occupational status over fifty posts strongly indicates that “like welcomed like” into the ranks.

We close with two great imponderables regarding membership: how many potential members continued to be put-off by the GAR's involvement with Nebraska's political elite and how many men were simply not joiners, whether by personality or the after-effects of their war service? One may infer that pioneers seeking the independence (followed by the isolation) of farming on the Great Plains might not have been the “hail fellow well-met.” And in an age which lacked rudimentary social/psychiatric care services, we will never know the number of those permanently undone by the rigors of combat.<sup>73</sup>

The very earliest provisional posts in fact received their charters from the Illinois Grand Army. In January, 1882, the now permanent Nebraska GAR would institute more regularity in the formation of new posts. In recognition of the State's widely dispersed populace, only ten charter members were required to start a new post. Any honorably

discharged soldier could request a copy of a blank charter from the Assistant Adjutant General for the sum of ten dollars. Upon approval of the new post the state headquarters would muster (initiate) the new members and install the officers.<sup>74</sup> By May, 1882, the Grand Army would up the requirement to twenty charter members as part of a renewed emphasis on recruiting. Posts received a mandate to interview all lapsed members and to institute a recruiting committee whose job it was to canvas all veterans in the neighborhood.<sup>75</sup> The process of starting a post could begin with the sending of a letter to the Department Commander, as this 1881 missive from Comrade M. F. Nail, newly arrived in Weeping Water:

Being a member of the Post that was organized at Waverly last Spring and having left there and taken up my residence here I would like to get a Post of the GAR started here . . . I find that there is upward of 60 good men here that would like a Post started . . . There is one or two of our men that have asked the Question--What is the object--and what are the benefits of such an organization . . . The men here are very anxious . . .<sup>76</sup>

Anxiety soon met with accomplishment as The John Bishop (later Lafayette) Post began on March 28, 1881.<sup>77</sup> This outburst of activity would lead the national GAR to note that, “New posts are springing up in every direction and a large increase is observable.”<sup>78</sup>

Recruiting could take many forms: the neighborhood canvas, the camaraderie of reunions and campfires, the nostalgia engendered by Memorial Day, or even the simplicity of a form letter. While a Department Commander could assert that “We are members of the American Legion of Honor,” recruiting required a more specific set of appeals.<sup>79</sup> Those appeals are laid out in a 1909 letter from L.D. Richards, Department Commander--noteworthy also for demonstrating that the urge to expand had not passed

away after the turn of the century. Richards reminded the nameless comrade that if he held personal animosity towards any members, the end was near (“we are nearing the last long march”) and that, “the Father of us all will settle these little misunderstandings.”<sup>80</sup>

After referring to GAR burial services (“this sad duty on our part will be yours by right of membership”), Richards set forth “potent business reasons.” for joining the GAR:

-The Grand Army . . . has labored long and faithfully . . . to secure favorable pension legislation . . . You know this is so, and ought you not to support an organization that has done so much for you?

-The Grand Army . . . has been instrumental in the establishing of our Soldiers' homes . . . It also secured the enactment of a law granting \$60 for expense in the burial of comrades . . .

-At the last session of the Legislature, [AAG] Trimble prepared and had passed a bill . . . to secure the names and service of all old soldiers . . . in a permanent record, and the surest way for your service to appear in this permanent record is to become a member of the Grand Army.<sup>81</sup>

By this stage of the Grand Army's existence appeals to camaraderie had given way to warnings of imminent death and inferred imputations of guilt to those outside the organization who had taken advantage of the Grand Army's work in pensions, burial benefits and the Soldiers' Home. Richards even implied that a comrade may not be permanently remembered unless he joins--a potent threat to those who had witnessed the unmarked battlefield graves of so many soldiers.<sup>82</sup> The national GAR was aware of the recruiting difficulties faced by Nebraska, leading a national commander to a truly moving epiphany:

. . . they are scattered out upon their homesteads, remote from towns, with little ready money, and intent upon the grand work of providing homes for themselves and their children. They cherish out on the prairies the hallowed memories of the

past, and in their hearts are true GAR men, although their names are not upon our rolls.<sup>83</sup>

Chance meetings--the nineteenth century equivalent of networking--could lead to the formation of a post. In August, 1879, Henry Masterman of Lincoln journeyed to Omaha, where he encountered some members of George Custer Post No. 7. Observing their Grand Army badges, Masterman asked, "What is that thing, and what are you wearing it for?" After being told it was a symbol of the Grand Army, he returned to Lincoln, gained the names of thirty-five comrades and received a charter for the Farragut Post of Lincoln. Farragut had 867 members between 1881 and 1906, and provided four Department Commanders. More importantly, the post had given extensive funding to "all of the destitute poor within its ranks." It had buried some 300 comrades, leading a member to note proudly in 1906 that,

We have buried the rich, the poor, the homeless, the obscure all alike. I think I may truly say that the poorer, the more friendless the Comrade, the better has been the attendance and the better spirit of comradeship at his burial. So far as is known no Soldier of the Civil War sleeps in an unmarked grave in Lancaster County, those who have not private monuments erected by their families, have government stones secured and erected through the instrumentality of Farragut Post.<sup>84</sup>

The unmarked graves of Fredericksburg, the Wilderness and Shiloh placed burial ceremonies at the very heart of the Grand Army for the lifetime of its existence.

Like a glacier whose core is surrounded by ever thickening layers of ice, the internal workings of Nebraska posts are hidden under an endless accretion of dry and turgid membership rolls, pro-forma Inspector General reports, and the desire of men to maintain a united front to the rest of the world. The 1895 formation of the Samuel

Dennis Post in South Omaha, does at least penetrate the outer layers, revealing some of the humanity beneath the heroic surface of late nineteenth century veteranhood. In March of that year Department Commander Clarendon Adams received a letter and a charter petition from J.W. Cress signed by 28 comrades requesting a new post in South Omaha.<sup>85</sup> The apparently disgruntled Cress was leading six other members with him out of South Omaha Post 282. Cress had instigated an investigation of the post by Adams's representative Charles Wilcox (“he [Wilcox] has been here to investigate matters and finds them just as I have stated to you [Adams]”). Cress insisted that Post 282 “have nothing to say in regard to our organizing as a Post of the GAR.”<sup>86</sup>

Meanwhile, Wilcox was writing Adams that he had discovered “a very bad state of things” at Post 282.<sup>87</sup> (original emphasis) Wilcox recommended that Adams take no immediate action until his investigation was complete, a view echoed by Emma Bayless of South Omaha in a letter to the Adjutant General. As a member of the Womens' Relief Corps--an auxiliary to the GAR--Bayless felt that the granting of a new charter would effect both, “an injury to our City and a detriment to the Order in general.”<sup>88</sup> She went on to blame the situation on “2 or 3 [who when they] are not permitted to run the entire Post they want a new one.” Closer to home, Bayless asserted that, “we women have supported [Post 282],” helping to pay off a fifty dollar debt. A new post would require new supplies, and “I say . . . we women will have to work to pay for this and we can not support two Posts.”<sup>89</sup> (Bayless's placement of women at the heart of the Post's financial operations offers an interesting avenue of contemplation and investigation by historians.)



Notwithstanding the furor and the (undocumented) results of Wilcox's investigation, Samuel Dennis Post No. 337 was chartered on April 16, 1895; by September 1896 Post 337 was consolidated with Phil Kearney Post No 2.<sup>90</sup> For just an instant we can see beneath the iconic surface of the veteran, and realize that they were men too--contentious, jealous, bickering--as men and women are want to do. And we see their women--absolutely essential in providing the financial wherewithal to keep a Post going in hard times.

Clarendon Adams once described that great movement in the postwar years by which veterans had settled Nebraska. They had encountered a land "grand with climate and fertility of soil." The soldier's landscape of battle and death had given way to "an opportunity to secure a home . . . [by those] willing to brave a frontier life . . . the monotony of the bleak prairies soon gave way to the farm houses, the villages, and the cities."<sup>91</sup> The establishment of these towns may have at first presented the appearance of self-contained "islands," but the steel web of telegraph wires and railroads was tying every town to every other: in trade and services, in the ability to relocate after a drought, in the communication process by which the veterans found one another. In a Gilded Age when business dealings tended to be sharp and self-serving, Grand Army fraternalism could provide a much-needed safety net. A Wisconsin comrade once remarked upon this when he wrote in 1890 that "fraternity has the deeper meaning, and it becomes on occasions another mystic tie, showing its power alike in public and commercial circles, and in social life."<sup>92</sup> Nebraska's Grand Army expressed its power by seeking to dominate

the political life of a state, while exercising influence in the national GAR far out of proportion to its numbers. It performed these feats while continually insisting that it lay above and apart from the clang and clash of party strife.<sup>93</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. Memoirs and Selected Letters of Ulysses S. Grant, ed. Mary Drake McFeely and William S. McFeely (New York: Library of America, 1990), 778.
2. See Hermen Hattaway and Archer Jones, How The North Won: A Military History of the Civil War (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), Chapter 3, 11, 13, 17.
3. A.T. Andreas, History of the State of Nebraska, Volume 1 (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1882), 327, 78. While I have listed Andreas in the author's space, he was in fact the publisher/owner of the Western Historical Company. This voluminous work was written by "many different writers"--all unattributed--selected for their competence and having "access to the archives and records of the State." The extensive sourcing on these archives make it a primary rather than secondary work.
4. *Ibid.*, 100.
5. *Ibid.*, 174-175.
6. *Ibid.*, 175, 177.
7. *Ibid.*, 192, 195.
8. *Ibid.*, 328.
9. Andreano, Economic Impact of the Civil War, 224. See Andreas, History, 1:203 for 1882 Union Pacific mileage figures, as below:

|   | Miles |
|---|-------|
| Main line, Council Bluffs to Ogden, Utah                        | 1,033 |
| Omaha to Lincoln and Stromsburg, and<br>Grand Island to St Paul | 132   |
| Omaha, Niobrara and Black Hills Branch,                         | 84    |

- |  |     |
|--|-----|
| Duncan, Neb. to Norfolk and Lost Creek<br>to Albion          | 75  |
| St Joseph and Western Division, St Joseph<br>to Grand Island | 252 |
| Marysville & Blue Valley Branch, Marysville<br>to Beatrice   | 38  |
10. Arthur M. Schlesinger, "Biography of a Nation of Joiners," American Historical Review, 50 (October 1944): 2.
  11. The figure on immigration is derived from Paul Boyer, Urban Masses and Moral Order in America 1820-1920 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 124. Boyer also notes the "massive waves" of strikes occurring in the 1880's in St. Louis, Chicago, Milwaukee, New York and Omaha, among others. The figure on numbers of societies is from Schlesinger, "Nation of Joiners," 18. Membership totals and the designation of this era as a "golden age of fraternity," are from W.S. Harwood, "Secret Societies in America," North American Review 165 (May 1897): 617, 623.
  12. Schlesinger, "Nation of Joiners," 8.
  13. Mark C. Carnes, Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 142. Carnes notes that rules regarding physical deformities were relaxed during the War, but the Masons later denied entry to those who lacked a thumb or who had an artificial limb.
  14. Robert Beath, History of the Grand Army of the Republic (New York, Bryan Taylor & Co., 1889), 18-19, 25-26.
  15. Ibid, 28.
  16. Ibid, 33-42. Beath names various others involved in putting the ritual together, noting that some of it was based on the Soldiers and Sailors league ritual.

17. Ibid, 44-45.
18. Oliver M. Wilson, The Grand Army of the Republic, 225.
19. Ibid, 229-233.
20. Ibid, 225.
21. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 30-33. McConnell rightly terms this move an “unmitigated disaster.” See also Beath, History, 100, who states that GAR membership dropped from 240,000 to 25,000.
22. Wallace E. Davies, Patriotism on Parade: The Story of Veterans' Hereditary Organizations in America 1783-1900 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 34.
23. Wilson, The Grand Army Of the Republic, 73.
24. See Davies, Patriotism on Parade, 35 and McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 33-36. See also, Wilson, The Grand Army Under its First Constitution, 99-103. In 1867 the Indiana Department passed a series of resolutions which highlighted the importance of the Grand Army's political partisanship:

Resolution #1 - “stands pledged to crush out active treason . . . to vindicate everywhere the full and complete rights of every loyal American citizen against all combinations of force or fraud.”

Resolution #2 - “That we pledge all the power and influence which . . . we can legitimately wield . . . to those gallant men who stood fast by the country in the hour of its agony, in the rebellious states . . .”

Resolution #3 - “. . . loyal men should alone control the affairs of this country.”

25. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1908, 55.
26. *Omaha Daily Republican*, January 14, 1868.
27. For Nebraska City, see the *Nebraska City News*, May 30, 1892 and for Schuyler, see the *Schuyler Quill*, April 9, 1890.
28. Handwritten Material, no author, no date. These two pages are attached to copies of organizational summaries for each post and are located in the archives of the Nebraska Historical Society in Lincoln. Researchers are directed to:

RG 26 GAR, Type of Record Series 5 Encampments, Box 7 Vol 1. The following sentence excerpt suggests the research was performed by one of the later Adjutant Generals, and seems to be couched in a style referring to himself in the third person, "In searching the scanty archives of his office, the Adjutant General came upon a letter . . ." The unknown author quotes directly from National GAR Journals and a private letter. Additional references hereafter are to Handwritten Material.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. James Boyd became Nebraska's first Democratic Governor in 1891. Robert Furnas, elected in 1873 as a Democrat, switched to the Republican ranks during his administration. See Robert Sobel and John Raimo, ed., Biographical Directory of the Governors of the United States, Vol 3 Montana Pennsylvania (Westport, CT:Mecklen Books, 1978), 889-895.

34. Journal of the National Encampment, 1902, 228.
  
35. *Omaha Republican*, May 7, 1889. For an interpretation of GAR involvement in Kansas politics, see Kyle S. Sinisi, "Veterans as Political Activists: The Kansas Grand Army of the Republic, 1880-1893," Kansas History 14(Summer 1991):89-99. Sinisi attributes the decline of Kansas GAR membership in the 1890s to its fight against Populism. Populist success in wooing GAR members was captured in two events. In January 1893 Populists conducted caucus meetings in a GAR Post in Topeka. GAR members offered to protect Populist legislators when violence threatened to erupt in the aftermath of the 1892 elections. Sinisi believes that as long as the GAR stuck to the pension issue, it was successful; when it attempted to participate in non-veteran issues, it declined.
  
36. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 35.
  
37. See McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 109-110. For the modifications of the ritual see Ezra Cook, comp., Five Standard Rituals. Odd Fellowship illustrated, Knights of Pythias illustrated, Good Templarism illustrated, exposition of the Grange, ritual of the Grand Army of the Republic, and the Machinists and Blacksmiths Unions (Chicago: Ezra A. Cook, 1880), 3-19.
  
38. From Article XI, Chapter V of the GAR Constitution, as quoted in Journal of the National Encampment, 1884, 34.
  
39. Wilson, The Grand Army of the Republic, 188, 205.
  
40. Handwritten Material, NSHS This characterization of Phillpott comes from the National GAR's Journal of 1875.
  
41. Ibid.
  
42. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1877, 13. Finding one's way through the labyrinth of Post charters had proven a daunting and challenging task. Posts were re-numbered during the transition from a provisional to permanent organization. Mr. David Wells of Omaha has performed much needed spade work in this area

and I express again my admiration for his fine work in producing a sequential list of posts in Nebraska. For charter data researchers should consult the Nebraska Historical Society's archives in Lincoln, filed in:

RG 26 GAR, Series 5 Encampments, Box 7, Vol. 1.

43. The Grand Army Blue Book: Containing the Rules and Regulations of the Grand Army of the Republic (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1891), 22.
44. Ibid., 64.
45. Number of records averaged 44 members per posts, with no fewer than 25 and no more than 60 records per post. I tended to use a higher number of records from larger and urban posts, since they provided a higher percentage of the Grand Army's membership. As will be shown, farmers still were the predominant occupational group, even with the skewing towards cities. Of course, one must remember that, except for Omaha and Lincoln, many of the "urban" areas may have seemed to Easterners as little more than overgrown villages.

Posts Composing Demographic Study

| <u>POST</u>      | <u>TOWN</u>  | <u>YEARS COVERED</u> |
|------------------|--------------|----------------------|
| W. A. Webb       | Fairmont     | 1879-80; 1893        |
| Morton           | Hebron       | 1882-84; 1887        |
| G.W. Thomas      | Nelson       | 1882-84              |
| E.A. Rice        | Steele City  | 1879; 1883-84        |
| Silas Strickland | Hastings     | 1881-83              |
| E.W. Summer      | Sidney       | 1879-82; 1884-85     |
| Sedgwick         | Kearney      | 1879                 |
| Phil Kearney     | Fort Omaha   | 1880                 |
| Seward           | Seward       | 1881                 |
| McPherson        | Fremont      | 1882-83              |
| Casey            | Laporte      | 1881                 |
| Union            | Stella       | 1883-84              |
| George Custer    | Omaha        | 1879-82              |
| Canby            | St Paul      | 1879; 1881-82; 1884  |
| A. Lincoln       | David City   | 1879-83              |
| Lyon             | Grand island | 1882-84              |
| Reno             | Wisner       | 1882                 |



|                 |                |                                 |
|-----------------|----------------|---------------------------------|
| Lew Wallace     | Hubbell        | 1883-4; 1887                    |
| C.G. Horker     | Wilber         | 1883; 1882-84                   |
| John A. Dix     | Blair          | 1880                            |
| Sill            | Burlingame     | 1880; 1883                      |
| Mansfield       | Palmyra        | 1880; 1882-83                   |
| Carrigan        | Bell Creek     | 1880                            |
| Heckethorn      | Tecumseh       | 1881-84                         |
| Porter          | Salem          | 1880; 1887                      |
| Wright Woolsey  | Elk Creek      | 1884-85; 1890                   |
| George Oliver   | Fairfield      | 1881-83                         |
| Zack Chandler   | Aurora         | 1880; 1882                      |
| McConihe        | Plattsmouth    | 1880-82                         |
| James Shields   | Grafton        | 1880; 1882-83                   |
| Sheridon        | Schuyler       | 1880; 1883-84                   |
| Rawlins         | Beatrice       | 1883-85                         |
| T.G. Ransom     | Scotia         | 1880                            |
| Kit Carson      | Albion         | 1880; 1883; 1885-86             |
| Sully           | North Bend     | 1884                            |
| Kirkwood        | Springfield    | 1882-84                         |
| Thornbury       | Clarksville    | 1879                            |
| Joe Hooker      | Shelton        | 1880-83                         |
| Ellsworth       | Silver Creek   | 1880                            |
| Jeff C. Davis   | Fort Hartstuff | 1880                            |
| Bob McCook      | Ashland        | 1880-84; 1885                   |
| Robert Anderson | York           | 1880; 1883                      |
| William Baumer  | Nebraska City  | 1883-87; 1889                   |
| Farraout        | Lincoln        | 1880-81; 1886-87                |
| J.F. Reynolds   | Osceola        | 1882-83; 1885                   |
| John A. Andrews | Wahoo          | 1882-84                         |
| Buford          | Central City   | 1879                            |
| John O. Neill   | O'Neill        | 1884; 1886; 1888;<br>1891; 1894 |
| John Bishop     | Weeping Water  | 1881                            |
| S. R. Curtis    | Dewitt         | 1882                            |

SOURCE: Membership records, Nebraska Historical Society Archives, Lincoln, Nebraska.

46. Compendium of the Eleventh Census, 650-651. Counties with the largest foreign born numbers were:

|             |        |
|-------------|--------|
| Douglas -   | 40,757 |
| Lancaster - | 11,104 |
| Saunders -  | 6,562  |
| Platte -    | 5,397  |

47. *National Tribune*, September 3, 1896. The *Tribune* was a Grand Army newspaper published between 1877-1900 in Washington, D.C.
48. The Grand Army became embroiled in a series of debates in the 1890s over attempted segregation of posts in Louisiana and Texas. No comments on these debates are to be found in the Nebraska Journals for those years. For a discussion of the controversy, see McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 215-221. See also Journal of the National Encampment, 1891, 50-51, 261. There are no records at the Nebraska Historical Society of individual post meetings, although records of the Beatrice Post may be found at the Gage County Historical Society Museum.
49. The “Great Migration” of southern blacks into the cities of the north was still at least a generation away. See Nicholas Lemann, The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America (New York: Random House, 1992).
50. *Omaha Bee*, June 4, 1894.
51. *Nebraska Veteran*, February 15, 1898. Copies of this paper may be found in the Nebraska Historical Society's Archives under 355.11XAM35.
52. See C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 8.

53. *Omaha Bee*, June 4, 1898.
54. The indefatigable Mr. David Wells, telephone conversation with author; December 8, 1995.
55. Mr. Wells took the first twenty names of private soldiers who had served with United States Colored Troops, as listed in Ken Martin, The Civil War Veterans Buried in Nebraska (Beatrice: Ken Martin, 1995). Martin derived his list from GAR Burial Cards, Nebraska State Historical Society. Wells then cross-referenced the names with post membership rolls. The names are: Silas Alexander, Nebraska City Post #27; Robert Annel, Hemmingford Post #265; John Bridewell, Greely Post #36; Allen Brown, Omaha Post #262; Anderson Bell, Omaha Post #262; Frank Canter, Beatrice Post #35 William Coates, Grand Island Post #1; Michael Dance, Omaha Post #7; William Danford, Omaha Post #262; Samuel Grant, Lincoln Post #25; and Meade Hall, Omaha Post #262.
56. Three of the six men were from Omaha Post #262.
57. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 215.
58. The very absence of controversy in the newspapers suggests that a benign attitude prevailed. Omaha papers loved a good fight and most certainly would have highlighted any conflicts. The number of black veterans in Omaha Post 262, coupled with the previously noted death of a white member of the same post shows that integration prevailed. While there may have been no blacks in leadership positions, all had served as enlisted personnel in an organization dominated by former officers until the turn of the century.
59. Nebraska's membership rolls unfortunately fail to note voting records or prospective members, which might have provided insight on who was accepted and rejected.

60. See Sobel and Raimo, eds., Biographical Directory of the Governors of the United States, VOL III, 889-900, and *The National Tribune*, February 24, 1887.
61. Such practices included high muster fees, requirements to buy expensive uniforms, or meetings at expensive restaurants. See McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 57.
62. Journal of the National Encampment, 1881,764. That two dollars was a substantial sum for the time is demonstrated in Scott Derks, The Value of a Dollar: Prices and Incomes in the United States, 1860-1889 (Washington, D.C., Gale Research Inc., 1994). This subject will be addressed farther during the chapter on pensions.
63. A caveat must be issued regarding Table VI. The percentages derived for the Nebraska workforce are from tables showing "Number of persons engaged in principal (selected) occupations." There are no gender differences in these tables, and not all occupations are listed. Arguments may be made concerning the categorization of certain jobs as high/low status white collar, service workers, etc. I used those occupations listed and attempted to conform them to the classifications discussed by McConnell in Glorious Contentment, 57-67. To summarize: the percentages shown in Table VII are derived from job listings which are not complete, subject to controversy over their placement in a socioeconomic category. That having been said, here are the occupations used to derive my percentages. The following are from Compendium of the Tenth Census, 1356, 1380-81:

|                 |         |
|-----------------|---------|
| All Occupations | 152,614 |
|-----------------|---------|

|             |                |
|-------------|----------------|
| Agriculture | 90,507 (59.3%) |
|-------------|----------------|

High Status White Collar

|             |     |
|-------------|-----|
| Clergy      | 744 |
| Dentists    | 93  |
| Engineers   | 115 |
| Journalists | 179 |
| Lawyers     | 840 |
| Physicians  | 807 |

|               |              |
|---------------|--------------|
| Teachers      | 2,866        |
| Manufacturers | 211          |
|               | 7,350 (4.8%) |

### Proprietors

|                                    |                   |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Boarding and Lodging House Keepers | 205               |
| Saloon Keeper                      | 553               |
| Butchers                           | 599               |
| Merchants                          | Not Listed        |
| Lumber Dealers                     | Hot Listed        |
| Grocers                            | <u>Not Listed</u> |
|                                    | 1,357 (0.8%)      |

### Low Status White Collar

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Salesman             | 291 (Banking, Brokers, Stocks)                   |
|                      | 127 (Insurance)                                  |
|                      | 4,443 (Traders & Dealers)                        |
| Clerks & Bookkeepers | 197 (Clerks & Copyists)                          |
|                      | 2,818 (Clerks, Salesmen & Accountants in Stores) |
|                      | <u>185</u> (Agents, Not Specific)                |
|                      | 8,061 (5.28%)                                    |

### Skilled Workers

|                        |       |
|------------------------|-------|
| Barbers                | 331   |
| Blacksmiths            | 1,564 |
| Shoemakers             | 591   |
| Brick & Stone Masons   | 1,129 |
| Carpenter              | 4,125 |
| Wagon & Carriage Maker | 381   |
| Machinists             | 425   |
| Bookbinders            | 60    |
| Brass Founders         | 7     |
| Brewers                | 131   |
| Brick & Tile Makers    | 363   |
| Broom & Brush Maker    | 26    |
| Cabinet Maker          | 189   |
| Cigar Maker            | 180   |
| Clock & Watch Maker    | 46    |
| Cooper                 | 113   |
| Glass Worker           | 4     |

|                       |          |        |
|-----------------------|----------|--------|
| Jeweler               | 150      |        |
| Gun & Locksmith       | 53       |        |
| Harness, Saddle Maker | 519      |        |
| Hat & Cap Maker       | <u>2</u> |        |
|                       | 10,389   | (6.8%) |

#### Semiskilled and Service Workers

|                            |            |        |
|----------------------------|------------|--------|
| Railroad Company Employees | 4,183      |        |
| Firemen and Engineers      | 380        |        |
| Lumbermen                  | 425        |        |
| Painters                   | 936        |        |
| Plasterers                 | <u>404</u> |        |
|                            | 6,328      | (4.1%) |

|                             |        |        |
|-----------------------------|--------|--------|
| <u>Unskilled Laborers</u>   | 11,812 | (7.7%) |
| <u>Active Duty Military</u> | 769    | (.05%) |

64. The figure on number of veterans in the state is derived from Ronald V. Jackson, W. David Samuelson, Shirley P. Jackson, et al., eds., Nebraska 1890 (Special Census of Veterans) (North Salt Lake Utah: Accelerated Indexing Systems International, Inc., 1897), an alphabetical listing of all veterans listed in the 1890 census.
65. Journal of the National Encampment, 1882, 938.
66. Ibid., 1882, 939
67. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1889, 52.
68. Ibid., 1885, 24.
69. Ibid., 1892, 37. Department Commander Joseph Teeter, promised a rule of “rigid economy,” which would lead his comrades into “the bright sunshine of prosperity.”

70. Ibid., 1887, 42.
71. Ibid., 1882, 53.
72. Ibid., 1888, 35. Palmer's injunction to use the blackball was never contradicted by a successor.
73. Civil War soldiers had an exceptionally hard time in identifying and labeling emotional problems arising from the War. Soldier memoirs usually ended with Lee's surrender, so there is little direct testimony concerning the War's long range psychological impact. Contemporary accounts of fellow soldiers suffering from bouts of "nerves" or "nervous exhaustion" may have been the nineteenth century's term for what today we call Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
74. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1882, 52.
75. Ibid., 1882, 53, as reflected in General Order #5, dated May 1, 1882.
76. M.F. Nail to Johnathen S. Wood, February 28, 1881, GAR Archives, Nebraska Historical Society.
77. Post Charters, GAR Archives, Nebraska Historical Society.
78. Journal of the National Encampment, 1883, 67. Between 1882-1883 the number of posts surged from 54 to 110, an increase of 69 percent.
79. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1887, 33. From the address of John M. Thayer, Department Commander. "Legion of Honor" was a phrase often used by Grand Army men, especially when arguing the pension issue.

80. L.D. Richards to "Dear Comrade," September 1, 1909, Samuel Clay Bassett Collection, Nebraska Historical Society.
81. L. D. Richards, September 1, 1909, GAR Archives.
82. Potent as the threat may have been, membership continued to decline.
83. Journal of the National Encampment, 1888, 33.
84. Typed manuscript, letterhead "Headquarters Department of Nebraska Office of C. M. Parker A.A.G.," November 24, 1906, GAR Archives, Nebraska Historical Society. We may infer from the letterhead that this brief history of the Farragut post is from C.M. Parker, though unsigned.
85. Jacob W. Cress to Clarendon Adams, March 11, 1895, GAR Archives (RG 25, Series 8, Box 1, Folder 5), Nebraska Historical Society.
86. Jacob W. Cress to Clarendon Adams, March 13, 1895, GAR Archives (RG 26, Series 8, Box 1, Folder 5), Nebraska State Historical Society.
87. Robert Wilcox to Clarendon Adams, March 15, 1895, GAR Archives (RG 26, Series 8, Box 1, Folder 5), Nebraska Historical Society.
88. Emma A. Bayless to Adjutant General Trimble, March 9, 1895, GAR Archives (RG 26, Series 8, Box 1, Folder 5), Nebraska Historical Society.
89. Bayless to Trimble, March 9, 1895, Gar Archives.
90. Post Charters, GAR Archives, Nebraska Historical Society. Phil Kearney Post had a large number of active duty soldiers stationed at Fort Omaha, most of whom were recently assigned to Montana. See Perry A. Lyons to James D. Gage, 25 September 1896, GAR Archives (RG 26, Series 8, Box



1, Folder 5), Nebraska Historical Society.

91. Journal of the National Encampment, 1896, 76.

92. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 117.

93. Journal of the National Encampment, 1882, 53.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Strife and Clash of Parties

When last we left Paul Vandervoort he was the triumphant Department Commander of the now permanent Nebraska Grand Army. His attendance at out of state events, such as the veterans' reunion at Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1878 signified a willingness to display his leadership abilities in a larger venue.<sup>1</sup> At the National GAR Encampment in 1882 Vandervoort was simultaneously named to the Pension Committee and elected as Commander-in-Chief, trouncing his opponents--James Tanner of New York and John Kountz of Ohio--on the third ballot.<sup>2</sup> His elevation to the Grand Army's highest office was applauded by the *Omaha Republican* which proudly asserted that, “[it] reflects honor not alone upon Paul Vandervoort, it is a recognition of a state which numbers among its citizens thousands of veterans enrolled in the Grand Army.”<sup>3</sup> Vandervoort's personal schedule would have taxed an elephant: nine department encampments attended, 156 posts visited, 143 addresses delivered, 40,403 miles traveled, and an absence from home of 265 days.<sup>4</sup> In his annual message--akin in the GAR to the President's State of the Union Address--Vandervoort assigned to his office the role of “missionary,” whose purpose was, “to arouse enthusiasm, explain the objects of the order, ignite emulation and enlist the sympathy of all in the good work.”<sup>5</sup> Part of this missionary work had entailed traveling to Utah. Conditions in that state appalled Vandervoort, resulting in a tongue-lashing of Mormonism as “an enemy, treacherous and defiant;” they were “polygamous wretches who have erected a structure as unholy and

damning as slavery.”<sup>6</sup> Vandervoort recommended the exclusion of all Mormons from voting and office holding in order to terminate their relentless grasp of the political reins in Utah.

Having delivered himself of a diatribe over an essentially tangential issue (Utah had 87 GAR members in 1883!), Vandervoort went on to speak of more mainstream topics: Grand Army Soldiers' Homes (“delighted at the progress”), Memorial Day (“observed beautifully and grandly everywhere”), and pensions (“I am in favor of pensioning every deserving soldier”).<sup>7</sup> Vandervoort praised extensively the work of the Womens' Relief Corps, the GAR auxiliary which owed its existence in great part to his efforts. He refused to speak of them in condescending terms (“I am a firm believer in the work of women”) and believed that no GAR post could be truly effective without them.<sup>8</sup> Emma Bayless would have agreed. He also sought to silence continuing criticism of the organization as a political entity. Condemning “the insidious influence of partisanship,” Vandervoort claimed that the GAR had no concern for any member's “political faith,” and closed by stating that the Grand Army,

. . . stands aloof from the strife and clash of parties . . . It will lighten up the desolate home with the glowing illustration of charity, but on all political and religious affairs we will hold our independence of thought, and our conscience, as something we will not surrender to any order in the land.<sup>9</sup>

But to say that one does not care for a member's political faith hardly addresses the issue of whether the Grand Army as a group engaged in politics, or whether individuals within the organization used it to enhance their political power.

Nearly all of the National Commanders were active in Republican Party politics.

John Logan ran on the Presidential ticket with the “Plumed Knight,” James G. Blaine in 1884. Charles Devens had an army post named for him at the behest of Massachusetts Republicans, while Lucius Fairchild and Russell Alger were governors of Wisconsin and Michigan, respectively.<sup>10</sup> Prominent Nebraska Grand Army men proved equally dominant at the state and National Republican Party level. John Thayer, active in the GOP's radical wing, was U.S. Senator (1867-71) and later Governor of Nebraska (1887-89, 1891-92). Charles Manderson, who had proved his worth in the army by rising from private to colonel, had moved to Omaha in 1869, becoming the city attorney and a member of the state's constitutional convention in 1871. Manderson later overcame the state's preference for one term U.S. Senators when he held that office from 1883 to 1896.<sup>11</sup> And Samuel J. Alexander's career demonstrated an interesting intersection of politics and labor unrest in 1882, when he was simultaneously Department Commander and Nebraska's Secretary of State.<sup>12</sup>

The great railway strike of 1877 had set a precedent for the use of military troops as strike breakers, later prompting National Commander John Roberson to deplore “the lawless and turbulent element” who had committed arson and murder, and offering to President Hayes the services of thousands of GAR men.<sup>13</sup> Nebraska's militia, meanwhile, had undergone an extensive reorganization in 1880, the aftermath of a dismal failure to respond to a call for troops at the 1879 trial of the notorious Olive gang in Hastings.<sup>14</sup> A perceived need for soldiers quickly developed after laborers at Omaha's Smelting Works went on strike on May 4, 1880, causing the owners to ship into the city over one hundred

African-American workers from Kansas City, St Joseph and Leavenworth. While labor leaders remained conciliatory, fearful Smelting Works operators telegraphed Governor Albinus Nance (“A riot is imminent here”) and Nebraska Secretary of State Samuel Alexander (“Serious trouble is threatened”), requesting federal troops. Alexander succumbed to the rhetorical overkill by assembling Fort Omaha soldiers at a “corral” on Omaha's outskirts and ordering up the militia. These actions, despite later acquiescence by Nance, were characterized by historian Roland Gephart as illegal and done, “at the behest of private parties in Omaha.”<sup>15</sup>

The general popularity of Alexander's actions led to increased requests for the organization of militia companies and the subsequent passage of a bill establishing a state-funded National Guard in 1881. Militia participation in GAR reunions, Nebraska's largest social events of the 1880s and 1890s, can only have enhanced its popularity. The growth of the militia and its use in quelling the 1882 “Camp Dump” strike in Omaha and the 1894 Packing Plant Strike in the same city present a blatant interweaving of the GAR into Nebraska's political and economic fabric. The legislature authorized a state-supported National Guard at the request of a veteran-flavored executive branch, which then used the confirmation of officer positions as a patronage tool. The positions were filled mainly by prominent citizens in real estate, politics or the law, many of whom were Union veterans. The organization of which they became a part was then used in the furtherance of the social/economic objectives of the classes from which National Guard leadership was formed.<sup>16</sup> Despite heated criticism from members of the state's Populist-

Democratic Alliance (one member termed the Guard “a constant menace . . . to the public peace”), Guard activities received general approval in a state where the Grand Army remained immensely popular.<sup>17</sup>

Grand Army influence was not confined to the control of lower class labor activities; an upscale banquet could also provide grist for political controversy. On the evening of February 12, 1883, a large group of political notables gathered in Omaha under the auspices of the GAR to honor Senator Charles Manderson. After feasting upon a menu which included oysters, turkey, buffalo tongue, Neapolitan ice cream and cognac, the well-wishers settled in to listen to remarks from U.S. Senator-elect W. H. Michael, who foresaw a long reign by the GOP in Nebraska. Michael based his belief on two factors: the numerous ex-soldiers coming into the state from Wisconsin, Illinois and Iowa, most of whom were “strong Republicans;” Republican domination of the state constitutional convention coupled with a concomitant preeminence at “every political echelon”. When Manderson rose in reply, he first gave credit to the Grand Army:

I believe in this organization. I believe that it exists for good and not for harm . . . The man who charges that it is in any sense a political machine, does not understand the objects of its existence.

He expounded upon its “glorious” history in the state, but after acknowledging its current strength, went on to assert that, “no Grand Army man debased himself or lowered this order by doing anything to accomplish the election of myself.” The predominantly GAR crowd, whose political influence was attested to by the presence of the man it was honoring, listened . . . and applauded.<sup>18</sup>

If the dinner party audience was willing to swallow Manderson's disclaimer, the *Omaha Herald* most certainly was not:

This form of doing him honor was made the more appropriate by placing the affair under the auspices of that convenient politico-military machine called the GAR, whose chief function it is, in this and every other northern state, to promote Republican politicians to office.

Never one to back down from a fight (and a chance to bash a competitor) the *Omaha Republican* swung into the fray. While admitting that the majority of veterans had become Republicans during or after the war, it noted that the GAR had never endorsed a candidate, and more doubtfully claimed that, “there has never been a political or quasi-political discussion in the deliberations of the Grand Army of Nebraska.” By citing Vandervoort's support for Manderson's opponent and General John Thayer's run for the office which Manderson had claimed, the *Republican* hoped to illustrate a non-partisan element in Grand Army political activity. It then closed the matter in the nineteenth century newspaper style of personal invective: “The editor of the *Herald* has one fault . . . He hates the boys who wore the blue. He hates the men who freed the slaves . . . His democracy is of the rebel variety.”<sup>19</sup>

As the 1880's wore on the *Republican* and the *Herald* continued to snipe at one another over the Grand Army and veterans' issues in general. When the state's 1887 Democratic Party platform failed to mention the veteran, the *Republican* immediately made its feelings known in an editorial, “Shame upon Them”. In a region often self-styled as “the Soldiers' State,” the Democrats had become the first non-seceding state party “to ignore the old soldiers in their platform--not a word of commendation for the

million patriots.”<sup>20</sup> When the *Herald* later wanted to know why both state and national Democratic platforms should have mentioned the veteran in documents whose purpose was to deal with “current events”, the *Republican* exploded, pointing the finger this time at Grover Cleveland:

Because he [the veteran] saved the nation, and the people owe him a debt that can never be canceled . . . How could it have expected a man [Cleveland] who went fishing on Decoration Day . . . to recognize him [the soldier] even by a word.<sup>21</sup>

Cleveland, the first non-veteran President since Grant, often found himself in uncomfortable and inflammatory positions vis-à-vis the Grand Army, not unreminiscent of President Clinton, a hundred years later. We shall yet see how Cleveland's positions on the return of Confederate battle flags and the pension issue created a firestorm of resistance by Nebraska newspapermen and Grand Army figures.

Newspapers also exhibited the importance and primacy of veteran's political influence in the community at large through coverage of a less controversial nature, specifically the deaths of Ulysses Grant and John Logan. The response by Omaha to Grant's death in 1885 and the subsequent depth and breadth of newspaper coverage were probably to be expected for the man who had sealed Union victory at Appomattox and become a two-term President. The *Republican* reported “universal sadness,” with crepe hanging on all businesses, and even applauded Mrs. Grant's request to have Confederate pall bearers as “a historical episode without parallel or precedent.”<sup>22</sup> The Grand Army's memorial service at Omaha's First M.E. Church mirrored the community's desire to pay respects to a towering figure, with the display of “an immense silk flag,” battle flags,



stacked arms, large flower vases and a snow-white dove.<sup>23</sup>

More striking however, was the response in 1886 to the death of Logan. Our current age is one where military officers not named Colin Powell get short shrift in the media. Lieutenant General Maxwell Thurman, a key player in the Reagan/Bush defense buildup of the 1980s, received back-page notices upon his death. How stunning it is then, to note the entire front page of the December 28, 1886, *Republican* devoted to the death of Logan, a solid Major General under William Sherman, but a man who never attained the prestige of a Phil Sheridan, George Thomas, or even George Meade. Logan's subsequent role within the Grand Army as one of its founders and driving forces in the 1870's expansion elevated him to a figure of primacy in the national and even local community, attested to by Vandervoort's comment that, "he was before any General in the war in the hearts of the rank and file of the Union Army."<sup>24</sup> Logan's funeral services remained on the front pages for another week; newspapers tend to feature what sells and what is important to the community. Department Commander John Thayer's subsequent eulogy of Logan as a "great statesman . . . the soldier's friend," might have sounded strangely to the ears of Logan's former superior, Sherman.<sup>25</sup> Logan's friendship to the soldier included only veteran volunteers, as a recent biographer of Sherman has noted Logan's sponsorship of a reform bill in the 1870's that, "not only chopped ruthlessly at the budget and size of the [regular] army but attacked the pay and privileges of senior officers and even threatened the future existence of West Point."<sup>26</sup>

The sudden removal of Paul Vandervoort in 1883 from his position with the

Railway Mail Service sheds further light on the complexities of the relationship between the Grand Army and the Republican Party, and once again, as with the formation of the Samuel Dennis Post, reveals internal divisions within the Grand Army. In a statement released to the *Republican*, Vandervoort set forth this sequence of events: On September 31 (sic), Vandervoort was handed a notice of removal from the Postmaster General (PMG), with orders to turn his office over to the telegram's bearer, one J. D. Stacey. After learning from newspapers that his removal was based on frequent and prolonged absences from his post while carrying out the responsibilities of National Commander, Vandervoort demanded a hearing with the Postmaster General. He reported to the PMG in Washington, D.C., on October 3; his responses to the charges caused that gentlemen to tell Vandervoort, "You're honest." But instead of being reinstated, he was offered a position with the government Land Office in the Dakota Territory. The PMG then refused Vandervoort's demand for reinstatement.<sup>27</sup> On September 30, 1883, the *Omaha Bee* printed a letter from Senatorial candidate and future Department Commander John Thayer, chastising the Grand Army for having passed a resolution at the Hastings Encampment on September 6, 1883, calling for Vandervoort's reinstatement.<sup>28</sup> In an editorial, the *Republican* suggested that Thayer should have attended the encampment. The paper also commented on a perceived hypocrisy in Thayer's position: here was a man who, during the senatorial campaign, had prepared "a very eloquent lecture, and offered gratuitously" to give it at Grand Army posts. Chided the *Republican*,

We mention these facts not to intimate that the Grand Army is a political organization, but for the sake of showing to the general how his enemies might

attempt to spread the opinion that he did his level best to use it as a political force in the late senatorial campaign.<sup>29</sup>

The ripples from Vandervoort's dismissal did not travel outward only--they also muddied the waters at Omaha's Custer Post. The passage of an anti-Vandervoort resolution by six post members reached the pages of the *National Tribune*, the GAR house organ, and was naturally carried by the *Republican*. At a meeting on November 20th, with attendance reduced to twelve members by inclement weather, six comrades managed to push through a resolution condemning the GAR's pro-Vandervoort stance at Hastings and further called for release of the action to the press. George O'Brien, the Post Commander, threatened to resign, while the *Tribune* was horrified at "such unfraternal, uncharitable and disloyal action as these six members . . . now stand convicted of before the whole order!"<sup>30</sup> Soon however, posts, "formidable in number," would inundate Washington with appeals for Vandervoort's reinstatement. Vandervoort eventually regained his duties, going on to perform valuable service for the Grand Army and the Republican Party until his death in 1902. Vandervoort's importance and long-lasting fidelity to the GAR must have been overborne by the creation of the animosities swirling around his dismissal. A useful tool for evaluating the latent hostility of his contemporaries may be found by setting together two eulogies which appeared four years apart in the National Encampment Journals:

Paul Vandervoort (1902) - He was faithful to his duty as he saw it.

John Thayer (1906) - Nebraska's grand old man . . . her most distinguished citizen, statesman and scholar.<sup>31</sup>

Of the eulogy for the man who in many respects was the founding father of the Nebraska Grand Army, one can only conclude: how dry, how exceedingly dry!<sup>32</sup>

On February 4, 1885, Department Commander Henry E. Palmer gave an address in Beatrice containing the self-contradictory stance of one unable to articulate the Grand Army's relationship to politics. Palmer remembered the return of himself and his comrades after the War, many with “ruined constitutions,” only to find “occupation gone, school days past, places filled, wives and children dead, the old house filled with strangers.” They had then gained homestead rights in a “howling wilderness,” and now, twenty years later, found themselves in a world which often honored those who committed treason and rebellion. Then, in the space of three sentences, Palmer came firmly down both sides and the middle in describing the Grand Army: “There is politics in the Grand Army . . . I know no Democrat or Republican in the Grand Army. I have always been non-partisan.” But he went on to assert that,

In religiously eschewing politics we refuse ourselves the grandest inheritance gained by our victory - the right to govern the work of our own hands - [but] keep our organization out of politics, that is right.<sup>33</sup>

In fact, of course, veterans dominated the state government in many ways until the end of the century, negating the requirement to issue a Grand Army endorsement for specific candidates. The value of post property holdings alone, which peaked in 1910 at over \$71,000, would have made them a major player in state politics, if only in the taxation process.<sup>34</sup> Their participation in the fights over veterans' pensions and the nineteenth century version of “culture wars” (return of the Confederate battle flags,

military instruction in the schools, reconciliation with the South) placed them as a group and as individuals, in the heart of the post-Civil War political landscape. The GAR's perceived influence would even be used by outsiders to combat the Populist fervor sweeping through the Plains states, as when a Republican Kansas editor falsely printed the following as the position of the Farmers' Alliance:

We condemn the GAR . . . organized for . . . preying upon the U.S. Treasury . . . filching from the people in the form of pensions, money not their due. We also condemn the membership for . . . demanding the right to hold office . . . their right to dictate . . . political action . . . we, the reform (Alliance), do pledge, ourselves to resist such presumption on the part of . . . the GAR.<sup>35</sup>

The question then shifts from whether the Grand Army was a political organization (it was), to whether Grand Army members exhibited a mask of hypocrisy to the world in their repeated denials of political involvement. To those who were the masters of Nebraska's political universe--wily men like Manderson, Vandervoort, Thayer, Alexander--we can say that an element of self-serving doublespeak entered into their refusal to recognize the Republican face of the great fraternal body. But as for the rank and file membership, they had collectively evolved from the wide-eyed and mostly disorganized recruits of '61 and '62 into calm, hand-bitten soldiers, veterans of the fiercest fighting of the nineteenth century, and ever-willing to give their lives so that the flag of the United States was held aloft--a flag intertwined in their minds with fallen comrades, Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party. How could they then conceive as political their ties to a party which represented that for which they died: the flag and the Union itself? Even an outside commentator of the Grand Army could conclude that it was,

“organized to keep alive the fires of patriotism, to look after the common interests of the veterans and to perpetuate the ties of comradeship . . . a noble mission.”<sup>36</sup> Charges of political partisanship made no sense at all to men who believed that they belonged to the 'American Legion of Honor.' They insisted, as did the *Omaha Republican*, that their ranks,

will remain unbroken. Shoulder to shoulder the veteran, Democrat and Republican, will continue the grand mission . . . they will not permit the prostitution of their organization to serve personal and political ambitious.<sup>37</sup>

As a department which ranked seventeenth of forty-five in seniority and which never came near to the post memberships of the populous Eastern states--or even of neighboring Kansas' 1890 total of 18,238--Nebraska exerted an influence on the national GAR far out of proportion to its numbers.<sup>38</sup> Four Nebraskans eventually assumed the mantle of National Commander: Vandervoort (1882), Thomas S. Clarkson (1896), Clarendon Adams (1918), and John Reese (1928). Part of the state's influence may be attributed to the dedication and personality of those elected; the seconding speech by Comrade Sexton of Illinois on behalf of Clarkson's candidacy noted his “faithfulness, fidelity and courage,” while Adams was cited as, “gracious and gentlemanly.”<sup>39</sup> Each of the first three personified a cause which either greatly sustained organizational growth or exemplified the Grand Army's relationship with the greater community outside. Vandervoort's sponsorship of the Womens' Relief Corps greatly enhanced the influence of a group whose relief efforts supplemented the Grand Army's. Clarkson made a point of visiting the Southern Departments (“My sentiment 'One country, one flag, one people,

one destiny,' met as hearty a response in Georgia as in Massachusetts.”), in an age where Americans were groping towards reunion.<sup>40</sup> Adams gave voice to the feelings of Americans beset by the anxieties of U.S. participation in the Great War and concern over Theodore Roosevelt's “hyphenated-Americans,” when he urged, “America for Americans . . . One Country, One Language and One Flag.”<sup>41</sup>

If part of Nebraska's influence is due to the specific efforts of high-ranking individuals, much credit also goes to the work of lesser lights. At the state level various Assistant Adjutant Generals, such as John Wood, Brad Cook and A.M. Trimble, coupled with a series of dedicated Inspector-Generals, performed so much of the spade work necessary to keep a large organization functioning--and pleasing to the National GAR. IG William Coburn reported to the National group in 1878 that, “We are trying all the time and you may yet hear good reports, as we require more time to accomplish an object than our more favored comrades in the East.”<sup>42</sup> The efforts of AAG John Wood between 1878 - 1880 earned recognition by the National Adjutant-General, who noted in 1880 that,

Nebraska has increased more in proportion than any other department. Comrade Wood, AAG, has been zealously working and the results of his labors are manifest in the splendid growth of the Order in that state.<sup>43</sup>

In that same year Wood, optimistically (some might say mindlessly) declared that, “every honorably discharged soldier, sailor and marine living within our state will be enrolled.”<sup>44</sup> Wood's optimism and a phenomenal one year growth rate between 1880-81 of 175 per cent percolated upward into the mind of National Commander Lewis Wagner, who

proclaimed,

The state [Kansas] is filled with soldiers, but they will not take hold as do their brothers in Nebraska, who just keep the Grand Army *booming*.<sup>45</sup> (original emphasis)

Nevertheless, by 1890 Kansas had over twice as many members as Nebraska.

Perhaps zealotry could accomplish what optimism could not. If so, Wood's successor as AAG, Brad Cook, proved to be a case of the man meeting the moment. Cook's first report to the State's Council of Administration in 1882 demonstrated the abilities of one who was financially astute and dedicated to the GAR above and beyond the call of duty. A former debit of \$1,700 had been transformed in Cook's hands to a cash balance of \$1,566.22, and he had traveled 17,180 miles that year in the furtherance of his duties. In contrast to his predecessor's call for the enlistment of every veteran in the state, Cook urged more care, "in examining the applications of recruits . . . so that none unable to comprehend the true objects and aims of our Order obtain admittance."<sup>46</sup>

Cook and Samuel Alexander promulgated General Order #5 which called for the establishment of a recruiting committee at each post to canvas the neighborhood and interview ex-members.<sup>47</sup> Cook would proudly note two years later that he had sent out 2,400 letters, 500 post cards and 23,850 copies of orders and circulars, while receiving and answering 1,830 letters.<sup>48</sup>

The IG and AAG reports of the 1880's and 1890's are filled with mind-numbing figures and can present at best only a pro forma picture of the Nebraska Department. A sample here below is taken from the 1893 IG report to the national GAR:



|          |  |
|----------|--|
| 277      | Number of Posts                                |
| 31       | Number of Posts w/Officers properly equipped   |
| 17       | Number of Posts w/members uniformed & equipped |
| 88       | Number of Posts w/records complete & well kept |
| 63       | Number of Posts w/Relief Fund                  |
| 264      | Number of Posts w/WRC                          |
| 11       | Number of Posts w/Excellent Prospects          |
| 2        | Number of Posts w/Poor Prospects               |
| \$10,313 | Amount of Relief Fund                          |
| \$3,099  | Amount expended on Relief <sup>49</sup>        |

While this poorer Department could never hope to compete with its richer neighbors to the East in buying uniforms and equipment, the efforts of Nebraska's second echelon figures received consistently high ratings from the National GAR:

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <u>1880:</u> | the splendid growth of the Order in that state.  |
| <u>1882:</u> | Prospects for the future of this department are most brilliant. . .                            |
| <u>1885:</u> | good condition, records complete.  |
| <u>1888:</u> | generally good condition of the posts.   |
| <u>1895:</u> | Posts of the Department are in good standing indeed . . . Nebraska is all right! <sup>50</sup> |

Fueled perhaps by the optimism of these reports and impelled certainly by a desire to make money, Lincoln businessmen formed a Citizens Committee several weeks before the National Encampment in 1891, whose purpose it was to persuade national delegates to vote for the Nebraska capital as the site of the 1892 National Encampment. Despite having been told by the Washington, D.C. committee that Lincoln would get no more than thirty votes, Nebraska's contingent must nevertheless have been eager as the still-powerful Paul Vandervoort arose to speak in August 1891.<sup>51</sup> After placing Lincoln in nomination, Vandervoort was compelled to listen to Comrade Pipes speak of D.C.'s advantages: the fifty battlefields located nearby, a hotel capacity of 65-70,000 and the

ability to house 100,000 more in private homes.<sup>52</sup> Vandervoort kept his promise to offer “no glittering generalities” and promised the national brethren: free space for the National Headquarters in the State Capital building (versus the standard charge in most cities \$40 to \$100 a room); fixed hotel rates with a maximum charge of \$4.50 per day, this to be backed by a forfeiture bond posted by 32 Lincoln citizens; 250,000 soldiers within 200 miles.<sup>53</sup> Then Vandervoort spoke bluntly to the assembled delegates:

This is business. This is not battlefields grown up with weeds, it is a business proposition to the GAR . . . I know that the Grand Army comrades of the city of Washington are as true and loyal as any people on earth; and I know . . . that back of them is an unsympathetic community that do not believe in the cause for which they fought.<sup>54</sup>

The Lincoln site received seconding nominations from Kansas and Minnesota, with Comrade Rea of the latter state ascending to a higher level of eloquence than the down to earth Vandervoort:

Lincoln is not a city of boarding houses, but a city of American homes - of American Soldiers; these men cannot go to Washington . . . what they want, comrades, is not battlefields, or pretty pictures in an art gallery, they want the grasp of your hands, they want to look you in the face.<sup>55</sup>

Neither cheap room rates or midwestern eloquence could carry the day for Lincoln, but the vote was close, with Washington winning by a margin of 366 to 340 votes.<sup>56</sup>

Department Commander Joseph Teeter accepted defeat stoically, praising the “noble and valiant” efforts of the Citizens Committee, while Vandervoort later promised a new campaign on Lincoln's behalf at the 1894 Encampment.<sup>57</sup> Reports surfaced in the *Omaha Bee*, however, demonstrating that some in the Grand Army ranks refused to take defeat gracefully. When a future Lincoln candidacy was mentioned at the 1892 Washington

Encampment the *Bee* reported many comrades in the National GAR believed that Lincoln would find, “much obstreperous and obstinate opposition, due to the protest of congressional appropriations for the current encampment.” A petition had been presented earlier in the year to Congress, signed by citizens and various Grand Army posts, opposing federal funds for the National Encampment. The potential money to be generated by a National Encampment must have overcome normal political alignments-- the congressional sponsor of the petition was none other than young William Jennings Bryan.<sup>58</sup>

The once powerful political ascendancy of the Nebraska Grand Army fell into a precipitous decline after the turn of the century. A 1902 recommendation to have the legislature make the Grand Army a Department of the Nebraska state government became a last gasp to hold on to its influence. Other Departments had already gained this status in New York, Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, Iowa and Kansas. Nebraska’s establishment as part of the state’s governmental structure would have enabled the comrades to seek biennial appropriations to defray expenses, money much needed by a group whose membership was literally dying on them day by day.<sup>59</sup> The failure of the legislature to act signified the end of an era in Nebraska’s political life. By 1908 the GAR was complaining bitterly of “abuses” in the removal of veterans from public posts, citing Henry Palmer’s dismissal from his Omaha postmaster position as the work of “a combination of political fugelmen.” Where veterans had once been consistently elected to the governorship and had dominated the state legislature and the U.S. Congressional

delegation, the Encampment's Committee on Resolutions could now only cry plaintively that state authorities were,

Riding rough shod over the requests of this Department and ignoring their wishes . . . in no instance has this great organization of the veterans of the Civil War been consulted or recognized by the appointing power [the Governor] of this state.<sup>60</sup>

We have examined in the last two chapters some aspects of how the veterans came together, who joined, and the waxing and waning of their political influence, both in the state and in that greater national body of which they were a part. But other avenues remain to be explored, other questions answered. John B. Furey once remembered how his Eleventh Ohio Cavalry, "passed through Omaha and I made up my mind that there would be a great city here some time."<sup>61</sup> Furey returned and stayed, along with many other veterans who helped make his belief come true. If we are to explain their power, if we are to know why they were loved by so many, we must turn to Grand Army reunions and campfires, events emblematic of the group's ability to come ever "closer to the public heart."<sup>62</sup>

**FOOTNOTES**

1. *Omaha Republican*, May 22, 1878.
2. Journal of the National Encampment, 1882, 872, 882..
3. *Omaha Republican*, June 24, 1882 (Editorial).
4. Journal of the National Encampment, 1883, 5. Vandervoort's absence from work would soon lead to a political contretemps in Omaha.
5. *Ibid.*, 1883, 4.
6. *Ibid.*, 6-7.
7. *Ibid.*, 37; 7-9.
8. National Encampment, 1883, 8. The national WRC was formed at the very encampment over which Vandervoort presided. See also Wallace E. Davies, Patriotism on Parade: The Story of Veteran's and Hereditary Organizational Societies in America, 1783-1900 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 38. Davies acknowledges the efforts of *The National Tribune*, the Grand Army's Washington newspaper, in the formation of the WRC.
9. National Encampment, 1883, 11.
10. Davies, Patriotism on Parade, 87.
11. Dumas Malone, ed., Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. XVIII (New York: Charles Scribner, 1936), 408 and Vol. XII, 230.

12. Roland M. Gephart, "Politicians, Soldiers and Strikes: The Reorganization of the Nebraska Militia and the Omaha Strike of 1882," Nebraska History 46 (June 1965): 164.
13. Journal of the National Encampment, 1878, 522.
14. Gephart, "Politicians, Soldiers and Strikes," 92-93. The gang had lynched two homesteaders in Nebraska's on-going strife between ranchers and homesteaders. The militia's inadequate response also led to a request for federal troops from President Hayes.
15. Ibid. 94-99. While the *Omaha Bee* deplored this as a "bungling blunder," other Omaha papers supported the action.
16. Ibid., 100-104, 111-112, 119-120. Gephart notes differences, however, between Eastern use of the militia, with vested interests there favoring state troops over the regular army. He asserts that Nebraska's militia officers "hardly sought positions in the Guard to protect the property of vested interest groups in Omaha." He attributes the use of the Guard in the Omaha strikes of 1880 and 1882 to the actions of Alexander and Nance, both veterans. The relationship between National Guards and state politics deserves more treatment from historians. One is reminded of General Omar Bradley's fervent wish, expressed in his autobiography, that the Guard be disbanded, its manpower to be turned over to the less politicized Army Reserve.
17. Ibid., 119. I base the Grand Army's popularity on the outpouring of sentiment and people at reunions and Memorial Day observations, as will be detailed in Chapters Four and Five.
18. *Omaha Republican*, February 13, 1883.
19. Ibid., February 14, 1883, (Editorial), and Ibid., February 15, 1883. The author was unable to obtain a copy of the *Herald* for February 14, 1883, the quote is found in the *Republican's* editorial response. The last line of the paragraph was added from the *Republican's* editorial follow-up on the 15th of February.

20. Ibid., October 27, 1887 (Editorial).
21. Ibid., December 9, 1887 (Editorial).
22. Ibid., June 23, 1885;Ibid., August 1, 1885, (Editorial).
23. Ibid., August 1, 1885.
24. Ibid., December 28, 1886.
25. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1887, 33.
26. See Michael Fellman, Citizen Sherman: A Life of William T. Sherman (New York: Random House, 1995), 322. Logan was extremely disenchanted with the primacy of West Pointers during the war, becoming estranged from Sherman after the fall of Atlanta when the latter failed to promote him into the vacancy created by the departure of Joseph Hooker.
27. *Omaha Republican*, October 21, 1883. It should be emphasized again that this account is based solely on Vandervoort's statement. The author was unable to find an independent narrative.
28. Ibid., September 30, 1883 (Editorial). The most plausible explanation for confusion about the date of Vandervoort's dismissal is that the *Republican's* typesetter simply inserted the wrong month. Vandervoort's account, printed on October 21st, begins, "On the 31 of September last . . ." It seemed unlikely that Vandervoort, accustomed as he was to the punctilious exactness of a postal service required to deliver tons of mail to exact addresses, did not know there are only thirty days in September. In addition, he was granted a hearing in Washington, D.C. on October 3, 1883. if he had been dismissed on September [30th] instead of August 31st, he would have been hard put to make the 1,100 mile journey.

29. Ibid., September 30, 1883 (Editorial).
30. Ibid., December 12, 1883. Normal procedure stipulated that any such resolution as was proposed be forwarded through channels to the Department Commander.
31. Journal of the National Encampment, 1902, unpagged, entitled "In Memoriam;" Ibid., 1906, unpagged, entitled "In Memoriam."
32. I have been unable in these pages to give proper credit to the talents, energies, and personalities of many other key Grand Army figures - Herman Bross, Clarendon Adams, Charles Manderson, John Thayer and many more. The nature of the material has compelled me to focus on institutional processes and the impact of the GAR, as an entity, on the community. I am sure that future researchers will remedy these shortcomings.
33. *Omaha Republican*, February 4, 1885.
34. Journal of the National Encampment, 1910, 96.
35. *Greeley Herald*, May 4, 1891. Clipping provided to author by Mr. David Wells of Omaha. The *Herald* called this "the depths of meanness," and reported that the false circular had been printed by many Nebraska papers. The real circular read:

We pledge ourselves to the support of every measure that shall tend to render justice to the old soldiers, by the way of service pensions and the making of their pay in the service equal to that of the bond holder, independent of any political affiliation, as we fully believe soldier legislation should be handled independent of politics.

For an evocative interpretation of GAR involvement in Kansas politics, see Kyle S. Sinisi, "Veterans as Political Activists: The Kansas Grand Army of the Republic, 1880-1893," Kansas History 14 (Summer 1991):89-99. Sinisi attributes the decline of Kansas GAR membership in the 1890s to its fight against Populism. Populist success in wooing GAR members was captured in two events. In January, 1893 Populists conducted caucus meetings in a Gar Post in Topeka. GAR members offered to protect Populist legislators when violence threatened to erupt in the aftermath of the 1892 elections. Sinisi believes that as long as the



GAR stuck to the pension issue, it was successful; when it attempted to participate in non-veteran issues, it declined.

36. *Omaha Illustrated Bee*, June 1, 1902.
37. *Omaha Republican*, December 7, 1889 (Editorial). See also James O'Kane to General C. J. Dilworth, January 30, 1893, GAR Archives (RG 26, Series 8, Box 1, Folder 2), Nebraska Historical Society for a testament to the ingrained Republicanism of Nebraska's Grand Army. In discussing the wishes of a former East Tennessee man to join Sedgwick Post #1, O'Kane concluded by calling him, "a more loyal or better man never lived, he will have no conversation or dealings with a Democrat and he is a man after my own heart."
38. Seniority designation is from Journal of the National Encampment, 1916, 50. The Kansas figure is from Journal of the National Encampment, 1890, 81.
39. *Ibid.*, 1895, 235; *Ibid.*, 1918, 83.
40. *Ibid.*, 1897, 55.
41. *Ibid.*, 1918, 111. John Reese's tenure is outside the scope of this work and came at a time when the Grand Army was in a precipitous decline.
42. *Ibid.*, 1878, 533.
43. *Ibid.*, 1880, 677.
44. *Ibid.*, 1881, 87. Wood's promise was made at the Encampment at Central City on September 17, 1880.
45. *Ibid.*, 1881, 758.

46. Ibid., 1882, 16-18.
47. Ibid., 1882, 53.
48. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1884, 35. A picture of Brad Cook begins to develop even without the benefit of personal description. He was a man zealous and indefatigable in the pursuit of his mission, a workaholic without whom the state GAR could not have efficiently functioned. At the same time his efforts created friction and even distrust. During the 1885 Encampment, incoming Department Commander A. V. Coler threatened to resign if a resolution was passed continuing Cook at the AAG. The resolution was tabled and Cook's tenure ended. (See Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1885, 1141.) At the 1886 Encampment Cook's financial records were questioned as to a possible \$1,000 overpayment. The resolution exonerating Cook deplored "the publicity attained . . . through this Department reflecting upon the integrity of Comrade Brad P. Cook or the past administration." (See Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1886, 69.) Cook's work in the field of patriotic instruction will be taken up later.
49. Journal of the National Encampment, 1893, 131-132.
50. Ibid., 1880, 677; 1882, 939; 1885, 96; 1888, 107; 1895, 163.
51. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1892, 38. Vandervoort's prominence was attested to by his placement on the National GAR's Pension Committee and Committee on School Histories. He took an active part in debates and comments over pensions and the Womens' Relief Corps throughout the 1880's and 1890's. In addition he had been named to the position of Secretary to the Republican National Committee in 1889 (see Editorial, *Omaha Republican*, January 13, 1889.)
52. Journal of the National Encampment, 1891, 184-185.
53. Ibid., 1891, 192-193. Vandervoort was seriously stretching the truth on the last figure regarding number of soldiers. The combined GAR membership totals in Colorado, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas,

Missouri and Nebraska amounted to 103, 935. (See Journal of the National Encampment, 1891, 66.) The figure is still a reach even if one takes into account non-GAR veterans in those states.

54. Ibid., 193.
55. Ibid., 199.
56. Ibid., 203.
57. Ibid., 1892,38; Ibid., 1893, 187. Vandervoort was wrong, as no future effort developed.
58. See *Omaha Bee*, September 18, 1892 and *Omaha Bee*, April 23, 1892. Bryan's presentation of the petition was not unlike the stance of many twentieth century Congressmen--opposed to increased military spending unless it means jobs in their own district.
59. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1902, 68-69.
60. Ibid., 1908, 89.
61. *Omaha Bee*, December 2, 1900.
62. Ibid, June 1, 1902.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Imaginary Camp: Reunions and Campfires

The totality of the first modern war--the whine of musket and rifle shots, the shrieking of an artillery cannonade, death and dismemberment to the farthest limits of vision--mocked the conventions of Victorian romanticism and shocked the souls of survivors into a stillness of the mind and voice. As Union and Confederate veterans streamed home, they also turned their faces from the memory of the carnage which they had both inflicted and endured. Captain Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. shaved off his martial mustache, while William McKinley spoke to friends and voters on any topic except the war. Robert E. Lee attributed his refusal to read about the conflict to a desire, "not to awaken memories of the past."<sup>1</sup> Less than two per cent of all Northern veterans joined the Grand Army in the 1870s and Confederate soldiers, surrounded by the echoes of their defeat, proved even more reluctant to share war memories by not forming a region wide veterans' group until 1889.<sup>2</sup> But psychological imperatives combined with the developing desire for pensions to ensure that a vision of the war would be shared with those who had never been within a hundred miles of a battlefield. Survivors of catastrophe feel a need to speak about their experience; justification for pensions had to be grounded in a shared vision of the war of courage which civilians believed had been waged by the soldier. But what would that vision be? John Logan summarized the dilemma facing the veteran:

To keep the scenes of war with all its horrors vivid before the [public] mind, without some still more important motive, would hardly meet with the approval of

this intelligent age. It was to keep constantly before the mind the *cost* of liberty, and the *price* paid for the suppression of the rebellion, and the preservation of a free and independent Government; to keep forever green the hallowed memory of the heroic dead, who had fallen to save their country from disunion and dishonor.<sup>3</sup>

The war would have to be sanitized.

Post-Civil War America failed to develop that sense of bitterness and disillusionment which characterized the Lost Generation of the First World War.<sup>4</sup> Rather than challenge the Civil War's meaning or efficacy, they simply turned away from it for a decade and more. On the other hand, as Americans continued to experience this collective and willful amnesia, they were coming together in a multitude of lodges and fraternal bodies--the Elks, the Masons, the Knights of Pythias, the Moose. And as the 1870s merged inexorably into the 1880s, so did the veteran find again the boon companionship he had once shared with his fellows. By the latter decade social tensions increased dramatically, personified by increasing industrialization, labor unrest and worries over the flood tide of immigrants.<sup>5</sup> This juxtaposition of worry over the present and growing nostalgia for the past paved the way for Americans to turn to Civil War commemoration as a primary focus of the community, characterized by one historian as enjoyment, "justified by connection with serious goals."<sup>6</sup>

While the goals of Civil War commemoration may have been serious, they did not include any intent to portray the conflict realistically. This was evident in the first Nebraska "campfire" of which we have a record. After adjourning from the Department's encampment business meeting on January 31, 1879, Grand Army members and their families went to Omaha's Clark Hall, patriotically decorated with a simulated campfire in

the center, surrounded by a stacked arms and the flag.<sup>7</sup> After the Fort Omaha drum corps played reveille, Comrade R. H Wilburn announced that the purpose of the evening was “not to recount scenes of blood and carnage or fight our battles o'er again but . . . to look at soldier life in its brighter aspects.” After speeches by Colonel C. S. Chase (pensions for widows and preferential hiring of veterans) and James Savage (“campfires keep up patriotism,”), Paul Vandervoort presented stereopticon pictures of Civil War tableaux: Fort Sumter, an enlistment, the charge, the dead soldier, the preserved Union and a GAR badge.<sup>8</sup> After eating “hot coffee and hard tack” (one doubts if it was the indescribably hard jawbreaker type that was the object of so many oaths in soldier memoirs), the crowd joined in singing “The Girl I Left Behind Me,” ending with three cheers for General Logan. Here was not to be found the all-male camp, with its diseases and uncertainties. Here instead was a picture of camp viewed through the mist of nostalgia, a camp which in Stuart McConnell's memorable phraseology,

. . . offered the picture of self-controlled comrades, voluntarily submitting to a congenial discipline and enjoying fraternity without regard to present or former rank. Orders from headquarters always arrived on time and were followed, sentinels stopped every intruder, soldiers said their prayers and abstained from drink . . . space was orderly and movement controlled, marching was strictly for show, and of course no one was ever killed.<sup>9</sup>

This is not to belittle the veteran's portrait of a camp that never was; it only demonstrates the impossibility of presenting the war's real face as entertainment to “outsiders.”

While such events may have provided pleasure to many, Department leaders did not neglect the practical aspects. The 1880 address of Commander James Savage recommended frequent campfires and reunions, “to keep alive the warm glow of

fraternity and to give an opportunity to every honorably discharged soldier to attach himself to some post.”<sup>10</sup> The first large reunion, held in Central City from September 14-18, 1880, set the stage for two decades of successful Grand Army gatherings and also illustrated that body's influence with the national government, state authorities and local business interests. For the event, United States Senator A. S. Paddock and Adjutant General Samuel Alexander combined efforts to obtain from the U.S. Army the loan of six hundred hospital tents capable of sheltering 9,000 people. J.T. Clark, General Superintendent of the Union Pacific Railroad, agreed to ship four carloads of tents free of charge, while also offering half-fare to all reunion participants.<sup>11</sup> Seven companies of militia, “uniformed and equipped,” were on hand to participate in competitive drills-- militia and Grand Army leaders were obviously of the same mind in viewing the event as a spectacular recruiting opportunity.<sup>12</sup>

The *Omaha Republican* could not restrain its enthusiasm, bursting into a poetic exclamation on its front page:

Lo, they come, the heroes come  
Hark! The tread of hosts advances.<sup>13</sup>

The five day event featured all manner of entertainment for visitors: Addresses by James Savage, Charles Manderson and Paul Vandervoort, dress parades, Company and regimental drill, a \$100 purse to the best brass band, a night artillery duel and a competitive drill by the militia. Central City adorned itself with “flags, mottoes, transparencies and other decorations on every building.”<sup>14</sup> The estimated crowd of 15,000 was met by sutlers selling “every conceivable article of camp comfort and with

groceries wet and dry.”<sup>15</sup> National Commander Lewis Wagner attended, addressing his listeners “upon the commendable work of inducing all the veteran Union soldiery of Nebraska to join the ranks for mutual sympathy and aid for patriotic service.” The *Republican* praised the “non-partisan nature” of the Grand Army as the main reason for an affair “astonishingly free of politics,” terming the reunion “in every respect a success.”<sup>16</sup>

As a social and recruiting event the newly reinvigorated Grand Army had indeed conducted a resounding success. Unfortunately, the money flowing into the coffers of Central City businessmen was not equaled by a similar intake by the GAR's treasury, as the order found itself with a debt of over \$1,700.<sup>17</sup> Undeterred by this setback, the Council of Administration awarded the 1881 reunion to Lincoln, heartened by an offer of a \$1,900 payment to the GAR, free use of the fair grounds and water, the erection of [sutler] booths around the camp, and free tentage.<sup>18</sup> The opening remarks of Charles Manderson on September 7, 1881, spoke directly to criticisms that had been brought upon these seemingly benign events (reunions). His comments encapsulated the emotions of the crowd, veteran and non-veteran alike, over the work they were engaged in on the Nebraska prairie,

These gatherings of the federal soldiery have been critiqued somewhat. We are told they should not be held; that they keep alive a sectional and unfraternal strife that ought to be forgotten . . . as General Grant, I am not ready to apologize to anybody for the part we played in the war [Loud Applause] . . . to the most remote generation: will point to your record as a Union soldier as the brightest blue on the family escutcheon . . . in no state do [Army reunions] create so deep an interest as they do in Nebraska . . . You come from the rocky, granite-hilled New England, you come from the mines and workshops of the middle Atlantic, you come from



the fertile valleys of the western states, you have come here to make the prairie bring forth its abundant and satisfying harvest.<sup>19</sup>

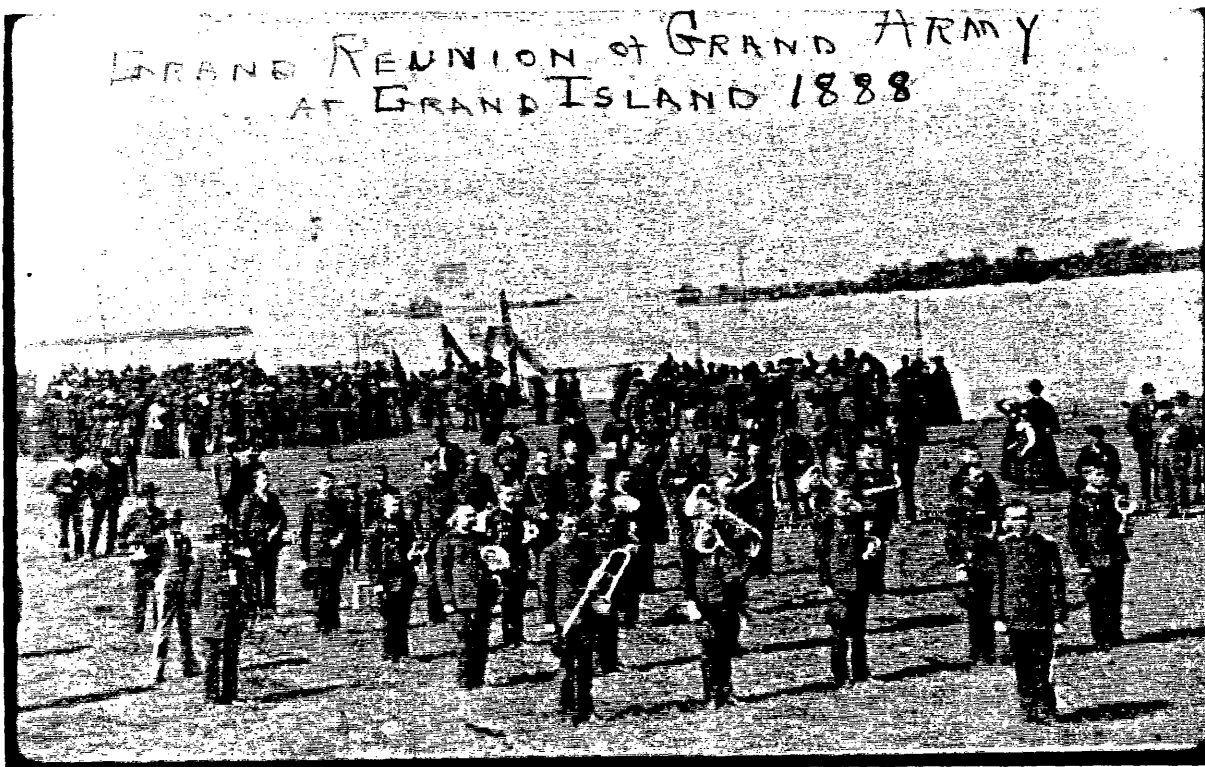
Manderson's words had transformed a soldiers' reunion into a testimony on the eternal legacy of the Union soldier and a celebration of the Nebraska pioneer in America's heartland.

Organizational abilities gained in wartime had not been forgotten. Five hundred tents housed the veterans, and 1,000 could be fed at a time.<sup>20</sup> The 15,000 in estimated attendance witnessed several calls for women's right to vote, an unexpected development in an event most often thought of as a celebration of the martial spirit. A pavilion tent purchased by the GAR held a meeting highlighting women as speakers; speeches by a Mrs. Billenberden and a Mrs. Colby were described as "telling and witty, an appeal to those equal rights in civil and public life," which the crowd "responded to with true, manly feelings."<sup>21</sup> A more conventional entertainment consisted of a sham battle, witnessed by 20-30,000 spectators, between 2,500 veterans and 600 National Guardsmen.<sup>22</sup> Brad Cook would term the 1881 venture a financial success, while despairing of the constant noise generated by the military bands and enthusiastic crowds, making it "impossible to transact any important business."<sup>23</sup>

Several events combined to demonstrate an organizational need to set forth minimum bidding standards through the establishment of regulations more advantageous to the Grand Army. The size of the crowds at the first two reunions led to a spirited bidding war for the 1882 event, as Blair, Columbus, Wilber and Seward vied to be the host city. Blair, which submitted the highest bid (\$2,210 cash payment, 180 acres, and

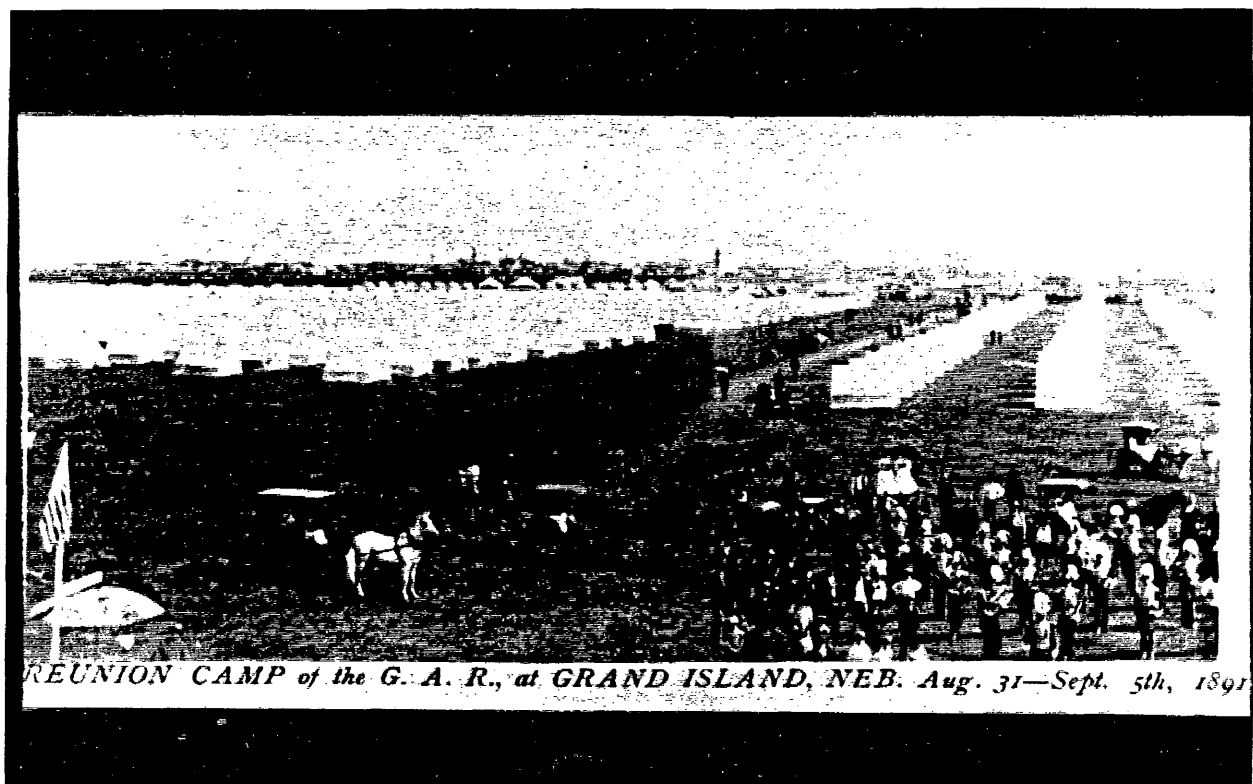
payment for all grain and hay) placed third in the voting and lost to Grand Island--which had not even campaigned for the reunion site. If the organization was not to be wracked by factional feuds over reunion sites, a more systematic process would have to be developed.<sup>24</sup> Cook's initially optimistic assessment of the 1881 reunion's financial success was overcome by a more detailed accounting which showed a debt of almost \$400--an amount later termed by Inspector-General James West as "a crushing disaster." The debt incurred at the Lincoln reunion surfaced only after a disagreement between city businessmen and the Grand Army, with the former claiming the promised sum of \$1,900 was to be used to defray expenses, and the latter asserting that the amount was to be free and clear above all expenses. Lincoln had obviously won the argument. An *ad hoc* solution came about when five comrades came forward to pay off both the old Central City debt and the newer deficiency of the Lincoln reunion.<sup>25</sup>

The year 1883 proved to be decisive in the imposition of guidelines by the Grand Army on towns wishing to host reunions. A resolution adopted at the February encampment in that year required a bond of five hundred dollars on all bids, with part of the bids to include an (unspecified) amount directed towards the proposed Soldiers and Sailors Home. Voting would be conducted at each post, with the votes to be sealed and sent to the Department Commander.<sup>26</sup> A subsequent General Order, published on December 10, 1883, imposed the following mandates on towns: to provide a minimum of 240 acres of ground for reunions; to provide 75 tons of hay, 50 tons of straw, 100 cords of wood, 50 tons of ice; enough water to support 50,000 people and 3,000 teams of



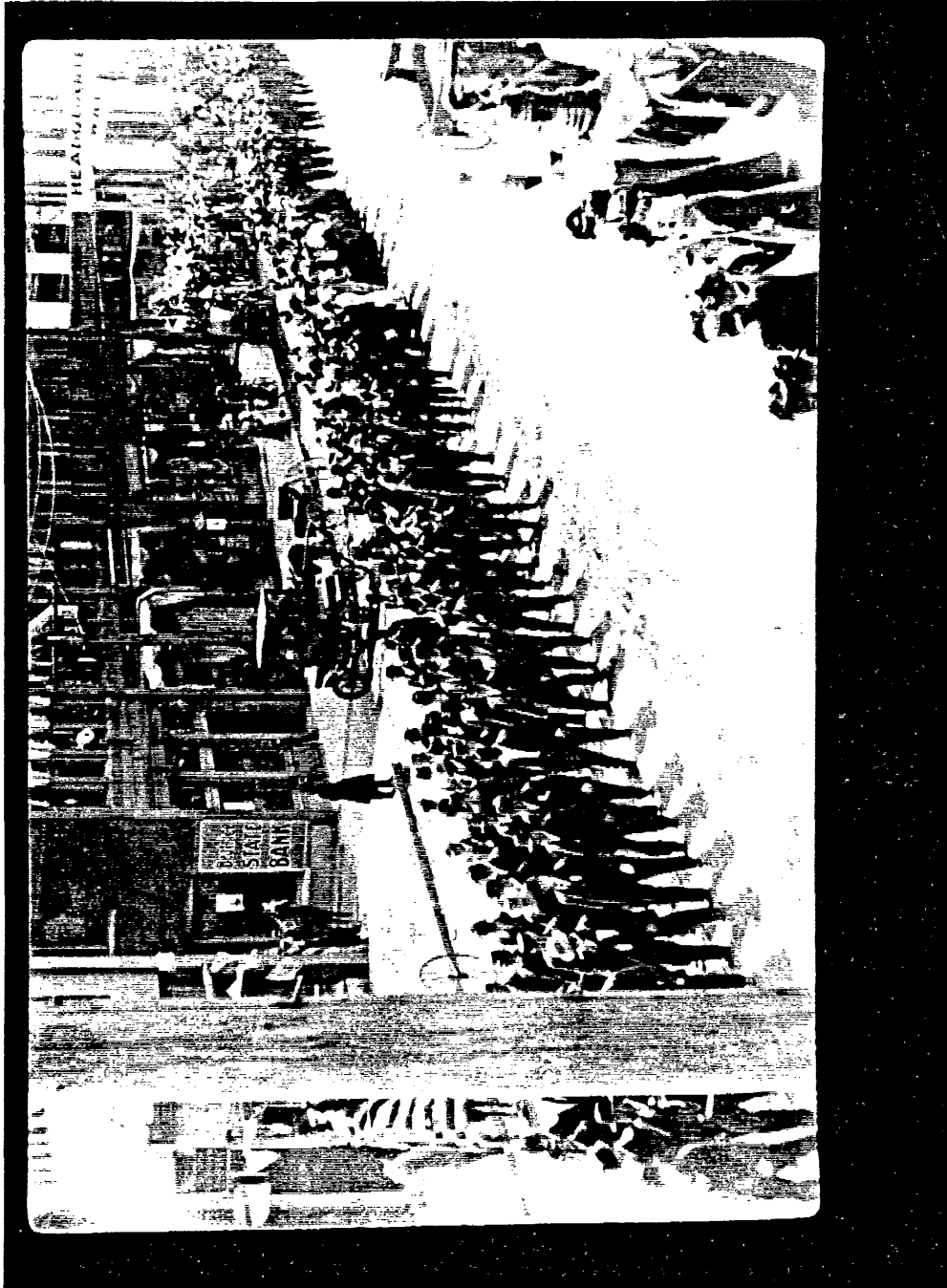
A Very Grand Reunion

**SOURCE:** Nebraska State Historical Society  
(Courtesy David Wells)



The Imaginary Camp in all Its Splendor

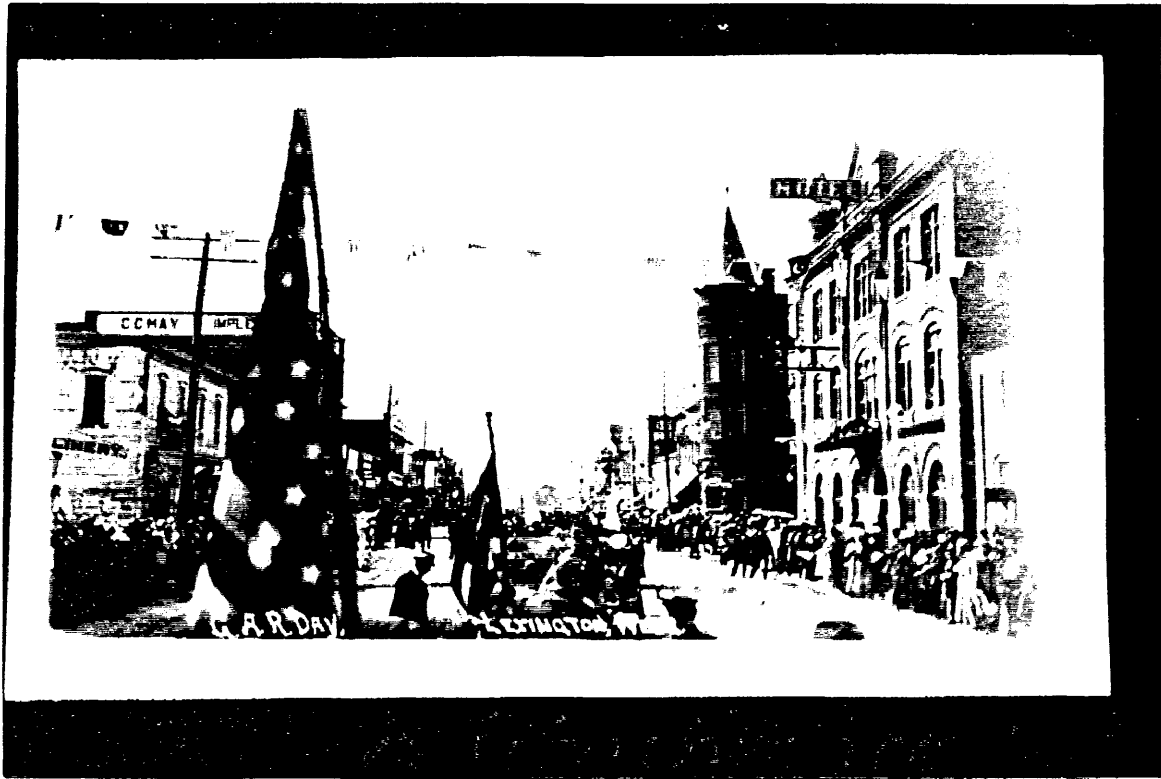
**SOURCE:** Nebraska State Historical Society  
(Courtesy of David Wells)



Beatrice, Nebraska, May 14, 1912

SOURCE: Nebraska State Historical Society

(Courtesy David Wells)



Lexington, Nebraska, Date Unknown

SOURCE: Nebraska State Historical Society  
(Courtesy David Wells)

horses; labor crews to transport all tentage and equipment from the railroad station to the site and return; guarantees to police the crowd and guard all property for nine days; to defray all incidental expenses for parades, sham battles and amusements; to spend at least \$350 in advertising the event; to provide a cash donation to the Grand Army. Cities were granted the right to maintain and receive rent from sutler stores, dining halls, games and shows, provided that there be no dancing halls, gambling or booths that served alcohol.<sup>27</sup>

The new rules were too late to prevent problems at the 1883 reunion in Hastings. The Grand Army later complained that, "bills for incidentals are constantly being provided to the Council [of Administration] and we call upon Hastings to meet the same." Hastings eventually resolved the dispute with the payment of \$4,432.18 to the Grand Army, but not before the dispute reached the papers.<sup>28</sup> Allegations brought by the *Wahoo Independent* of the reunion's financial failure were riposted in the *Omaha Republican*, which told *Independent* editor D. B. Davis that, "you have never fully recovered from the shock you received when Comrade Bonnell was elected Department Commander and the reunion was located at Hastings."<sup>29</sup> During the year 1884-1889 reunions were held successively in Fremont, Beatrice, Grand Island, Omaha, Norfolk and Kearney. Crowd estimates averaged 40,000 at each reunion, reaching an apogee of 75,000 at the 1887 Omaha site.<sup>30</sup> A suggestion by the *Republican* that a permanent camp site be established in the central part of the state came to fruition in 1890 when Grand Island became the reunion site for the next five years.<sup>31</sup> After Hastings again hosted in 1895, Lincoln gained the site from 1896 to 1900.<sup>32</sup>

The new requirements demonstrated the Grand Army's determination to lose no more money on reunions, as well as a desire to appeal to a growing middle-class appetite for mass celebrations. Historian Anne Rose has characterized reunions as, “cast[ing] participants in the role of consumers of standardized experiences in fairly impersonal settings,” as opposed to the more private diversions of home entertainment.<sup>33</sup> But the eagerness with which Nebraska cities conformed to Grand Army rules attests to the fact that attendees were consuming--and paying for--shelter, food and entertainment in large numbers. The spending of disposable income by Nebraska's citizens at these festivals of commemoration buttresses the viewpoint of another historian, David Glassberg, who has noted late nineteenth century participation in historical pageants for reasons other than altruism and patriotism. The wearing of a Grand Army badge in a state whose members often lay in the upper half of the economic spectrum could attest to one's social position. Reunions offered cash prizes to the best marching band. Former residents could visit old friends, while locals could display group identities.<sup>34</sup> City governments throughout the country sponsored a variety of entertainments besides reunions--carnivals, fireworks, picnics and races--ensuring thereby the maintenance of “both public order and political popularity.”<sup>35</sup> These threads and others all come together when examining in detail what can only be called the Great Reunion of 1887 in Omaha.

The *Republican* had begun beating the drums for Omaha--”This magnificent Western metropolis”--to be chosen in mid-March 1887. After the announcement of Omaha as the site, the paper gushed over the Grand Army, asserting that, “There is



nothing they ask which a grateful nation should not grant.”<sup>36</sup> City businesses came together in the formation of a Board of Trade GAR Reunion Committee, whose purpose was to generate enthusiasm and enhance the cash revenues inherent in such an affair. The Board achieved one triumph, paying \$200 to the Knights of Pythias to erect early a triumphal arch on Omaha's Farnam street which would later be used for their own convention, a month after the Grand Army's reunion. The Board was not a well-oiled machine; Omaha businessmen who had raised a subscription list for advertising and miscellaneous support of the reunion were delinquent to the amount of \$1,500, prompting the *Republican* to promise a listing of their names.<sup>37</sup> Those who had provided “special evidence of enterprise” in backing the reunion received free advertisement space in the *Republican's* pages. The lucky recipients included the Omaha Rubber Company, the Continental Clothing Company and the Nebraska National Bank.<sup>38</sup>

By September 5, 1,700 tents had been pitched near “Cut-Off Lake” (now Carter Lake) and designated as Camp Logan. The opening address two days later by National Commander Lucuis Fairchild placed the Grand Army in the context of other fraternal bodies and captured Nebraska's enthusiasm for reunions:

The fraternity of our order is strong, for the ties which bind you together to the millions of men that served in the Union Army are stronger than the ties that bind any other class of men . . . Many of you are Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias and the United Order of American Workmen . . . Before you gentlemen entered those orders there was no fraternal feeling, but with the Grand Army it is different. This great order, the Grand Army of the Republic, was born of fraternity.

I had heard of Nebraska reunions and I thought they were newspaper exaggerations or chestnuts. I am perfectly astounded at the extent of the reunion

you have here . . . a man came 400 miles with his daughter, fifty miles by wagon . . . three or four hundred miles is nothing [to you.] That is an index of the broad gauge of the northwest and what caused half a million men to face death, the devil and the cannon's mouth.<sup>39</sup>

Fairchild had placed the Grand Army at the forefront of nineteenth century fraternal orders, harkening back to the deeper bonds forged by combat. The extent and enthusiasm with which Nebraska veterans reunited mirrored the zeal with which they had fought for the Union; unmentioned by Fairchild were the hundreds, perhaps thousands, who had endured rides in railroad box cars to reach this destination.<sup>40</sup>

The city responded to the massive influx of visitors, presenting “an animated spectacle . . . streets and hotels crowded.” What the hotels could not handle, private enterprise could, as one individual rented an empty building adjacent to the downtown Paxton Hotel, filling it with five hundred cots in which visitors could sleep--and pay.<sup>41</sup> An estimated three to four hundred wives and daughters of veterans lodged on the camp ground itself, further diffusing any relation reunion camp-sites may have had to reality.<sup>42</sup> But the much anticipated parade through the Knights of Pythias arch was beset by trouble, in the form of a huge picture of Grover Cleveland which Omaha Democrats had suspended on the Paxton Hotel. The *Republican* was quick to point out its “true” purpose, which was, “to compel the Grand Army of the Republic to do something distasteful to its members . . . to coerce them by a political party in the interest of a candidate for office.”<sup>43</sup> When the veterans marched on September 7, an estimated crowd of 75,000 thronged Omaha's downtown. Portraits of Lincoln, Grant, Logan and Washington decorated Douglas and Farnam streets; conspicuous by its absence was the

now infamous picture of the current president, removed early that morning at the request of a Grand Army committee.<sup>44</sup>

The reviewing officers (Governor Thayer, Mayor William Broatch and Senator Manderson) witnessed a parade broken into four segments: active duty soldiers from the 8th and 21st U.S. Infantry; First Division of Veterans, composed from the states of Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Kansas, Minnesota, West Virginia and the Navy; Second Division of Veterans, composed from Iowa, Indiana, New York, New England, New Jersey, Missouri, Pennsylvania and Prisoners of War; Third Division, composed of Sons of Veterans.<sup>45</sup> Apparently, original state loyalties were far stronger than the current configuration of veterans' posts. The Grand Army could even disregard the deep-seated racism of the time, while others characterized their actions in the patronizing attitude so typical of the era. In writing about one of the state delegations the *Republican* observed,

The West Virginia contingent [was] not large . . . it was a mixed crowd, several colored veterans appearing in line. Their skins were black, but the Grand Army badge showed that they were pretty white fellows and worthy to march in the Grand Army parade.<sup>46</sup>

Piercing the article's condescension leads one to the conclusion that the wearing of that badge could lift black veterans onto a plane of equality with their comrades, tenuous and short-lived though it may have been.

Despite the parade's success, some veterans registered complaints about the "showoff journey," objecting to its length, the Cleveland portrait, and the possibility of unpleasantness because of it. But numerous diversions existed to take their minds into a happier path. Central Avenue was thronged with booths offering items of all variety:

panoramas, photographs of battle scenes, merry-go-rounds for the children. The “badge man, the [candy] cane man, and the popcorn man” all plied their wares.<sup>47</sup> Others less interested in family entertainment were open for business. Speaking in the purple prose of the era, the *Republican* reported that “a set of saloon and dance house men” had opened a “low den” on the east side of the camp. “Several of the devil's own females,” and a good liquor supply,

soon [drew] to their vile flame all the night bug bummer element that since the camp has opened has infested the vicinity.

A raiding party of one hundred veterans, determined to clean up the area, descended upon the saloon, only to find that the “dirty debauchers” had left.<sup>48</sup> The humorous aspects of this episode are touched by another thought: How many of those raiding the 'low den' would themselves have been willing patrons of such establishments twenty years previously? Thus had age, family life and prosperity worn down the desires of youth.

More military-style diversions were also available. Guard mounts, battalion drill and battery drill were provided by elements of the Regular Army. In an unusual touch, Captain I.W. Hastings of Aurora replicated the duel between the *Monitor* and the *Merrimac* and the siege of Vicksburg on Cut-Off Lake, using ships representing the *Benton*, *Tuscumbia*, and *Henry Clay*.<sup>49</sup> The sham battle conducted on September 9 between veterans and elements of the state militia drew 50-60,000 people, termed “the largest number of people ever congregated in Omaha.”<sup>50</sup>

What are we to make of such events? At least one historian has characterized reunions/encampments/battle reenactments as,

offer [ing] participants opportunities to affirm a sense of communion that was likely to be missing from the rest of their lives . . . Although encampments may have been stylized, to say the least, they did affirm a sense of community all too lacking in more conventional social arrangements.<sup>51</sup>

Anne Rose has seen these events as the harbinger for other “extended dramas, orchestrated by a core group of organizers and subsuming large numbers of observers,” leading to twentieth century rock concerts, street festivals and sporting events.<sup>52</sup> The impetus given to reenactments has lasted well into the late twentieth century and enthusiasm for these events shows no evidence of dying out. And yes, modern versions of the 'candy-cane man and popcorn man' still thrive.<sup>53</sup>

As the Great Reunion prepared to close, the *Republican* attempted to place the event in perspective. No less than the future of the nation depended on veteran reunions, instilling in “Young America,”

. . . a feeling of pride in his country, and a resolution to emulate these gray-haired veterans. He becomes himself a patriot--the future defender of the nation. Reunions train up young men to keep step to the music of the union.<sup>54</sup>

The paper here struck its own finely-pitched note. For while reunions provided entertainment and diversions to thousands of Nebraskans in the era before mass entertainment, an underlying seriousness underlay their motivation and their content. The veterans were presenting to family, friends and on-lookers a portrait of who they were and how they had come together at the supreme moment of their lives. This feeling was captured by the welcoming remarks of T.M. Marquette to the veterans at the 1881 Lincoln reunion, who called it,

a faint rehearsal--a shadowy recollection--of the great tragic act over 20 years ago

. . . today [the flag] floats a symbol of a broader humanity--a nobler civilization.<sup>55</sup>

Their love for the nation had transformed itself into a fraternity of comradeship with each other, ending only in death. Reunions would pass on to succeeding generations both a love of the nation that had been saved and of the men who had saved it. In their own minds the veterans were the nation--the American Legion of Honor.

Passing on to more mundane issues, one anonymous veteran gave voice to both a complaint and a prophecy, as the Great Reunion neared its end. For this man at least, Omaha was “too big, with too many distractions,” and would have a hard time ever getting another reunion.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately for the sustained success of future reunions, the distractions of which the veteran spoke were not limited to Omaha. When Lincoln became the reunion site in 1896, the state fair grounds were used, as that location afforded more opportunity for public meetings. Department Commander J. H. Culver became concerned, lamenting that, “the character of our reunions . . . is gradually changing [from] a reunion of old soldiers to that of a grand aggregation of sideshows.”<sup>57</sup> When Hastings gained the site from 1901 to 1903, concessions came under the direct supervision of the Department Commander, “in order that all improper and immoral sideshows be excluded.”<sup>58</sup>

Nebraska worries over sideshows reflected national concern by patriotic organizations for the growing commercialization and “carnival atmosphere” attendant upon these occasions.<sup>59</sup> While state reunions began to lose focus in the 1890s, they also faced the prospect of competition from regional events. In 1891 an Eastern District

Association of the GAR was formed, composed of Lancaster, Cass, Sarpy and Saunders counties. Their first reunion was held in May 1893 at Greenwood, Nebraska, attracting 5,000 attendees. A second was held in August 1893, at which point the *Nebraska Defender* complained of smaller than usual attendance at the state reunion.<sup>60</sup> By 1904 the Grand Army voted without debate to cease state reunions which, in the words of Department Commander Herman Bross,

marked another milestone in our progress toward the cessation of all distinctly Grand Army gatherings . . . Officers and comrades . . . have been disposed to emphasize the importance of District Reunions [which are] entirely independent of the Department as far as their organizations are concerned.<sup>61</sup>

And so the veterans had honored their past and celebrated the living within the confined and welcoming spaces of an imaginary camp. They had constructed this edifice out of equal parts of nostalgia and the remembrance of the camp as the one safe place in the world of combat--a place where a man could cook his meals in leisure, share thoughts and memories of home with his comrades, and sleep protected by the web of sentinels who guarded his dreams. Department Commander James Savage captured these feelings in 1881, when he remarked that,

Memories of the war grow dim and vague and dreamlike . . . and we grow fond of looking back upon the stirring scenes . . . we close up our diminishing ranks and cling closer and closer to the friends who are left.<sup>62</sup>

But others had to be remembered and commemorated also, those comrades who had not survived past the days of battle. One grace note had been struck in this regard at the 1882 reunion by Colonel Thomas O'Hara,

The muffled drum's sad roll has beat

The soldier's last tattoo,  
No more on life's parade shall meet  
That brave and fallen few,  
On Fame's eternal camping ground  
Their silent tents are spread,  
And glory guards with solemn round,  
The bivouac of the dead.<sup>63</sup>

The deaths of so many men could not be encompassed by the essentially celebratory rites of a reunion. The answer would come in the form of a uniquely special day--at once a holiday and a holy day--the roots of which may be traced to a few words of dedication spoken at a small town in Pennsylvania.



## ENDNOTES

1. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 269.
2. *Ibid.*, 270.
3. *Ibid.*, 270-271.
4. This statement applied to the North only. Southerners reacted to that special sense of being a defeated people by making the Lost Cause a form of civil religion. See Charles Reagan Wilson, Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause 1865-1920 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), and Gaines M. Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause and the Emergence of the New South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).
5. Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 85-87.
6. Anne C. Rose, Victorian America and the Civil War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 134.
7. *Omaha Republican*, February 1, 1879. A word here on nomenclature: Encampments were held semi-annually, were for members only, and conducted the routine administrative business of the Grand Army--election of officers, resolutions to pass to the National GAR, reports of the IG, and so on. Campfires were open to the public, and were usually held in an enclosed area, where speeches and patriotic songs were the order of the day. Reunions were open to the public, lasted three to five days, and featured sham battles, drill reviews and speeches.
8. *Ibid.* These might have been standardized pictures, as the paper makes no attempt to describe them.
9. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 104-105.

10. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1880, 49.
11. *Ibid.*, 1881, 87, and *Omaha Republican*, September 10, 1880.
12. *Omaha Republican*, September 10, 1880.
13. *Ibid.*, September 16, 1880.
14. Listing of events is from *Omaha Republican*, September 14, 1880, and description of Central City is from *Republican*, September 16, 1880.
15. *Omaha Republican*, September 16, 1880. The paper stated that 8,000 veterans were in the camp. The Grand Army had invited all veterans to attend, whether members or not. "Sutlers" was a name given to those men during the Civil war who were authorized to sell personal sundries to soldiers in their camps. The appellation continued in the post-war period.
16. Wagner's address from *Omaha Republican*, September 17, 1880; characterization of the Grand Army as non-partisan from *Republican*, September 18, 1880; characterization of the reunion as a success from *Republican*, September 16, 1880.
17. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1881, 82. Expenditures for items such as advertising, wood, hay, food and labor totaled \$2,335.88, while income amounted to only \$609.93. A subscription list to liquidate the debt by April 1, 1888, amounted to only \$708, including Central City's offer to pay \$250, leading to the question, "Where's the rest?" Grand Army finances appear not to have always been handled on the record.
18. *Ibid.*, 1881, 89-90.
19. *Omaha Republican*, September 7, 1881.
20. *Ibid.*, September 1, 1881.

21. Ibid., September 10, 1881.
22. Ibid.
23. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1882, 18,22. Cook's assessment of the financial success of the 1881 reunion was contradicted by the statement of the 1883 Reunion committee's report, which asserted that the Lincoln event had left a debit of \$398.30. (See Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1883, 26.)
24. Ibid., 1882, 33. See also *Omaha Republican*, September 5, 1883, for an account of the early departure from the Hastings reunion of comrades from Kearney and Harvard. They left in part due to problems over accommodations, but the paper also describes them as, "considerably galled because they failed to secure the reunion."
25. Comment by James West and *ad hoc* solution are in Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1883, 70. Disagreement between the Grand Army and Lincoln is in Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1882, 34-37.
26. Ibid., 1883, 44.
27. Ibid., 1884, 66, as published in General Order #10.
28. Ibid., 1884, 56, 601.
29. *Omaha Republican*, February 21, 1884.
30. Ibid., September 8, 1887. See also Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1884, 60, for a much larger estimate of the 1883 reunion at Hastings. The Reunion Committee report called it "by far the largest gathering ever assembled in the state of Nebraska." Someone on the committee had counted 3,473 wagons, estimating four to a wagon, for a total of 13,892. Adding passenger totals from the railroads, they came up with a total of 83,352.

31. *Omaha Republican*, September 5, 1883; Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1890, 48.
32. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1896.
33. Rose, Victorian America and the Civil War, 143.
34. David Glassberg, American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 20-21.
35. *Ibid.*, 25.
36. *Omaha Republican*, March 16, 1887; *Ibid.*, March 17, 1887 (Editorial).
37. *Ibid.*, September 3, 1887.
38. *Ibid.*, September 6, 1887.
39. *Ibid.*, September 7, 1887.
40. See Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1888, 77, which passed the following resolution: "Railroads in Nebraska have always failed to furnish comfortable and adequate transportation to accommodate the people who visit reunions, encampments . . . often compelling the people to ride in flat or box-cars and to stand up for long distances and they should charge one cent a mile."
41. *Omaha Republican*, September 5, 1887.
42. *Ibid.*, September 7, 1887.

43. Ibid., September 7, 1887 (Editorial).
44. Ibid., September 8, 1887.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Complaints by the veterans are in *Omaha Republican*, September 7, 1887. Description of booths on Central Avenue is from *Omaha Republican*, September 8, 1887.
48. Ibid., September 8, 1887.
49. Regular Army activities reported in *Omaha Republican*, September 6, 1887. Description of naval display in *Omaha Republican*, September 8, 1887.
50. Ibid., September 10, 1887.
51. Jim Cullen, *The Civil War in Popular Culture: A Reusable Past* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 182.
52. Rose, *Victorian America and the Civil War*, 143.
53. See Cullen, *Civil War in Popular Culture*, Chapter Six.
54. *Omaha Republican*, September 9, 1887 (Editorial).
55. Ibid., September 7, 1881.

56. Ibid., September 9, 1887.
57. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1897, 77.
58. Ibid., 1900, 65. One may infer that Lincoln may have been a host to “improper and immoral” shows.
59. See Glassberg, American Historical Pageantry, 30.
60. *Nebraska Defender*, May 1893; Ibid., August 1893. The paper was published for two years. Copies are located in the Archives Section of the Nebraska State Historical Society.
61. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1905, 25.
62. Ibid., 1881, 79.
63. *Omaha Republican*, August 30, 1882.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **The Bivouac of the Dead: Nebraska Celebrates Memorial Day**

Americans in the late twentieth century fill Memorial Day with baseball games, barbecues, auto racing and opportunities to shop at the local mall for items at fifty per cent discount. Commemorative activities have been reduced to sparsely attended parades, sponsored by the local American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars, and have become a stage for local schools and bands to parade in front of the citizenry--another chance for Americans to celebrate themselves. Such media attention as is directed towards the purpose of the day focuses on the laying of a wreath by the President at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.<sup>1</sup> As each year passes, fewer and fewer are left who ever mourned directly the loss of a soldier who died in combat. But in 1865 Americans had just lost over 600,000 of their contemporaries--fathers, sons, brothers, husbands, friends--causing a void and heartache in the collective life of a nation which is staggering to comprehend. The Grand Army would be at the forefront of efforts to fill that void, and in recounting their endeavors we must also focus on the often tortuous process by which the North and South became reconciled. For this now seemingly innocuous national celebration is as much a Southern story as it is a Northern one. On the last day of his life, President Lincoln had exhorted his cabinet that, "We must extinguish our resentments if we expect harmony and union."<sup>2</sup> Such resentments would be hard to overcome in a land which had expended so much of its blood and treasure, but Lincoln himself had shown the way for Americans to follow.

When the President rose to give his dedicatory remarks at Gettysburg's National Cemetery he was honoring a tradition which went back to the oration of Pericles, spoken over the ashes of the Athenians killed in the Peloponnesian War.<sup>3</sup> Unlike his oratorical counterpart, Edward Everett, Lincoln did not dwell on the specifics of the great battle which had been fought in July of 1863; he did not name generals or units or even allude to the enemy. Instead he gave voice to images which forever intertwined the living with the dead, images which became the mainstay of Grand Army thought and rhetoric:

It is for us the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work that they have thus far so nobly carried on. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us,--that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to the cause for which they here gave their last full measure of devotion--that we here highly resolve that the dead shall not have died in vain.<sup>4</sup>

While the Gettysburg Address signaled a revolution in American political thought, several features are noteworthy in regard to subsequent Memorial Day activities: Lincoln spoke at a Cemetery and cemeteries would become the focal points of commemoration. He spoke not of the Northern dead, but of 'these honored dead,' pointing a way to reunion and reconciliation. Lastly, the sacrifices made by the dead must forever be remembered by the living; by inference, only a national day of commemoration could fulfill this wish.

At least one historian would come to see Lincoln's own funeral--attended by the "wild delirium of seven million Northerners crushing, sobbing and fainting"--as the impetus for the later pageantry of Memorial Day. Lloyd Lewis asserted that, "Fourteen days of morbid frenzy around the bier of the martyred President were enough to prepare the Republic for an annual Holiday of Death--a day of processions, flowers and



lamentations for dead warriors.”<sup>5</sup> And certainly there seems an element of truth in this, with the image fixed in the popular mind of the martyred hero lying dead on the altar of democracy, surrounded by the endless rows of the young men who had passed over into the next world with him. If the Great Captain could be paid such homage, why not the hundreds of thousands who had died so anonymously on so many battlefields?<sup>6</sup> But if Northern response to the war is to be placed in its proper perspective, we must first turn in another direction.

Southern decoration of soldiers' graves by the strewing of flowers almost certainly predates the end of the Civil War and the Grand Army's post-war commemorative events.<sup>7</sup> And even as Lincoln's funeral train wound its way to Springfield, war correspondent James Redpath led a group of three to six thousand freedmen to a Union cemetery in Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>8</sup> But the actions and efforts of Southern whites focused, of course, on the Confederate dead, with the credit for formalized observances accruing to one Lizzie Rutherford of Columbia, South Carolina. In 1866 Rutherford suggested a public ceremony for all the Confederate dead, after returning from a loved one's grave. A group of Columbia women published an appeal and the custom quickly spread.<sup>9</sup> While such observances were often celebrated on different days, all were conducted in the spring, and most were characterized by a formal procession, a prayer service and hymns.<sup>10</sup> These rituals provided solace to the grieving, honored the recent past and acknowledged the death of a cause. But the South needed more; in the words of historian Gaines Foster,

Not just political acceptance but northern respect was needed to heal the wounds of defeat. The North had to acknowledge the heroism and nobility of the Confederate war effort, the honor of the South, before southerners would be totally at ease within the Union.<sup>11</sup>

Respect and acceptance were not going to come easily from the war's victors, as the North coped with its own psychic wounds. When a group of Southern families signaled their intention to cast flowers on the Confederate dead in Arlington Heights Cemetery, outside Washington, D.C., in May 1869, the Grand Army was appalled. Its resolution asserted that "to throw flowers on Confederate graves would be a desecration of loyal Union soldiers." Despite this warning the families carried out their intent, resulting in the detail of a six man Marine detachment at the graveyard to prevent further "desecration." The *New York Herald* immediately heaped "shame on the zeal that pursues a quarrel beyond the grave."<sup>12</sup> The *New York Times* was even more scathing, casting a baleful eye on the very concept of commemorative actions,

Decoration Day . . . is a day that can never become national . . . It is an occasion for heaping epithets of infamy upon one set of graves while piling flowers upon another set--for reviving the bitter memories of conflict.<sup>13</sup>

(In the early post-war period, "Memorial Day" and "Decoration Day" were used interchangeably.) If North and South were ever to be reconciled, if they were ever to pay tribute to "these honored dead," rather than to just their own, much would depend on the reaction of Grand Army veterans--those who by right of combat would make their voices most loudly heard.

The institutionalization of Memorial Day by the national Grand Army was not without its own share of controversy. Robert Beath has attributed the idea to a letter

received by the Assistant Adjutant General from a comrade in Cincinnati, who remembered, from the days of his youth in Germany, “the custom of the people to assemble in the spring-time and scatter flowers upon the graves of the dead.” Whatever the cause, on May 5, 1868, Grand Army Commander John Logan promulgated General Order No. 11 designating May 30, 1868, “for the purpose of strewing with flowers, and otherwise decorating the graves.”<sup>14</sup> Doubters of the measure were much in evidence, with Beath recalling those who feared Memorial Day would keep alive the animosities of the war. Others objected to the expense, believing that “the money for music and flowers could be more wisely spent on the living.”<sup>15</sup> While no formal ceremony was initially devised for Memorial Day, a ritual would eventually be developed. The words of this ritual deserve our attention, evocative as they are of certain aspects of America's civil religion.

Sociologist Robert Bellah has argued that America possesses a civil religion, different from Christianity and defining it as “the religious dimension of a people through which it interprets the historical experiences in the light of transcendent reality.”<sup>16</sup> Civil religion, like its more orthodox counterpart, must provide a ritual which through symbolic acts set forth the objects to be venerated--in this case the soldier dead--and the relationship of those objects with the citizenry.<sup>17</sup> The Grand Army's ritual not only linked the living with the dead, it specifically tied fallen comrades together with the organizational watchwords of fraternity, loyalty and charity, first at post services, then at the cemetery. Commanders were enjoined to speak the following at the post:

We meet to honor our dead, and to deepen our reverence for their worth: to strengthen among ourselves the bond of *fraternity* by recalling the memory of experiences common to us all; to encourage a more generous *charity* for our comrades who are sick or in distress . . . to renew our pledge of *loyalty* to our country and our flag . . .<sup>18</sup> (emphasis added)

Chaplains intoned the following at cemeteries:

O God! teach us to decorate the graves of our dead not only with a tribute, beautiful and fragrant, that must fade, but with that *fraternity* whose love shall endure, with that *charity* that is fruitful of good works, with that *loyalty* which, while true to our country's flag, is supremely devoted to the cross, the symbol of our faith.<sup>19</sup> (emphasis added)

As the dead were inextricably tied to the living, so did the flag become united with the cross--a ritual which at least temporarily united the whole community together.<sup>20</sup>

In 1878 Omaha Mayor and Nebraska Department Commander R. H. Wilber used religious symbolism to speak about Union veterans and their relationship with ex-Confederates. Wilber held “no personal animosity towards the south,” but he knew that their veterans would not enjoy being at the Fort Leavenworth reunion he was then addressing. They would not enjoy being there,

with men who were always loyal; for this is an *inner temple* into which they may not come; the *high priest of Union* must be chosen from her defenders who by reason of their unbroken fidelity, and a sort of *divine right*, are the chief custodians of the *ark of our covenant*, which contains the constitution as it is . . . crowned and hallowed by the old flag. (emphasis added)<sup>21</sup>

Wilber was relatively neutral in speaking of past enemies. His predecessor as Department Commander, John Hartanft, had been downright welcoming in 1877, calling Confederate soldiers, “the better citizens of that section,” in contrast to noncombatants, “the most pestilent classes.” While ex-soldiers had turned swords into plowshares,

“professed men of peace fanned the embers of hate.”<sup>22</sup> Hartanft's view of Southern noncombatants had a parallel in the much harsher assessment of the South offered by the *Omaha Republican*, which felt the country was upon the verge of anarchy. The paper fulminated about communists “drilling” in the cities, requests to reduce the army and attacks on the office of the Presidency. The cause of all these problems lay in a large “disaffected” element in the South which hoped “to plunge the country into a state of civil war” so that “southern officers would be allowed to resume their old positions under the U.S. Government.”<sup>23</sup> The paper concluded that, “Reconciliation should be spelled with three R's instead, and these stand for Reaction, Repudiation and Rebellion.”<sup>24</sup> Religious symbolism and a schizophrenic attitude towards former enemies would become hallmarks of Nebraska's Memorial Day celebrations in the 1880s and 1890s.

By the late 1870s Nebraska's Grand Army had come through its period of organizational strife and veteran indifference. With a consistently growing membership it now became the focal point and driving force behind Memorial Day celebrations. And the public to which it appealed seemed ready to remember what it had previously chosen to forget. Wars in general and the Civil War in particular had offered to combatants and noncombatants alike the opportunity to forget group conflicts--business and labor, natives and recent immigrants, Protestant and Catholic--by offering all participants the chance to unite against a common enemy. The Grand Army was offering to these groups a ritual and a means by which they could again reclaim those feelings of purpose and unity which

had characterized the supreme moment of their lives--nostalgia for the past intertwined with an eternal commemoration of the dead.<sup>25</sup>

The structure of Nebraska's Memorial Day activities mirrored the national pattern elaborated upon by historian W. Lloyd Warner. Celebrants gathered in the heart of the downtown business district from where separate organizations marched to the town's major cemetery. There, graves were decorated, memorial services held and speeches made. The sequence of events for Omaha's 1887 celebration were typical of the era and of this pattern. Private citizens and civic societies so numerous that the *Republican* chose not to list them individually met in central Omaha's business district at Fourteenth and Farnam streets. The thousands gathered there moved by foot and carriage to Omaha's Prospect Hill Cemetery, and upon their arrival formed a hollow square around the national flag marking the site of an unknown soldier. After an oration by Mayor Broatch, the State Quartermaster-General E.R. Wright read a prayer from the Grand Army's memorial services. He was in turn followed by a male quartette which sang "Soldier's Farewell."<sup>26</sup>

The Grand Army memorial service which followed evoked themes of nationalism, reconciliation with the South, sorrow for the departed and a commingling of the dead with comrades who had survived. Such words (modified through the years) had a special power for those in whom the memory of the dead being spoken of were actual people-- friends, fathers, husbands, comrades-in-arms:

This is the national day of memorial--the time when in mind and thought our glorious past is made to live again, and the noble men who molded and shaped its destiny, though dead, are to memory once more instinct with life and being.

It is . . . the hour when a loyal people . . . unite to honor their patriot dead, to enrich and ennoble their own lives by recalling a public valor and a private worth that are immortal . . .

Differences of party, creed and sect are today forgotten, while north and south, east and west, all over our broad land, our people, with reverent hearts, circle the sacred mounds where sleep our country's dead.

Let us not forget . . . that many lives are desolate . . . and that many graves are the shrines of a sorrow whose influence is still potent though time has mercifully robbed it of its first keen anguish.

Therefore, with our regard for the dead, let us mingle a tender sympathy for the living who mourn for the loved ones they have lost.<sup>27</sup>

The words that filled the air at Prospect Hill Cemetery surely comforted the Grand Army survivors present--if those already fallen were immortal, would they not be also? If their deaths had “perpetuate[d] the power and glory of our American republic,” could not the lives of the survivors continue to do the same? The focus now shifted from the spoken word to symbolic gestures. Children representing the different states covered the graves with flowers placed over the mounds of the fallen who had been deemed immortal. One Omaha comrade's daughter, “impersonating the Goddess of Liberty,” placed a banner reading “To the Memory of Those Who Never Returned” near the gravesites. A rifle salute by the 2nd Infantry then preceded an address by Omaha attorney Edmund Bartlett and a final song, “The Vacant Chair.”<sup>28</sup>

As the thousands of celebrants streamed home the more thoughtful among them might have observed the diversity of the groups which had gathered together in the spring

sunshine. Previous Memorial Days had been dominated by the local Custer and Kearney Posts, with some representation from the Omaha Fire Department, the Regular Army and Omaha City officials.<sup>29</sup> By 1881 the Odd Fellows and German Singing Society had begun to march as separate entities in the parade.<sup>30</sup> A year later Department Commander Samuel Alexander issued a call for greater community participation in “this National Act,” urging “people in every locality . . . to assist in the solemn ceremonies.”<sup>31</sup> The Omaha School Superintendent's response to this plea came in 1883 when he had the city's school children bring flowers to the cemetery on the day before the ceremony.<sup>32</sup> Other cities responded as well. The 1884 procession in Blair, Nebraska--“the largest ever seen”--included a juvenile band, school children, the Knights of Pythias, the Odd Fellows and the Masons.<sup>33</sup> The next year saw Omaha's Bohemian Turners' Societies, two lodges of the Danish Brotherhood and the Women's Christian Temperance Union as marchers to Prospect Hill.<sup>34</sup> By 1888 enthusiasm for the day had pervaded virtually every civic group in Nebraska's largest metropolis. In that year six Divisions, composed of seventy-five societies, marched on Memorial Day. The *Republican's* list of groups is notable both for the all-encompassing nature of the organizations and the lack of commentary about one in particular: Board of Education, Board of Public Works, Union Veterans League, Sons of Veterans, Odd Fellows, Omaha Letter Carriers, Bohemian Gymnastics Society, the Tanners Union, Knights of Pythias, Knights of Labor and . . . Confederate Army Veterans.<sup>35</sup>



Confederate Army Veterans marching benignly and with apparent community approval in festivities designed to commemorate the Grand Army's most sacred day! This had come about just a year after the *Republican*--a paper which largely represented itself as an organ for both the Republican Party and the Grand Army--had suffered a fit of near-apoplexy over the expressed intention by President Grover Cleveland of returning Confederate battle flags to the Southern states. The paper heaped invective on Cleveland's motives ("a cheap bid for Confederate support") and character ("an insult to have this done by a president who took no part in the war.") The intended action of the President impelled the editorial writer to a rare height of rhetorical eloquence as he asserted that the flags "belong to the men whose blood-stained hands grasped them in an hour of courage and carnage."<sup>36</sup> We have previously noted the passionate attachment of Union (and Confederate) soldiers to the battle streamers which led them onto every battlefield. The passage of a quarter century had not dimmed their regard for the old flag. National Grand Army Commander Lucius Fairchild, who led the most highly esteemed unit of the Army of the Potomac--the Iron Brigade--may have been thinking of some of those scenes of carnage when first apprised of Cleveland's intent. Nothing less could account for his invocation of a divine affliction to be passed upon the nation's leader--an exclamation of contempt rarely surpassed even in the slash-and-burn, take-no-prisoners era of nineteenth century political discourse:

May God palsy the hand that wrote the order! May God palsy the brain that conceived it! And may God palsy the hand that dictated it!<sup>37</sup>

Nebraskans proved equally fervent in their denunciations. A group of Schuyler citizens attributed Cleveland's order returning the flags as "a concession to the sentiment of treason." Omaha Mayor J.E. Howard had to be paraphrased by the *Republican* when he called the order "the blankest blank outrage ever perpetrated," going on to exclaim that "people [should] just as well pull down the monuments, disband the Grand Army, abandon the national cemeteries and let the goats feed in them, since treason has become respectable and patriotism odious." Disdain for Cleveland crossed generational lines, captured in the interview of a young Mr. A. McGregor, who called the proposed return of the flags "an enormous outrage."<sup>38</sup> Cleveland quickly capitulated to the overwhelmingly negative sentiments of the Northern people by rescinding the order. But the imbroglio had touched a national nerve, just as the outcry would a century later over the Smithsonian's display of the *Enola Gay*. Hard questions remained: What was to be the national attitude towards the Confederacy, its soldiers and leaders, and the New South which was struggling to be reborn out of the old? Would the issues of emancipation and racial justice be overcome by the desire for sectional peace?<sup>39</sup>

At the heart of this ongoing, if often unstated, struggle over the memory of the Civil War lay Memorial Day celebrations. The Confederate veterans marching to Prospect Hill, shoulder to shoulder as it were with former enemies, reflected the wishes of men like Senator Charles Manderson who, while protesting Cleveland's actions, also expressed the belief that, "The extinction of all sectional feeling is earnestly desired by the soldiers of the Union."<sup>40</sup> Others in Nebraska echoed these sentiments. The

*Republican* praised the report of a Boston Grand Army post meeting with a camp of Virginia Confederate veterans, and regretted that more gatherings of this type could not be held.<sup>41</sup> A Grand Army man speaking at the Crete, Nebraska, Fourth of July celebration, condemned slavery as “a badge of infamy” (and blaming it on England), while insisting that “The flood gates of bitterness between the sections should be closed forever.”<sup>42</sup> The growing mythology of the Lost Cause, coupled with the revitalization of Confederate veterans' groups paralleled Grand Army efforts in commemoration and monument building, further reminding northern veterans of the mutual respect which combat had engendered for their foes.<sup>43</sup>

Respect led to actions in different Nebraska venues. On Memorial Day, 1891, a group of veterans in Greely discovered that a “Mr. Warfield,” a Confederate veteran, lay buried in the town's cemetery and determined to take appropriate action. As described in the *Greely Herald*,

After the sun had gone down and the shades of night had almost fallen, a few of the comrades went up there and decorated the graves of the Confederate soldier with the same care and tenderness--with the same kindly feeling--as they had decorated their brethren who wore the blue in the early morning. It was a touching incident, not without its lesson of true charity.<sup>44</sup>

An editorial writer in Nebraska City later reflected on the sometimes acrimonious nature of reconciliation. In the early 1890s some Confederates had been requested by the local Grand Army post to participate in Memorial Day. Upon arriving at the cemetery they had been met by what the writer described as “one poor, foolish, hot-headed woman,” who had protested their presence. Subsequently, no invitations had been made by the Grand

MONUMENT

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"Under the Roses the Blue, Under the Lillies the Gray."



ON FAME'S ETERNAL CAMPING GROUND  
 THEIR SILENT TENTS ARE SPREAD,  
 AND GLORY GUARDS WITH SOLEMN ROUND  
 THE BIVOUAC OF THE DEAD

Death Reconciles All Things

SOURCE: Courtesy David Wells

WAYNE HERALD 1903

THE GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC ·  
DECORATION · DAY · MAY · 30<sup>th</sup> · 1903 ·



High lift your children, mothers! Let  
their young eyes behold  
A dying army marching, time-beaten, spent  
and old.  
As they toll by, as tattered as the banners  
that they wave,  
See the worn hands saluting! Lo! They sa-  
lute the grave!

High lift your children, mothers! Let their  
young voices cheer  
The brave old hearts that slowly draw on  
and disappear—  
Thin ranks that front the shadows, ranks  
that must ring out so fast,  
'Tis a phantom army that solemnly drifts  
past.

A fading army marching with weak and  
faltering tread—  
But pressing all around it there through the  
mighty dead!  
Aye, bright and splendid spirits! Their  
battle lines are drawn,  
And Comrade waits for Comrade beside the  
gates of dawn.

—J. W. MULLER.

Marching on to Join Dead Comrades

SOURCE: Courtesy David Wells

# MEMORIAL DAY 1895

Laurels and roses,  
Lilies and cypress,  
Kissed by the starlight,  
Waked by the sun;  
Lay them, oh! tenderly  
Over the heroes  
Of the cause that was lost,  
And the cause that was won.

Better than laurels,  
Sweeter than roses,  
Whiter than lilies,  
Purer than dew,  
Are the pledge of forgiveness,  
The hands clasped in friendship,  
The peace and the prayers  
O'er the Gray and the Blue.



Memorial Day as the Cement of Sectional Reconciliation

SOURCE: Courtesy David Wells

June, 1893.

FRIENDSHIP, CHARITY, LOYALTY.

50c a Year.

# NEBRASKA DEFENDER

VOL. I.

LINCOLN, NEBRASKA.

NO. 3.



TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER.

A Comrade Remembers



A Monument Dedication in Red Cloud, Nebraska on Memorial Day, 1904

**SOURCE:** Nebraska State Historical  
Society (Courtesy Mr. David Wells)



Army, leading the editorialist to heap perjoratives on the “narrowness of Nebraska City, which other places grew ashamed of years ago.” He concluded by recounting his observation of a Confederate colonel and a Union major who “together [had] strew[n] flowers, “in another town.”<sup>45</sup> Nebraska's eventual acceptance of Confederate participation symbolized the demise of the memory of the Civil War as an ideological struggle over freedom. In the public mind, Frederick Douglass's insistence that the struggle was, “a war of ideas, a battle of principles,” had been overcome by Oliver Wendell Holmes' idealization of soldierly virtue, untainted by creed or ideology. In the words of historian David Blight,

What mattered most was not the content of the cause on either side but the acts of commitment to either cause, not ideas but the experience born of conflict over those ideas. Whoever was honest in his devotion was *right*.<sup>46</sup>

Memorial Day speeches, like the Grand Army ritual, spoke to themes of linkage between the living and the dead and sectional reconciliation while also going beyond ritual to speak of societal problems wrought by industrialization and immigration. An 1878 oration by John L. Webster in Omaha termed every soldier's grave “a golden crown of courage,” and went on to assert that while they had been great in life, they had become immortal through their deaths.<sup>47</sup> In effect, they had not lost their lives; they had saved them forever. Unspoken by Webster was the thought, perhaps inferred by his listeners, that if the living could live as nobly as the soldier dead, so too would they become immortal. The 1884 address by A.J. Poppleton spoke to more immediate societal concerns and resonates still to the ears of a present-day auditor. Poppleton attributed the

current demoralization of society to “an unchecked reign of violence,” accompanied by an ascending divorce rate, lust and greed, and “poisonous literature” which caused “corruption of [our] youth.” He was not confident that legislation could avert the continuing decline of American civilization, noting that the statute books were “loaded with edicts . . . which the moment they are promulgated, become dead.” Only religion and education could provide the answer.<sup>48</sup> Thus does a window into the life of a middle-sized metropolis of the 1880s become instead a mirror of modern America.

An 1888 Memorial Day oration by Iowa Congressman William F. Hepburn in Omaha further captures a continuing refocus of speeches on contemporary problems, rather than the honored dead. (Perhaps it was easier for political figures to speak to the concerns of the living, who could offer them votes, rather than to the heroism of the departed.) Hepburn's efforts deserve an extended quotation, speaking as he did to issues which the Grand Army would take continuing action upon from the mid-1890s to World War One:

We have invited to our shores all mankind . . . We invite them to come here and be Americanized, to adopt the principles of our government and to enjoy our political institutions . . . [but] We invite no man to bring war in his hands and to engraft the principles of another people into our laws . . . and he who comes here seeking . . . to plant his theories in our midst, is an element we do not desire . . . *In America there is no room for socialism or anarchy* . . . In the present age we are trying to school our boys to revere the old flag, and with them we should teach all who come to our shores to honor the flag.<sup>49</sup> (emphasis added)

Hepburn's speech was a clarion call to action and would come to represent an agenda the Grand Army would take to its heart, driven both by the fear of the “foreign hordes” sweeping into America and a fervent desire to forever solidify the new nation they had

done so much to create. The Grand Army's desire to minimize the political and societal changes brought by the immigrants would lead them down a path we will examine in a later chapter.

One last speech deserves our attention, that spoken in 1890 in Omaha by Joseph Duryea, Pastor of the First Congregational Church. Duryea's talk encapsulated the manner in which tributes to the war's dead had changed from the time when families had gathered privately at individual grave sites (“To the tomb after death the heart turns and on the grave the tears fall.”) Eventually, veterans began to gather together to pay homage, then joined by the whole community. But Duryea looked outward from Omaha to that greater nation of which Nebraskans were a part; he conjured a vision of the future which became a self-fulfilling prophecy, while the response of his listeners indicated that he was expressing a feeling already in their hearts:

The time is coming . . . when we can stand side by side with our old foes with a common patriotic devotion, and the time is almost now here . . . We see a light and can alter our convictions . . . this Memorial service, this scattering [of] flowers on the graves of the dead will be hailed by those of the south . . . among the American people there were two civilizations . . . and I do not believe the people could have been united except through war . . . they are cemented together forever and forever.[tremendous applause]<sup>50</sup>

Nebraskans had finally taken to heart Lincoln's injunction to recognize “these honored dead”--all the honored dead. Unspoken, perhaps forgotten, were the deeds and current status of the 186,000 black soldiers who had done so much to win the war and the millions of more African Americans on behalf of whom so many soldiers--white and black--had died to ensure “a new birth of freedom.”<sup>51</sup>

Even as the Grand Army was at its apparent height as a social and political force in the Nebraska community, time and the age of its members effected changes in the manner of holding Memorial Day. In early May of 1888 the Omaha posts voted to hold the exercises on the grounds of Central High School, an action which the *Republican* noted would have been approved by "1 in 50" ten years previously.<sup>52</sup> One time department commander Thomas Clarkson laid out the rationale for the deletion of the march to Prospect Hill. The Grand Army "boys" were "getting entirely too old to walk way out to the cemetery from the city. It used to be 'decoration day' for the old soldiers, but now it is Memorial Day' for the people." Where only 500 people could fit into the cemetery 10,000 could congregate on the high school grounds. While the Sons of Veterans initially opposed the move, fearing that it would destroy the "sanctity" of the occasion, they eventually came around in support of the measure.<sup>53</sup> The very success of the Grand Army in incorporating community participation would lead to subtle and incremental changes more pleasing to that larger society composed of the Grand Army's descendants. As more ethnic groups and civic/fraternal associations had come into the Memorial Day picture, so would more attention be paid to their wishes, not out of disrespect for the "boys" but through the on-going membership attrition of the Grand Army which death provided.

The change of venue from cemetery to school ground was an important one, shifting the focus of Memorial Day from the past (the honored dead) to the future (the

school children). During the 1870s and 1880s Prospect Hill had indeed become a place which, in Lloyd Warner's conceptualization, had been

a place for all the living and all the dead . . . Death declared a holiday, not for itself but for the living, when together they could experience it and momentarily challenge its ultimate power.<sup>54</sup>

But the Victorian spell which cemeteries had cast for Americans as “pleasure grounds” was rapidly fading in the aftermath of that great and apocalyptic Civil War which had already shattered so many aspects of nineteenth century romanticism and melancholy.<sup>55</sup>

So perhaps the change was inevitable--and not unwelcomed by Grand Army men whose work in patriotic instruction in the schools will be detailed in a later chapter. But the shift to Central High entailed a lessening of the sacramental nature of this American holy day, one which Department Commander Lee Estelle proclaimed in 1904 as “to the true patriot just what Ascension Day is to the Christian.”<sup>56</sup>

But the demise of Memorial Day as a communitarian sacrament lay as much or more in forces outside the Grand Army's site designation of a high school. Americans in the 1890s lay on the cusp of a burgeoning mass culture, one aspect of which had been proclaimed by the *Omaha Republican* in the previous decade with a sudden designation in its headlines of baseball as “The National Pastime.”<sup>57</sup> By 1895 the report of Nebraska Inspector-General H.W. McArthur to the national body would include a lamentation that, while attendance at Memorial Day celebrations had continued to rise, yet “very many anticipate the day as one for recreation and pleasure.” He urged all posts to specifically target Memorial Day efforts at school children and their teachers, possibly recognizing

them as less susceptible to the lures of boating, organized horse races, bicycling and baseball.<sup>58</sup> (McArthur must have forgotten his own childhood!) Other Grand Army members were equally troubled by this trend, leading to a ruckus at the 1897 national convention when a resolution was made to observe Memorial Day on the last Sunday in May. The authors hoped to cloak Memorial Day with the sacred nature of the Sabbath as a means of stopping potential attendees from slipping away to more congenial pleasures.<sup>59</sup> Lewis Wagner, a past National Commander, objected, noting that the Grand Army had spent years in lobbying the national and state legislatures to declare May 30th as Memorial Day. That argument and the remark by Comrade Boyle of Pennsylvania that the “Sabbath is a religious day; Memorial Day is a patriotic day,” compelled the delegates to vote the resolution down.<sup>60</sup>

By 1905 continued lobbying by the Grand Army led to a Nebraska law which suppressed all sporting activity on Memorial Day.<sup>61</sup> But this was to prove rather the last grasp of an increasingly enfeebled group. In 1913 a resolution submitted by U.S. Grant Post #110 of Omaha called for boards of education in larger cities and mayors and aldermen in smaller towns to take control of Memorial Day preparations.<sup>62</sup> The voting down of this proposal at the GAR encampment only delayed the inevitable; within two years, Memorial Day Associations--the first of which had arisen in Elmwood--began to form. The Associations were open to all community members with annual dues of twenty-five cents. Their purpose (as printed in a sample Constitution of the Grand Army's Journal) was to ensure that Memorial Day shall “be duly observed as long as the

republic shall stand . . . to keep that day free from all debasing influences, that it may not become a day of sports and merry-making.”<sup>63</sup> To what end the associations served may be left for the reader to reflect upon.

In 1831 that great chronicler of our national character, Alexis de Tocqueville, had been struck by the nature of American individualism, which made “every man forget his ancestors . . . hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart.”<sup>64</sup> The communitarian nature of the military and the great cataclysm which accompanied that period of their lives had stayed with the Grand Army men forever. Rather than draw apart from their post-war communities, rather than become a kind of self-styled *Junker* elite, they had been the guiding hand in bringing together many different levels of society. Memorial Day became the vehicle by which they would ensure that Americans would begin to remember their past--individually and collectively--even if only for a day, becoming in the fine words of the *Republican*,

The grandest holiday and most touching ceremony in the history of the land. It is . . . the drill day of fifty millions of people.<sup>65</sup>

And if reconciliation with the South had been accompanied by a critical lapse of memory over the struggles of black Americans for freedom and civil equality--a lapse that still haunts our society--they had at least built a permanent monument to a great event in the American mind. But the Grand Army had other concerns during this period. What could be done, what would be done for the soldiers' widow and orphan, indeed for the soldier himself, as age and infirmity came to play a greater role in his life? How would the

nation, how would Nebraska respond to Joseph Duryea's rhetorical thrust--"Shame, shame be on the nation if they ever allow a single old soldier to appear at the feet of the people with outstretched hand"?<sup>66</sup>



## ENDNOTES

1. The school system for which this author currently works--Memphis, Tennessee--observes neither Memorial Day nor Veteran's Day.
2. Paul H. Buck, The Road To Reunion: 1865-1900 (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1937), 5.
3. Gary Wills, Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 41.
4. Wills, Lincoln at Gettysburg, 261.
5. Lloyd Lewis, Myths After Lincoln (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1929), 304.
6. My thoughts here and in much of this chapter have been shaped especially by W. Lloyd Warner, The Living and the Dead: A Study in the Symbolic Life of Americans (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 192.
7. See Buck Road to Reunion, 116. See also Gaines M. Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 38-42. Michael Kammen credits Waterloo, New York, as the site of the first formal post-war observances. See Mystic Chords of Memory, 102.
8. Lewis, Myths After Lincoln, 304-307.
9. Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 42.
10. Ibid., 42.
11. Ibid., 66.
12. Severo, Wages of War, 132-133.
13. Quoted in Severo, Wages of War, 143.
14. Beath, History of the Grand Army of the Republic, 90.
15. Ibid., 91.

16. Quoted in Wilson, Baptized in Blood, 12.
17. Warner, The Living and the Dead, 237.
18. Services for the use of the Grand Army of the Republic (Philadelphia: Town Printing Company, 1908), 8-9.
19. *Ibid.*, 11.
20. See Warner, The Living and the Dead, 248. Warner hypothesizes Memorial Day rituals as “a sacred symbol system which functions periodically to unite the whole community with its conflicting symbols and its opposing, autonomous churches and associations.”
21. *Omaha Republican*, May 22, 1878.
22. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1887, 10.
23. *Omaha Republican*, May 28, 1878 (Editorial).
24. *Ibid*, June 13, 1878 (Editorial).
25. See Warner, The Living and the Dead, 274-277.
26. *Omaha Republican*, May 31, 1887.
27. Services for the Use of the Grand Army of the Republic, 12-13.
28. *Omaha Republican*, May 31, 1887.
29. See *Ibid*, May 28, 1878 and May 29, 1879.
30. *Ibid*, May 26, 1881.
31. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1882, 55.
32. *Omaha Republican*, June 3, 1883 (Editorial).
33. *Ibid*, May 31, 1884.
34. *Ibid*, May 26, 1885.

35. *Ibid*, May 31, 1888.
36. *Ibid*, June 16, 1887 (Editorial).
37. *Ibid*, June 17, 1887.
38. All quotes from *Ibid*.
39. For a detailed study of how the Republican party turned away from support for black civil rights, see William Gillette, Retreat from Reconstruction 1869-1879 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979).
40. *Omaha Republican*, June 21, 1887.
41. *Ibid*, June 22, 1887.
42. *Ibid*, July 5, 1887. The paper identified the speaker as “General Morrow,” with no further descriptive data.
43. See Gaines Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 66-67.
44. *Greely Herald*, June 4, 1891.
45. *Daily Nebraskan Press*, June 1, 1893.
46. David Blight, “For Something Beyond the Battlefield”: Frederick Douglass and the Struggle for the Memory of the Civil War,” Journal of American History, 75 (March 1989): 1163.
47. *Omaha Republican*, May 31, 1878.
48. *Ibid*, May 31, 1884.
49. *Ibid*, May 31, 1888.
50. *Ibid*, May 31, 1890.
51. Reconciliation between North and South seems to have been connected to a collective amnesia on the part of Americans and historians which lasted into the middle of the twentieth century concerning the services of black soldiers during the war, and the continuing plight of the freedmen under Reconstruction and Jim Crow. Blight's, “For Something Beyond the Battlefield,” touches on this point.

52. *Omaha Republican*, May 8, 1888 (Editorial).
53. *Ibid*, May 8, 1888.
54. Warner, The Living and the Dead, 266.
55. Blanche Linden-Ward, "Strange but Genteel Pleasure Grounds: Tourist and Leisure Use of Nineteenth Century Rural Cemeteries," in Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture, ed. Richard E. Meyer (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), 294, 323.
56. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1904, 52.
57. In researching this paper, the author came across this particular nomenclature in an issue of the early 1880s--striking for a city that had only semi-organized teams at the time, and residing far from the nearest major league cities, St Louis and Chicago.
58. Journal of the National Encampment, 1895, 162. For reports on participation in Memorial Day by Nebraskans, the reader is directed to Chaplain Reports in the respective Journals of Nebraska Encampment. Some sample figures are given below. Since the totals are presented as estimates and since there is no description provided of how they were determined, the author has thought it best for narrative purposes to present them here.

Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1884, 47: 41 posts hold Memorial Day activities.

Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1886, 60-61: 80 posts hold Memorial Day Activities.

Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1888, 64:

123 - posts celebrate  
 39,320 - estimated church attendance  
 117,520 - estimated at Decoration (graveside) ceremonies

Journal of the Nebraska Encampment; 1892, 50:

320 - posts celebrate  
 58,530 - estimated church attendance  
 169,157 - estimated at Decoration ceremonies

Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1895, 83:  
142,810 - estimated at Decoration ceremonies

Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1897, 93:  
115,240 - estimated at Decoration ceremonies

59. Journal of the National Encampment, 1897, 274.
60. *Ibid.*, 277.
61. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1905, 27.
62. *Ibid.*, 1913, 85.
63. *Ibid.* 1915, 90.
64. Tocqueville, as quoted in Blight, "For Something Beyond the Battlefield," 1172.
65. *Omaha Republican*, June 3, 1883 (Editorial).
66. *Ibid.*, May 31, 1890.

## CHAPTER SIX

### An Act of Slow Justice

Stuart McConnell has described the welcoming attitude of most Grand Army leaders to the increased emphasis on fraternalism in the 1870s. Robert Beath, a founder of the Pennsylvania GAR, insisted that the basis for the group lay in “the formation by ex-soldiers and sailors of a grand union for fraternal and charitable purposes.”<sup>1</sup> This view was echoed by an early Nebraska Commander, James Savage, who attributed the growing numbers of Grand Army comrades in the state to “increasing confidence that [the Grand Army] is what it professes to be--dedicated to Fraternity, Charity and Loyalty alone.”<sup>2</sup> The body's new attitude found favor with civilians also, leading the *Republican* to observe that,

When posts were reorganized and the order placed on its present footing, it at once had a large following . . . its meetings were cordial, hearty and honest. There was no rank, red tape, fuss or feathers.<sup>3</sup>

But the second of the three Grand Army watchwords was charity, and it was an issue that soon faced Nebraska's comrades. Many contemporaries and some historians have berated the GAR as a pension grabbing political machine--and they certainly obtained pensions to an extent never foreseen. But few have traced local efforts to meet the relief needs of an ever aging constituency. It proved to be no coincidence that in the same year (1882) where Brad Cook published a recruiting broadside enjoining members “to minister to the needy and destitute comrade,” that Nebraska's Grand Army began the first halting steps towards a permanent relief system.<sup>4</sup>

In January 1882, Encampment members were asked to act on the report of a committee which proposed an insurance society styled as the Soldiers Mutual Benevolent Association. Key points included:

1. A fee (undetermined) to join, with no annual dues.
2. A nine man council of Administration, headquartered in Lincoln, with a majority of its members to be Lincoln residents.
3. Eligible to any Post, or individual member of the GAR, and open to any widow whose husband would have been eligible to join the GAR.
4. A payout of five hundred dollars to the family of the deceased. Each serving member of the Association would be assessed twenty cents.

Encampment members promptly tabled the resolution for an indefinite period.<sup>5</sup>

On December 7, 1882, the *National Tribune* carried a letter from James Helmkamp of Lincoln which must certainly have brought attention to the plight of ill and needy comrades. Upon hearing that Comrade Henry Jessup was stricken with cancer and needed assistance in harvesting his twenty-five acre farm outside Lincoln, Helmkamp rounded up forty-seven Grand Army men to do the job. He believed that, "actions like these will bring more recruits to our ranks than anything else." He may have been right, as seven men had promised him to join, but more important was his declaration to the dying Jessup that, "we would stand by him and his."<sup>6</sup> Attempts to institutionalize relief would go on, but insurance societies were soon deemed impractical. A committee which had been appointed to study the issue reported to the 1883 Encampment that too many barriers existed. Life insurance companies could solve the problem of increasing mortality with age by charging higher premiums during the early years of the policy,

while a mutual aid society set a level premium, not taking into account the continuing decrease in membership as it grew older. The committee had found almost no instances of successful management of such a program, concluding that it would furnish,

no lasting and permanent aid to our Grand Army comrades . . . [we] are now so near the great 'muster out' that the mortality rate would so increase the cost of the insurance, that the scheme is not . . . in the least practicable.<sup>7</sup>

Periodic droughts and other natural calamities (tornadoes, grasshoppers) placed many farmer comrades in dire straits. An 1885 drought and a drop in farm prices brought untold calamity to many members. Numerous members were suspended or dropped from the rolls, while four posts had to turn in their charters.<sup>8</sup> AAG, S.J. Shirley observed that many in the eastern part of the state had sold their farms, looking for cheaper land in the west, while those already in the west faced a lamentable future:

crops . . . have never been lower, cattle hardly pay for their keeping and their hogs have nearly all died. It has caused many of our comrades to borrow money at a high rate of interest . . . which leaves them badly in debt.<sup>9</sup>

The destruction of Post #97 at Bradshaw in 1890 by a tornado was only one of many low points in a year termed by Department Commander Clarkson as "a year of universal trial and suffering." An "awful visitation of drought" in the western and southwestern parts of the state left hundreds of families suffering for want of food, clothing, money and fuel. Contributions in-state for the tragedies came from 119 GAR posts, 23 Womens' Relief Corps Auxiliaries, and 18 Sons of Veterans posts, amounting to almost \$1,400; out-of-state moneys came from neighboring Kansas and Missouri and as far away as Massachusetts and Pasadena, California.<sup>10</sup> Personal disasters translated into



TABLE VII. Yearly Tally of Posts in Nebraska, 1877-1903.

| <u>YEAR</u> | <u>NO. OF POSTS</u> | <u>YEAR</u> | <u>NO. OF POSTS</u> |
|-------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| 1877        | 5                   | 1891        | 255                 |
| 1878        | 5                   | 1892        | 367                 |
| 1879        | 26                  | 1893        | 267                 |
| 1880        | 39                  | 1894        | 268                 |
| 1881        | 56                  | 1895        | 265                 |
| 1882        | 65                  | 1896        | 271                 |
| 1883        | 110                 | 1897        | 274                 |
| 1884        | 170                 | 1898        | 274                 |
| 1885        | 190                 | 1899        | 270                 |
| 1886        | 195                 | 1900        | 270                 |
| 1887        | 221                 | 1901        | 267                 |
| 1888        | 213                 | 1902        | 239                 |
| 1889        | 254                 | 1903        | 232                 |
| 1890        | 265                 |             |                     |

SOURCE: Annual tallies of posts “in good standing” taken from reports made in the Journal of the National Encampment (1877-1903). Discrepancies were noted between numbers recorded in Nebraska encampment journals and the National GAR. This may have had more to do with the differing times of the reports than to shoddy record-keeping. The sharp decrease in 1893 reflects the hard times of the Depression. Advancing mortality rates prevented the Grand Army from ever going over 300 again.

Table VIII. Charity Expenditures by Nebraska Posts, 1879-1906.

| <u>YEAR</u> | <u>AMOUNT</u> |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1879        | \$ 140.00     |
| 1880        | 129.00        |
| 1881        | 270.00        |
| 1882        | UNKNOWN       |
| 1883        | UNKNOWN       |
| 1884        | 826.46        |
| 1885        | 1,222.25      |
| 1886        | 1,200.00      |
| 1887        | 1,476.65      |
| 1888        | 1,585.76      |
| 1889        | 1,543.51      |
| 1890        | 2,631.19      |
| 1891        | UNKNOWN       |
| 1892        | 1,547.65      |
| 1893        | 972.28        |
| 1894        | 2,404.72      |
| 1895        | 2,632.43      |
| 1896        | 7,309.81      |
| 1897        | 1,200.84      |
| 1898        | 629.85        |
| 1899        | 923.99        |
| 1900        | UNKNOWN       |
| 1901        | 274.00        |
| 1902        | 1,080.36      |
| 1903        | 464.51        |
| 1904        | 485.59        |
| 1905        | UNKNOWN       |
| 1906        | 123.75        |

Source: Reports to the national GAR contained in Journal[s] of the National Encampment.<sup>11</sup>

organizational shortfalls as even the year afterwards saw the state body falling into indebtedness, with a “depleted treasury” the result of post inability to contribute towards departmental operating expenses.<sup>12</sup>

Weather and the economy combined for another one-two punch in 1893. Once again the western counties were hardest hit, with crops “almost an entire failure,” as the 1893 Depression caused job shortages and falling wages.<sup>13</sup> More sledge hammer blows fell on farmers in 1895-96 as a two year drought set in, causing an “utter failure of crops” in Western counties with hundreds left destitute in its wake. Food shortages abounded; Venango, Nebraska, endured the following rations over a one week period in March, 1895:

Molasses, one gallon to four persons  
 Beans, one pound to four persons  
 Sugar, one pound to four persons  
 Cornmeal, one and a half pounds to one person  
 Meat, one pound to two persons  
 One can of corn to 14 persons<sup>14</sup>

While state GAR charity relief totaled almost \$10,000 in the two years (see Table VIII), appeals had to go out to the nation in order to sustain the effort. Individual posts sent pleas to the *National Tribune*, including one from Frontier County which laid out the awful effects of the drought:

There has been a failure of crops for two years, placing our people in the most deplorable condition ever known in the history of our State . . . many of them are absolutely destitute . . . Their stock is living upon the dead grass . . . and if snow should fall deep enough . . . nearly all the stock must die of starvation.<sup>15</sup>

Cases of human starvation were also reported, with people reduced to burning “cow chips (dry manure) and sunflowers” for food. The *Tribune* issued an appeal for all comrades to join in contributing something, “if only a mite.”<sup>16</sup> Money and supplies flowed into the state during the two year siege by nature; the total value of the shipments and cash exceeded \$15,000.<sup>17</sup> The devastation could still be felt almost a decade later, captured in the plaintive cry of a member of Post #233 (Trenton) who explained, when turning in the Post's charter,

. . . [we are] made of farmers, and drought and grasshoppers have kept us in the background and most of us have had a hard time in keeping the wolf from the door.<sup>18</sup>

This sustained litany of economic turmoil and frequent hard times provided the background as Nebraska's Grand Army sought to sustain institutionalized relief. While the National GAR (backed by Nebraska) lobbied for pensions at the federal level, so did the state group eventually turn to its own legislature for assistance. Gilded Age America was not a receptive place for social welfare by state agencies. Social Darwinism had established a mind set attuned to individual responsibility, exemplified by one body of conservative veterans who proclaimed, “we believe that every American owes to his country in time of peace the duty of earning his own living; and that this obligation is not canceled or weakened by army service.”<sup>19</sup> Comfort indeed, to the farmer burning cow chips for fuel! The War had provided two examples of government sponsored relief groups to the soldier, the United States Sanitary Commission and the Freedmen's Bureau. While both had withered away during Reconstruction, the Bureau provided an example of

an agency set up to deal specifically with a separate group within society. The Grand Army was of course an equally distinctive part of the post-war community, self consciously set apart by their war experiences and their badges, and more than capable, as we have seen, of exerting political influence.

This influence began to come to fruition in 1889 with the introduction by state legislator A.P. Brink of House Roll No. 142, “a bill for the relief of needy old soldiers and their families.”<sup>20</sup> The Act was soon passed on March 15, 1889, and carried the following provisions:

1. It applied to Union soldiers, sailors and marines and the indigent wives, widows, and minor children of indigent or deceased Union soldiers, sailors and marines.
2. Section One: Created a fund in each county, based on a tax not exceeding 3/10 of a mill on taxable property; for the relief and for funeral expenses of those named above.
3. Section Two: each county would establish by January 1890 a three member Soldiers' Relief Commission (SRC), two of whom must be honorably discharged veterans.
4. Section Three: The SRC would meet at the County Clerk's office, there to determine who was entitled for relief and the amount to be paid. On the first Monday of each month the Clerks would issue to the SRC warrants upon the County Treasurer.
5. Section Four: County boards could remove SRC members for neglect of duty or maladministration.<sup>21</sup>

The veteran dominated SRCs were also given the power to place the money in the hands of another person to spend on behalf of the recipient (if it believed he would not “properly expend it”) and they could increase, decrease or discontinue payments

altogether. AAG P.A. Gatchell was hopeful, believing that the bill “will in great measure relieve the various posts of this Department from a large responsibility of relief.”<sup>22</sup>

The results of the bill were mixed. By the end of 1891 problems in the Douglas County (Omaha) operation had reached the ears of the *Bee*, which cited “a peck of trouble”, as funds had decreased from \$7,500 to \$7,000 in 1890-91. With contenders vying to replace an SRC commissioner whose term was expiring, several charges of misconduct were swirling around: that funds had been “injudiciously” distributed; that some recipients had received too much and others too little; that the tax levy was exhausted long before the year was up. A commission investigating the SRC's handling of the bill vouchers had stalled when the chairman moved away. When the *Bee* reporter inquired at the county treasurer's office he was told that, “only a few taxes had been paid for the year.”<sup>23</sup> At least three shortfalls of the system had been revealed by this imbroglio. The power of the SRC to choose who could be paid or to modify payment amounts would be subject to close and not altogether kindly scrutiny if unpopular decisions were made. The flow of tax revenue was accomplished on a much less timely basis than would later be established in twentieth century Nebraska. The decentralization of payments onto a county basis forced a dependence on the vagaries of local government efficiency and the ability of taxpayers to meet their obligations. If the relatively affluent citizens of Omaha were slow in making payments, how could the drought-burdened citizens of a Frontier County hope to meet their tax burden?

The only official Grand Army commentary on the impact of the Relief Act came in the 1893 report of AAG J.W. Bowen who noted a drop of \$575.37 in internal GAR charity expenditures from 1891 to 1892. Bowen cited Lancaster County expenditures in 1892 of over \$4,000 and felt that while relief needs were increasing, state (actually, county) action could pick up the burden.<sup>24</sup> The depression and drought which soon enveloped the state would demonstrate the system's inability to mitigate the effects of a prolonged economic downturn. Another and more singular instance--the case of that most distinguished Grand Army figure, John Thayer--further illustrated the limits of local relief. The initial 1893 issue of the veteran monthly, *Nebraska Defender* denied a report that Thayer was living in destitution, and sheltered by a comrade in Lincoln. When contacted by the *Defender* Thayer called the report, which had gone across the country, the product of "a contemptible little puppy." The ex-governor assured the paper that he would soon join a Texas land company and was "very pleasantly located."<sup>25</sup> Either the company went belly-up quickly or Thayer was shading the truth. A year later Senator Manderson submitted a special \$100 a month pension on Thayer's behalf to the Congress. Most telling are the petitions of GAR posts citing Thayer's "needy circumstances" as grounds for passage.<sup>26</sup> The droughts and depression of the 1890s, with their flood of donations from all over the nation, proved the inadequacies of local relief for hundreds, perhaps thousands of comrades. John Thayer's sad end can only have sent a chill up the spine of Grand Army leadership, impelling them further in the fight for increased federal pensions.<sup>27</sup>

While the grand Army was fighting with mixed results to aid comrades capable at least of living in the community, it better met its goal of charity for those whose age and physical debilities required placement in a soldiers' home. The road towards establishment of a facility began in 1882 with the appointment of a committee, initially formed to discuss the feasibility of a soldiers' orphans home.<sup>28</sup> The committee's report in the following year instead focused on the soldiers themselves, estimating that 35,000 veterans lived in the state, with numbers increasing rapidly. The report believed a home to be "a pressing necessity," based on the assertion that the majority of men who had served three or more years were "suffering from wounds or affected with incurable diseases."<sup>29</sup> Nebraskans would soon hear their conclusions echoed in the 1884 report of the national GAR's committee on the placement of a National Soldiers' Home to be funded by Congress west of the Mississippi--a committee of which Henry E. Palmer was a member. The national committee's report painted a bleak picture, with over 350,000 veterans estimated to be living in the West, beset by, "Age, disease and accident [which] had reduced thousands of these soldiers to destitution and want."<sup>30</sup> The report railed against the overcrowded National Homes in the East, and bitterly denounced the Congressional limitation of eligibility to only those who had contracted disease or injury in the line of duty, paraphrasing the policy as telling the veteran,

now in the hour of your necessity we leave you to eat the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table, to seek food and shelter in the county almshouse.



The committee had gained the support of John Logan, drafting a bill calling for the erection of a home in one of the following states: Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri or Nebraska.<sup>31</sup>

The bill's swift passage created a surge of activity in Nebraska. While a North Platte resident sang the praises of the Fort McPherson Reservation (“a beautiful and majestic bluff”), more prominent comrades lobbied for sites near Lincoln, Grand Island, Plattsmouth (sponsored by Palmer, a resident) and Omaha (Senator Manderson).<sup>32</sup> Congress had deflected direct lobbying by compelling delegations to submit arguments on behalf of a site to the Board of Managers at the National Home in Dayton, Ohio. Each state was provided with half an hour, and each site with ten minutes, in which to make its case. After arguments were concluded the *Republican* felt that the issue had been narrowed to Iowa, Leavenworth, Kansas, and little Beatrice, Nebraska, previously unmentioned. The Board of Managers would select Leavenworth as the final site by year's end, perhaps mindful of that city's location adjacent to one of the gateways of the west, Kansas City.<sup>33</sup>

With the effort to obtain a National Home forestalled, Nebraskans turned to the state. The 1886 encampment passed a resolution citing the “many worthy comrades disabled and in destitute circumstances and inmates of poor houses,” as the basis for a five man committee to gather supporting evidence and present a proposal to the legislature.<sup>34</sup> By year's end a bill was pending, supported by the *Republican*, with a story on forty Omaha veterans living in poor houses. The newspaper declared that it hoped

those who characterized the ex-soldiers as “a lot of pensioners who are constantly stretching out their hands for aid” would not prevail with their “shallow heartlessness.”<sup>35</sup> Early passage of the measure in 1887 authorized a 640 acre site, the location to be determined by the Board of Public Lands, with a requirement that it be within three to six miles of a town. The home would provide a residence to any honorably discharged soldier, sailor or marine who had lived in Nebraska for at least two years and who was disabled or suffering from old age so as to make him incapable of earning a living. The disability did not have to have been incurred during the war. Residency was also available to veterans' widows and their children under fifteen years of age. Grand Army members quickly passed their blessings on the measure, complimenting the legislature for an “act of slow justice [which would] rebound to the honor of the noble comrades.”<sup>36</sup>

Citizens of Grand Island, a city of 13,000 people located 155 miles west of Omaha, soon came forward with a donation of land. The *Republican* reported in glowing terms on the new facility which opened in mid-1888. The three story building had a projected capacity of 75 with plans to keep the residents occupied by raising garden vegetables.<sup>37</sup> A more detailed picture of the quality of life for inhabitants appeared a year later. The superintendent in charge of the Home was required to be a veteran and oversaw daily operations with the help of an adjutant, quartermaster, surgeon and matron. A five member advisory board conducted periodic inspections. Residents wore dark blue uniforms with brass buttons and were divided into squads, with an “officer” appointed by the superintendent. Continued misbehavior would result in an escalating series of

punishments: reprimand, “imprisonment in the guard house,” and finally, expulsion. The now four story building also had cottages adjacent to it to handle the 232 inmates. Cost per year per person amounted to \$245.32, of which the federal government defrayed with a \$100 per year payment. An anomaly in Nebraska law combined with a dilatory state legislature to prevent the Home from receiving its fair share of federal money throughout the 1890s.<sup>38</sup>

At least some Grand Army members were worried about inappropriate behavior by the residents of the Home. The 1887 Encampment had passed a resolution requesting that a saloon not be established on or adjacent to the grounds.<sup>39</sup> By 1893 one comrade would rhetorically ask of the *Nebraska Defender*, “Is the Soldiers' Home a drunkard factory?” H.W. Hardy of Lincoln claimed to know of a woman going door-to-door in that city, begging for money to pay for a whiskey cure for her husband. Hardy wanted to know why a man who was clothed, fed and housed by the government should be able to spend his pension on whiskey. The *Defender* made no reply.<sup>40</sup> That this may have not been a singular case is attested to by a 1906 report on the Home's operations. The IG spoke of the contentment and happiness of the couples living in the Grand Island cottages, “carrying on the miniature household economies.” By the same token, when pension checks were cashed, some “make a hurried leave for town where doubtless the saloons would absorb a good portion of these pensions.”<sup>41</sup>

Continual growth at Grand Island led eventually to the dedication of a second home at Milford in October 1895. Commandant J. H. Culver rhapsodized over this “most



**SOURCE:** Nebraska State Historical  
Society

beautiful retreat,” with its shady paths and five story brick building. Two years later Nebraska reported to the national GAR of the “prosperous and satisfactory condition” of the Grand Island Home.<sup>42</sup> The second home was still not sufficient and by 1902 Department Commander R.S. Wilcox called for more room. The combined population of 646 in 1906 led to a characterization of the Homes as “crowded.”<sup>43</sup> Despite their shortcomings, Nebraska's Soldiers' Homes had reflected similar efforts in a number of states, among them Massachusetts, Michigan, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Vermont. Stuart McConnell has characterized the legislation which established soldiers' homes as, “a significant expansion of the sphere of public responsibility.”<sup>44</sup> The Nebraska legislature's continuing response to Grand Army needs lay not only in the group's collective influence as a political entity but also in the composition of its membership, which incorporated all classes. This was a particularly significant point in an age where legislators continually declined to pass measures on behalf of the laboring classes and in a country which to this day abhors the very concept of class. The Soldiers' Homes reflected the paradox of a group which simultaneously identified itself with the nation as a whole while proudly sustaining an identity which set them apart.

Simultaneous with the Grand Army efforts to obtain state relief and soldiers' homes was a more far-reaching attempt to gain federal pensions for ever larger classes of veterans and their dependents. Soldiers' homes had their equivalent in almshouses; the state's establishment of Soldiers' Relief Commissions had operated under local control. Neither action had resulted in much, if any, negative comment in Nebraska. Federal

pensions, however, struck a political nerve which generated masses of calumny and vituperation on one side, and steadfast glorification of the veteran on the other. The *Omaha Herald* saw those wanting pensions as “self-seeking survivors of the late war . . . a horde of mendicants,” and *The Nation* declared that “Many old soldiers have used patriotism as a club for securing undeserved pensions . . . . The GAR is now a money-making machine . . . drift[ing] into politics.” On the other hand, Senator Manderson proclaimed that the “pension list of the nation is its ‘roll of honor’ and constitutes its only patent of nobility.”<sup>45</sup> Whatever the reaction, pensions now take center stage, as we examine the issue which highlighted the Grand Army’s political ascendancy in the nation and Nebraska, while lowering its moral force in the eyes of many.

## ENDNOTES

1. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 101.
2. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1880, 49.
3. *Omaha Republican*, February 1, 1885.
4. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1883, 52. See also McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 141-143.
5. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1882, 26-29. The key points listed in this section are not quotes, but are set apart in the narrative for ease of placement. The ubiquitous Vandervoort was one of the three members of the committee submitting the report. One wonders if the placement of the proposed association in Lincoln, with a majority of members to be from that city, was perceived as a power grab by other members. In the absence of any debate we can only speculate.
6. *National Tribune*, December 7, 1882. Helmkamp's letter contains a moving account of a community/fraternal spirit almost past remembering, as the forty-seven men at one point, "marched around the house so that he could review us from his bed, and then drew up at the head of his bed in close column."
7. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1883, 45-46. See also McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 102-103, who notes that some eastern posts established a plan based on voluntary contributions after the 1869 national encampment had forbidden forced contributions. Most schemes were unstable because they "either assess[ed] too little in dues or promis[ed] too much in benefits."
8. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1886, 24-25. Department Commander A. V. Cole called the farm prices "far below average." The four posts were located in Nemaha, Wayland, Hansen and Waterloo.

9. Ibid., 1886, 36. It should be noted here that first names of Department officers are not always available in the records, as many chose to go by their initials.
10. Ibid., 1891, 39-40.
11. These amounts are not complete. There are discrepancies in amounts reported between the AAG and IG, along with complaints from those officers that not all posts reported. The totals indicated were for amounts expended in the previous year. For the years in which no figures were available, I have placed a “-”.
12. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1892, 37.
13. Ibid., 1894, 63.
14. James W. Dickie to *The National Tribune*, March 21, 1895. This was not the complete list, but suffice it to say, rations were extremely short.
15. John M. Noyes to *The National Tribune*, January 31, 1895
16. Starvation report in letter from D. C. Harrison to *The National Tribune*, February 14, 1895. Fuel shortages report in Mrs. A. J. Frey to *Tribune*, February 14, 1895. Appeal for contributions in *Tribune*, February 14, 1895 (Editorial).
17. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1895, 63; Ibid., 1896, 116.
18. Ibid., 1903, 68.
19. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 149.
20. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1889, 70. The specific train of events leading to the introduction of the bill escaped my researches. Brink was a non-veteran from Boone County.



21. Ibid., 1890, 72. Once again, I have set apart what is essentially a paraphrase for ease of placement in the text.
22. Ibid., 72.
23. *Omaha Bee*, December 24, 1891. Unfortunately no follow-up story appeared
24. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1893, 66.
25. *Nebraska Defender*, April 1893.
26. *Ibid*, March 1894.
27. I was unable to locate direct testimony of personal reaction to Thayer's plight. Nebraska's leaders would have been less than human if they had not thought to themselves, "There, but for the grace of God, go I."
28. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1882, 41. Paul Vandervoort, apparently chosen for every committee in the early years, was joined by J. H. Culver and J. C. Bonnell.
29. Ibid., 1883, 45. The committee's assertion was apparently grounded on anecdotal testimony. The 1880s were well before the age of polling.
30. Journal of the National Encampment, 1884, 98. This picture may not have been so overdrawn. Although most veterans in the mid-1880s would have been comfortably in their forties--which we now consider to be early middle age--life expectancy was less than it is now, and was coupled in the West with a pioneer lifestyle harsh in its affects on the body.
31. Ibid., 98-100.

32. The description of Ft. McPherson is found in North Platte Resident to editor, *Omaha Republican*, July 4, 1884. Lobbying groups are mentioned in *Omaha Republican*, September 18, 1884. The paper does not name the leaders who spearheaded the efforts on behalf of Lincoln and Grand Island.
33. See *Omaha Republican*, September 19, 1884, and *Ibid*, September 21, 1884 (Editorial).
34. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1886, 74.
35. *Omaha Republican*, January 26, 1887 (Editorial).
36. A description of the measure is found in *Omaha Republican*, January 26, 1887. Thanks to the legislature are in Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1887, 34.
37. *Omaha Republican*, July 29, 1888.
38. *Omaha Bee*, August 30, 1889. The five-member advisory board consisted of three veterans, two wives, sisters or daughters of a veteran and one member of the Women's Relief Corps. See also, *Omaha Republican*, March 17, 1889, for a description of legislative debates over the addition of cottages. One legislator cited the need for a hospital wing because inmates with "ordinary sickness" were placed in rooms with cancer patients. The legislature appropriated \$15,000 for a hospital wing and \$1,000 for an elevator. See also, Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1894, 106, which contains a complaint by Grand Island Commandant D. A. Stovall of a shortfall in Nebraska law which he claimed caused the facility to turn away worthy applicants. Section 429 of the Consolidated Statutes of Nebraska mandated that federal funds sent to reimburse the state for running the Home had to be turned over to the State Treasury. The legislature then had to make a specific appropriation for its use; apparently the legislature lagged in making the necessary appropriation, causing a shortfall in operating expenses. Succeeding Journals do not provide any satisfactory resolution to this problem.
39. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1887, 87-89.

40. *Nebraska Defender*, August 1893
41. Journal of the Nebraska Encampment, 1906, 65.
42. Ibid, 1895, 154.
43. Ibid, 1902, 64; Ibid, 1906, 61.
44. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 141-143.
45. Comment from *Herald* as quoted in *Omaha Republican*, September 1, 1887 (Editorial); Manderson quoted in *Omaha Republican*, February 13, 1888; "The New Pension Policy," *The Nation*, 49 (May 30, 1889): 458.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Pensions Are Due Them

Every month, year after year, federal finance and disbursing offices process billions of dollars of government checks, drawn upon the national treasury, and carried by the grace of the U.S. Postal service into millions of homes. Recipients include, citizens eligible for Social Security, U.S. government workers who have attained retirement eligibility, veterans with twenty or more years of active service or service in the Reserves, veterans who sustained disabilities while on active duty, widows and dependent children of veterans. The list goes on, and except during debates over the balanced budget, is both unremarkable and unremarked upon by the average citizen. Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal wrought such a transformation in American thought over the issue of government entitlements that the current reader is apt to be caught short when encountering the following comment from a popular journal of opinion in 1891 regarding the contemporary move by the G&R to secure pensions for Union veterans:

No land dare deliberately enter upon the uncertainty of war knowing that the surviving soldiery would expect and demand so lavish a reward in the event of success and that public opinion would uphold their mercenary spirit . . . . We are no longer on the verge of socialism, we are in it, far advanced . . . the insidious growth of state socialism . . . approaching communism in the pension measures already operative.<sup>1</sup>

The Grand Army of the Republic, cloaked in the guise of *agents provocateur* for the overthrow of the capitalist state! The author's vehemence may be explained as much by the fact that pension payments accounted for forty per cent of federal budget expenditures in 1893 as by his political leanings.<sup>2</sup>

In tracing the conflict over post-Civil War pension legislation certain items need to be defined. A military pension is the regular allowance paid to a veteran of military service, or to his widow or dependent children. Disability pensions were granted on account of wound(s), injuries or disease(s) incurred while on active military duty. Service pensions were granted on the basis of military service for a specified time period. Pure service pensions were granted without any other qualifications, while limited service pensions required a specified length of service, plus other qualifying factors (e.g., indigence, inability to perform manual labor, inability to earn a support, disability incurred since the termination of service.)<sup>3</sup>

Pension legislation between 1789 and 1860 had resulted in the issuance of over \$90,000,000 and 65,000,000 acres of land to veterans and their families.<sup>4</sup> Lincoln's call for 500,000 volunteers, issued on July 22, 1861, continued this benefit system by offering monetary sums to wounded and disabled soldiers equivalent to coverage already in place for the Regular Army. Within a year the President would call for "300,000 more" supplemented by a Congressional Pension Act passed on July 14, 1862, which has been termed "epoch-making" by one historian.<sup>5</sup> The Act authorized disability pensions for wounds or disease contracted while in military service since March 4, 1861, with payments back-dated to the discharge date for those filing within a year. The legislation also served as a portent of things to come by increasing the amounts received by widows and dependent children of those who died on active duty, while adding mothers and sisters of bachelor soldiers who died as two wholly new classes of recipients.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequent pension legislation in the 1860s allowed orphaned brothers under sixteen and dependent fathers of soldiers to receive pensions, while also introducing the concept of arrears of pensions. Thus, all pensions approved as a result of death, disease or wounds would commence from the date of discharge of the person on whose account the pension had been granted, if an application had been made in writing within five years after the right to a pension had been established.<sup>7</sup>

And so the matter rested for the greater part of the 1870s as Nebraska veterans, like their counterparts in other states, responded to the Grand Army's membership entreaties. But while the booming fraternal order's power initially focused itself on matters of ritual, reunions and celebrations of the dead, individual members applying for pensions often found themselves up against a stonewall of bureaucratic red tape and indifference. Some failed to prove a service connection to injuries or illness sustained since the war. Others saw claims either disallowed or delayed by a Pension Bureau staffed with only 742 people as late as 1882--a number woefully insufficient to meet the forthcoming deluge of applications.<sup>8</sup> Other claimants failed to amass a sufficient trail of paper documenting that injuries had occurred while on active duty. Pension agents, some with legal training and some without, stood ready to fan the flames of discontent, as the *Omaha Republican* and *Herald* carried daily advertisements touting the skills of these nineteenth century "ambulance chasers."

Subsequent events demonstrated the truth of an equation which has proved itself time and again in the rights movements of the twentieth century: disaffected group plus

lawyers equals legislation. At the apex of pension attorneys stood Washington D.C.'s George Lemon, founder of the *National Tribune*, the national GAR organ, which once characterized Pension Commissioner John Bentley as “The Arch Enemy of the Soldier.”<sup>9</sup> Lemon and his brethren must have been greatly pleased by Congressional passage of the Arrears Act of 1879, the first significant piece of post-war legislation. The Act transformed the scale of pension applications and became intertwined with philosophical change on the Grand Army's part.<sup>10</sup> Before turning to that change and the role which Nebraskans played in it, we would do well to examine the Arrears Act itself, its impact on Nebraska pensioners, and to discuss the economic import of the pension system as it operated in the Nebraska economy of the 1880s.

The Arrears Act maintained service-related disabilities as the basis for claims and continued the same monthly rates for different injuries as previously provided (e.g., \$24 for the loss of a leg, \$13 for deafness, and so on).<sup>11</sup> All pensions previously granted, or applied for prior to July 1, 1880, for death/disease/disability would commence from the date of death or discharge, rather than from the application date. These pension arrears would be paid at the same rates as that for which the pension was initially granted. Any applications received and approved after July 1, 1880, would begin on the filing date, causing one historian to exclaim that, “[this] limitation saved the arrears monstrosity from being utterly unendurable.”<sup>12</sup> Just as important for the longer term was a provision which repealed the requirement for the veteran to produce records from the War or Navy k Departments, and a new provision allowing *ex parte* affidavits from the applicant as

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## ATTENTION! SOLDIERS.

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Owing to recent acts of Congress the pension and bounty laws are very liberal and claims can be adjusted on less testimony than before.

Soldiers who have had claims rejected or long pending can have them taken up and brought to a final settlement by applying to the undersigned.

Soldiers of the late war can now secure pensions if they incurred any disease or suffered any injury while in the service without regard to present condition as no claims can now be rejected on certificate of examining surgeon. Most pensioners can have their pensions increased.

PATENTS PROCURED ALSO.

**C. E. DUTCHER.**

U. S. Claim Atty, for Nebraska and Kansas.

Advance Print, Fairbury.

A Typical Pension Lawyer Advertisement (Year Unknown)

SOURCE: Nebraska State Historical Society



sufficient proof to show service-connected disability.<sup>13</sup> (*Ex parte* testimony allows only one side in an action to testify. Veteran testimony would not be challenged under this procedure.) The report of the Commissioner of Pensions for 1880 reported new claims “at an unprecedented rate . . . the affidavits in support of the claims have the same appearance . . . whether true or false.”<sup>14</sup>

The Arrears Act of 1879 spurred an equally unprecedented number of disability pension claims from Nebraska in the years 1880-1882. Over seventy-five per cent of the nearly three thousand disability pensioners in the state were granted pensions in those three years, obviously prodded along by lump sum payments which could total nearly a thousand dollars. (See Table IX) Historian William Glasson arrived at an average initial lump sum payout of \$953.62 for those granted pensions in 1881, which if true in Nebraska, would have generated an income of \$256,523.78 to the recipients.<sup>15</sup> The Arrears Act, of course, did not have quite the same impact on survivors of those who had died from service-related diseases or wounds. (One had to wait, after all, for the veteran to die!) Survivors, generally widows (See Table X), received anywhere from \$8 to \$30 a month, with the majority receiving the former figure. Even an annual income of \$96 could provide an effective barrier to poverty in an era when wages were much lower. By 1890 Congress would authorize pensions to all widows of honorably discharged soldiers who had served ninety days or more, providing a huge financial boost in a state where Union widows comprised between twelve to seventeen per cent of all widows.<sup>16</sup>

Critics of the pension system often vented their spleen on the problematic nature

of service-connected disabilities, given voice by a writer in the *Century* who asserted it as “a common opinion in Washington that about one-quarter of the Pension List is more or less fraudulent.” This same critic also characterized the viewpoint of Pension Office surgeons who passed on disability claims as believing the war had weakened men by “the unaccustomed strains of frictions of army life.”<sup>17</sup> And certain questions may arise in the minds of a current reader who peruses Table XI. How could gunshot wounds and other wounds account for over fifty-four per cent of the total some seventeen years after the war's end? In this age of disinfectants, penicillin and the miracles wrought by modern medicine, we forget that wounds could continue to fester, with new infections rising, accompanied by long-term chronic pain and disability. The man suffering from chronic diarrhea had herbs and plants as the only available medications; if he fell prone to the debilitating effects of Irritable Bowel Syndrome or lactose intolerance, no antibiotics were available to assist him. The scurvy sufferer was given to ulcers and soft tissue injuries.<sup>18</sup> Fraud certainly existed in the pension system--any operation depending on the basis of *ex parte* testimony would be prone to the greedy side of human nature. But if one looks askance at some of the pensions authorized, we must remember that the great majority were farmers, involved in the heaviest kind of manual labor, to whom such injuries or diseases could be catastrophic in terms of the ability to earn a living.

Other anomalies present themselves upon a closer view of Nebraska's pensions, specifically in terms of apparently inequitable payouts. Wallace Weber of Clear Springs was granted four dollars a month for the loss of sight of his right eye, while John Lee of

Table IX. Nebraska Disability Pension Growth, 1863-1882.

| <u>YEAR</u> | <u># OF PENSIONERS</u><br><u>(N = 2,942)</u> |
|-------------|--|
| 1863        | 13   |
| 1864        | 22   |
| 1865        | 30   |
| 1866        | 33   |
| 1867        | 50   |
| 1868        | 34   |
| 1869        | 24   |
| 1870        | 17   |
| 1871        | 23   |
| 1872        | 30   |
| 1873        | 20   |
| 1874        | 28   |
| 1875        | 27   |
| 1876        | 28   |
| 1877        | 59   |
| 1878        | 133  |
| 1879        | 142  |
| 1880        | 278  |
| 1881        | 269  |
| 1882        | 1,682  |

SOURCE: Senate Resolution of December 8, 1882, List of Pensioners on the Roll, January 1, 1883 (1883; reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company 1970), 713-761. NOTE: Numbers shown above reflect the original year in which pension payments began.

Table X. Survivor Pensioners in Nebraska as of January 1, 1883.

| <u>Relation to Deceased</u> | <u>Number</u> |
|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Father                      | 12            |
| Mother                      | 111           |
| Minor Child                 | 26            |
| Widows                      | 259           |
| Survivor War of 1812        | 12            |

**Source:** List of Pensioners on the Roll, January 1, 1883, 713-761.

NOTE: A total of 3,362 pensioners were on the rolls in Nebraska as of January 1, 1883.

Dublin lived comfortably on eighteen dollars a month for a wound in his right hand.<sup>19</sup> In Kearney, Nebraska, Alpheus Rogers was paid eighteen dollars for the loss of a left arm, while in the same town Benjamin Ayres received twenty-four dollars for the loss of his left arm.<sup>20</sup> Both would have been offended to hear of Lincoln's Jerome Schamp, who received the same twenty-four dollars for a dislocated left knee.<sup>21</sup> In Omaha, John Valentine had to make do on two dollars a month for chronic rheumatism, whereas Thomas Dent received the truly magnificent sum of fifty dollars for the same disease.<sup>22</sup> Omaha's William Riordan had suffered a gunshot wound to the groin, for which he was paid four dollars a month; yet, Milton Laycock of that city had an eighteen dollar monthly pension for a gunshot wound to the foot.<sup>23</sup> Such discrepancies offended concepts of equity then and now, giving rise to charges of fraud against a system which allowed local physicians to assess the extent and service-connectedness of disabilities.<sup>24</sup> One may only imagine the hard feelings amongst Grand Army members after a discussion of pension amounts at the monthly post meeting.

The economic impact of pensions in Nebraska as shown in Tables XII, XIII and XIV is only a snapshot in time. Total annual pension incomes for all counties totaled \$350,912.16 in 1882 (excluding possible tens of thousands more in arrears). This sum almost equals the \$355,465 of tax revenue collected by the state in 1880.<sup>25</sup> The 3,362 pensioners on the rolls as of January 1, 1883, represented 2.2% of the total Nebraska work force counted in the census of 1880.<sup>26</sup> More to the point for pensioners as *people* is Table XIII, which shows what kind of replacement income a pension could represent for

average occupations. The average annual pension payout of \$104.40 served to replace one-third of a normal income, while those totally disabled were rewarded with an income two and one-half times the normal wage--a comfortable safety net for the family, and for a Nebraska society which might otherwise have been compelled to fully support such unfortunates.<sup>27</sup> Table XIV demonstrates what could be purchased with the average pensioner's \$8.70 a month, remembering also that people sustained themselves with many fewer luxury items than in the present day. And so, two generations before Franklin Roosevelt's establishment of Social Security, a federal program protected for life a growing portion of the Nebraska populace by offering pensions that replaced typical annual wages at higher rates than the initial payouts of the 1930s.<sup>28</sup> We shall now see how the Grand Army contributed to the growth of that system in the ensuing years.

The growing largesse coming from the national treasury acted as a stimulant to the Grand Army leadership. The Proceedings at both the national and state encampments in the 1870s are bereft of much comment or debate on the pension issue. However, in 1882 the national body devoted several pages highlighting the accomplishments of its pension committee, to which Paul Vandervoort had been elected a member. Prompted by previous Grand Army recommendations, Congress had increased the size of the Pension Office clerical staff by fifty per cent, appropriated monies for the hiring of 250 special examiners and began to hire physicians with expertise in diseases of the eye, ear and nerves--all of this leading to a self-serving boast by the Committee that "the value to the veteran soldiers of [these] efforts can hardly be over-estimated."<sup>29</sup> This awakening

Table XI. Breakdown of Disability Pensions in Nebraska by Cause and Number as of January 1, 1883.

| <u>Cause</u>            | <u>Number</u><br><u>(N=2942)</u> | <u>Cause</u>     | <u>Number</u><br><u>(N=2942)</u> |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|
| Gunshot Wounds          | 1,261                            | Shoulders        | 9                                |
| Wounds                  | 352                              | Sunstrokes       | 8                                |
| Abdomen/Kidneys         | 209                              | Throat           | 8                                |
| Chronic Diarrhea        | 166                              | Stomach          | 7                                |
| Amputation/Loss of Limb | 166                              | Liver            | 7                                |
| Eyes                    | 133                              | Tuberculosis     | 6                                |
| Lungs .                 | 112                              | Improper Vaccine | 3                                |
| Rheumatism              | 81                               | Hepatitis        | 3                                |
| Feet/Ankles/Knees/Legs  | 73                               | Typhoid          | 3                                |
| Spine/Back/Head         | 61                               | Malaria          | 2                                |
| Heart                   | 60                               | Erysipelas       | 2                                |
| Shell Wounds            | 31                               | Jaundice         | 1                                |
| Varicose Veins          | 29                               | Goiter           | 1                                |
| Arms/Elbows             | 27                               | Pleurisy         | 1                                |
| Paralysis               | 27                               | Ague             | 1                                |
| Ears                    | 23                               | Enteritis        | 1                                |
| Bronchitis              | 18                               | Arcites          | 1                                |
| Scurvy                  | 13                               | Dislocated Jaw   | 1                                |
| Asthma                  | 11                               | Nephritis        | 1                                |
| Epilepsy                | 10                               | Frozen Feet      | 1                                |
| General Debility        | 10                               | Fever Sores      | 1                                |
|                         |                                  | Not Given        | 1                                |

**Source:** List of Pensioners on the Roll as of January 1, 1883, 713-761.

Table XII. Selected Monthly and Annual Pension Incomes by County as of January 1, 1883.

| <u>County</u> | <u>Monthly</u> | <u>Annual</u> |
|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| Adams         | \$1,123.75     | \$13,485.00   |
| Antelope      | 547.00         | 6,564.00      |
| Boone         | 313.08         | 3,756.96      |
| Buffalo       | 1,072.74       | 12,872.88     |
| Burt          | 487.75         | 5,853.00      |
| Butler        | 516.75         | 6,201.00      |
| Cass          | 622.58         | 7,470.96      |
| Clay          | 1,247.58       | 14,970.96     |
| Dawson        | 448.16         | 5,377.92      |
| Dodge         | 446.50         | 5,358.20      |
| Douglas       | 1,729.25       | 20,751.00     |
| Fillmore      | 611.25         | 7,335.00      |
| Franklin      | 296.25         | 3,555.00      |
| Furnas        | 659.25         | 7,911.00      |
| Greeley       | 140.00         | 1,680.00      |
| Hall          | 756.25         | 9,075.00      |
| Hamilton      | 482.50         | 5,790.00      |
| Harlan        | 482.00         | 5,784.00      |
| Holt          | 505.00         | 6,060.00      |
| Howard        | 306.32         | 3,675.84      |
| Jefferson     | 626.00         | 7,512.00      |
| Johnson       | 617.75         | 7,413.00      |
| Kearney       | 251.00         | 3,012.00      |
| Knox          | 287.00         | 3,444.00      |
| Lancaster     | 1,207.75       | 14,493.00     |
| Madison       | 344.00         | 4,128.00      |
| Merrick       | 492.66         | 5,911.92      |
| Nemaha        | 697.66         | 8,371.92      |
| Platte        | 576.00         | 6,912.00      |
| Richardson    | 825.00         | 9,900.00      |
| Saline        | 1,019.00       | 12,228.00     |
| Saunders      | 623.25         | 7,479.00      |
| Seward        | 542.50         | 6,510.00      |
| Sherman       | 125.00         | 1,500.00      |
| Thayer        | 648.00         | 7,776.00      |
| Valley        | 429.00         | 5,148.00      |
| Washington    | 419.00         | 5,028.00      |
| Webster       | 480.50         | 5,766.00      |
| Wheeler       | 94.00          | 1,128.00      |

**Source:** List of Pensioners on the Roll, January 1, 1883, 713-761.



Table XIII. Pensions as Replacement Income for Selected Nebraska occupations

| <u>Occupation</u>         | <u># Employed</u> | <u>Average Annual Wage</u> |        |           |
|---------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|--------|-----------|
| Manufacturer              | 4,793             | \$353.51                   |        |           |
| Average annual pension of | \$104.40          | replaces                   | 28.7%  | of income |
| “                         | 144.00            | “                          | 39.6%  | “         |
| “                         | 288.00            | “                          | 79.2%  | “         |
| “                         | 864.00            | “                          | 237.0% | “         |
| <u>Occupation</u>         | <u># Employed</u> | <u>Average Annual Wage</u> |        |           |
| Meat Packing              | 191               | \$338.83                   |        |           |
| Average annual pension of | \$104.40          | replaces                   | 30.6%  | of income |
| “                         | 144.00            | “                          | 42.5%  | “         |
| “                         | 288.00            | “                          | 84.0%  | “         |
| “                         | 864.00            | “                          | 254.0% | “         |
| <u>Occupation</u>         | <u># Employed</u> | <u>Average Annual Wage</u> |        |           |
| Flour & Grist Mill        | 506               | \$326.25                   |        |           |
| Average annual pension of | \$104.40          | replaces                   | 31.9%  | of income |
| “                         | 144.00            | “                          | 44.1%  | “         |
| “                         | 288.00            | “                          | 88.2%  | “         |
| “                         | 864.00            | “                          | 264.8% | “         |
| <u>Occupation</u>         | <u># Employed</u> | <u>Average Annual Wage</u> |        |           |
| Iron & Steel Works        | 90                | \$555.55                   |        |           |
| Average annual pension of | \$104.40          | replaces                   | 18.7%  | of income |
| “                         | 144.00            | “                          | 25.9%  | “         |
| “                         | 288.00            | “                          | 51.8%  | “         |
| “                         | 864.00            | “                          | 155.0% | “         |

**Source:** Compendium of the Tenth Census, Part II, 928, 992, 1137-38.

NOTE: Average annual occupation incomes were arrived at by dividing total wages paid by number of employees. The average annual pension payout for all Nebraskans in 1882 was \$104.40. The next two figures used were based on monthly rates of \$12 and \$24, amounts commonly paid. The last pension rate used was that paid for total disability.

Table XIV. Selected Prices of Goods and Services in the Nineteenth Century

| <u>Item</u>   | <u>Source</u>                        | <u>Description</u>                           | <u>Price</u> |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|--|--------------|
| Oil Heater    | <i>Ladies Home Journal</i> (1893)    | Heats a room<br>16' sq.                      | \$12.00      |
| Men's Shoes   | <i>Advertising Trade Card</i> (1892) | Good working shoes                           | \$1.00       |
| Men's Shirts  | <i>Spirit of the Times</i> (1877)    | muslin                                       | \$1.00       |
| School Outfit | <i>Ladies Home</i>                   | Combination suit with extra pair pants & hat | \$5.00       |
| Men's Pants   | <i>Advertising Trade Card</i> (1885) | Good cassimere pants                         | \$2.00       |
| Women's Shoes | <i>Advertising Trade Card</i> (1875) | Lace shoes                                   | \$.63        |
|               |                                      | Button shoes                                 | \$1.50       |
| College       | <i>Southern Christian Advocate</i>   | One semester, Clemson                        | \$59.00      |
| Corn Seed     | <i>The Plantation</i> (1872)         | Quantity Unknown                             | \$1.00       |
| Fertilizer    | <i>The Plantation</i> (1872)         | Per ton                                      | \$40.00      |
| Oat Seeds     | <i>Spirit of the Times</i>           | Per bushel                                   | \$1.00       |
| Coffee        | <i>N.Y. Times</i> (1863)             | Gillie's Old Plantation                      | \$.25        |
| Flour         | <i>The State</i> (S. Car., 1896)     | Half barrel                                  | \$2.50       |
| Pork & Beans  | <i>The Youth's Companion Year</i>    | Van Camp's per can                           | \$.06        |
| Soup          | <i>Ladies Home Journal</i>           | Per case, 2 doz. pint cans                   | \$2.00       |
| Sugar         | <i>The State</i> (1896)              | per pound                                    | \$.04        |
| Hotel Room    | <i>Spirit of the Times</i> (1877)    | Cincinnati per day                           | \$1.00       |
| Dinner        | <i>Spirit of the Times</i> (1894)    | Morton's Restaurant, "Best dinner in N.Y."   | \$1.25       |
| Doctor's Fee  | <i>N.Y. Times</i> (1863)             | Disease of pelvis/ruptive/per visit          | \$5.00       |
| Dentist's Fee | <i>Advertising Trade Card</i> (1880) | Vitalized or gas/per visit                   | \$.25        |

**Source:** Scott Derks, editor, The Value of a Dollar: Prices and Incomes in the United States, 1860-1989 (Washington, D.C.: Gale Research Inc., 19-35.

interest (or perhaps, self-interest) in pensions had been spurred on by George Lemon, who used the columns of his *National Tribune* to beat the drums for the concept of the Grand Army as a political interest group. “[Let us] present before the Congress . . . the same unbroken front which won many a glorious battle field . . . . The truth is that no political party can any longer afford to ignore the soldier.”<sup>30</sup>

Nebraska's Vandervoort proved to be a key player in the rise of pensions as an important Grand Army issue--by inclination of temperament, by his actions as National Commander, by his longevity as a delegate to national conventions, and by his close association with George Lemon.<sup>31</sup> One of Vandervoort's first acts upon assuming the position of National Commander in 1882 was to name Lemon as an aide-de-camp, as he would in later life be employed by Lemon on the *Tribune*.<sup>32</sup> Vandervoort's 1883 report to the National Encampment cast the pension debate in emotional and polemical tones by contrasting “the men who lost limbs or [who] were torn with bullet and shell,” with “the cowardly skulkers who are making the assault upon the pension rolls.” Denying any imputations of fraud (“one tenth of one percent”), he went on to characterize pensions as a kind of Keynesian pump primer to the economy: “It goes into the channels of trade. It makes money easy.”<sup>33</sup> While the Grand Army's Surgeon-General was coming out against the concept of service pensions, Vandervoort would conclude his remarks by ambiguously affirming that “I am in favor of pensioning every deserving soldier.”<sup>34</sup>

Historian Wallace Davies has noted that pensions were only one avenue of approach used by the Grand Army to enhance the lives of its members.<sup>35</sup> Agitation began

in the 1880s for the deeding of one hundred and sixty acres of land to all veterans, with no requirement to actually settle on the land. Vandervoort's speech on behalf of this measure at the 1884 National Convention would combine elements of a divine right of conquest theory with a nativist fear of that era's tide of immigration:

If we had been a monarchy, we would have confiscated the soil we conquered and given it to the victors . . . Unless land-warrants are given soon the public domain will largely fall into the hands of foreign syndicates, alien to our soil and leave the Union soldier homeless and landless. America for Americans will meet a response in every soldier's heart.<sup>36</sup>

Opposition to this proposal centered on the belief that insufficient public lands existed, that the surveying process would take too long and that many veterans would sell their deeds to land syndicates. Such arguments prompted Vandervoort to snarl that, “This would create the idea that the veteran of the war is unable to attend to his own affairs, and would at once fall into the hands of public cormorants.”<sup>37</sup> The objections already raised combined with the enmity of the pension committee (which feared a dilution of effort in the pension battle) to defeat the land warrant idea.<sup>38</sup>

A new conception was arising within Grand Army ranks of what was owed to them, a feeling that stretched from Nebraska to New York and points in between. Nebraska's Henry Palmer spoke bitterly of the “half dozen paltry dollars” they had received each month on active duty; many had then settled on the Great Plains, suffering from “ruined constitutions [and] seeds of disease that may ripen into [a] two dollars per month pension.”<sup>39</sup> In 1881 Comrade James West of Nebraska had offered a resolution to the National Encampment asserting “that the Office of the Commissioner of Pensions

belongs by right to us and its affairs should be administered by some distinguished volunteer soldier.”<sup>40</sup> A neighboring Kansas comrade proclaimed that “because you saved the nation, you have a mortgage written in blood on every man, woman and child and on every acre of land in these United States.”<sup>41</sup> The remarks of a New York comrade to the 1885 encampment epitomized Grand Army thinking, and were met with applause: “The Grand Army of the Republic owns this country by the rights of a conqueror.”<sup>42</sup> Back in Nebraska, the *Republican* more simply stated that “Pensions are due them.”<sup>43</sup> The “boys” had not forgotten the sign at the Grand Review, nor would they allow the country to turn away from its full meaning: “The only national debt we can never pay is the debt we owe the victorious Union Soldiers.”

If a fuller payment of that pledge was now due, what form should it take? Like a general seeking to sweep the field before him, the 1885 pension committee recommended action on several fronts: extend the limit on filing arrears until 1885; substantial increases in disability rates, topping out at \$100 per month; a further relaxation of standards of proof in establishing claims; pensions for those who had been a prisoner of war (POWs); a dependent pension act which would “pay all veterans, disabled or not, who had become dependent on others for support.”<sup>44</sup> At least one Nebraska post (#37 in Blue Springs) had gone further, forwarding a recommendation (not adopted) which called for service pensions of \$8 per month for all those who had served sixty days or more.<sup>45</sup> Waiting in the wings, like a potential villain in a stage melodrama, stood President Grover Cleveland, the ultimate arbiter of any dependent pension measure, and the *bete noir* of the

Grand Army.

The Dependent Pension Bill which found its way to Cleveland's desk in January in 1887 was the compromise measure of a deeply divided Congress, granting twelve dollars a month to all veterans with ninety or more days of service and who were unable to support themselves through manual labor.<sup>46</sup> Despite thousands of petitions calling for its approval (and the overwhelming support of Nebraska veterans), several midwestern newspapers, including the *Omaha Bee* viewed the measure with deep suspicion and disdain.<sup>47</sup> The *Chicago Times* thought the bill would “turn the government into a huge alms-dispensing establishment,” while that same city's *Tribune* scorned the measure as a “serpent of temptation.” The *Bee*, perhaps alluding to the social transformations then underway in England and Germany, warned its readers that

The people of this country may have imposed upon them a burden even heavier than those of any European nation have to bear, and one not so easily diminished or removed, if a check is not put upon the tendency to continually enlarge the pension system. Sentiment should not be permitted to shut out consideration of the prodigal facts in connection with this very important subject.<sup>48</sup>

Grand Army fury at Cleveland's veto of the Dependent Pension Act on February 11, 1887, was fueled as much by his chilly language as by the veto itself. Cleveland cast his sarcasm on pension agents and veterans, proclaiming that

It is sad, but nevertheless true, that already in the matter of procuring pensions there exists a widespread disregard of truth and good faith, stimulated by those who as agents undertake to establish claims for pensions, heedlessly entered upon by the expectant beneficiary, encouraged, or at least not condemned, by those unwilling to obstruct a neighbor's plans.<sup>49</sup>

Despite limp opposition by Comrade Shoemaker of Omaha, Nebraska's 1887

encampment passed a resolution which “unqualifiedly” condemned the veto, and “arraigned” Cleveland as “the most bitter and virulent enemy of the Union soldier.”<sup>50</sup> The *Republican* characterized the resolution as passing “with a thunder of ayes and not an audible no.”<sup>51</sup> The paper went on to highlight the increasing penury of Nebraska veterans and the large amounts already being contributed to their relief by Grand Army posts, citing Adjutant-General Brad Cook’s statement that “every post in Nebraska has one to five families dependent [upon them] without regard to their Grand Army status.”<sup>52</sup> When St. Louis citizens invited Cleveland to conduct a review of marchers at the grand Army’s 1887 national convention, the *Republican* warned the President to stay away, citing the “elephantine humor [and] sneering flippancy” of his veto, which had produced “an atmosphere of contempt for the men who wore the blue.”<sup>53</sup>

Nebraska’s resolution of censure went before that same 1887 encampment, resulting in spirited debate and becoming the object of a ruling by the national Judge Advocate-General, holding that such measures were not “outside the letter, spirit or intendment of the declared objects of our Order, and [are] not an attempt to use the organization for partisan purposes.”<sup>54</sup> The Committee on Resolutions recommended no action as the Pension Committee had already responded adequately to Cleveland’s veto by calling it an act “which has inflicted immeasurable cruelty.” Vandervoort rose to reply and warned the national body that if they failed to pass Nebraska’s resolution, the Grand Army would then “march in the rear of the soldier procession . . . Are we to sit here like dogs and receive the abuse of a large body of newspapers in this

country?”<sup>55</sup> The delegates instead chose to heed the warnings of Ohio's comrade Grosvenor against descending into “the cesspool of political agitation,” by defeating Nebraska's condemnation of Cleveland.<sup>56</sup> Nebraska's Grand Army remained undeterred and would later send a resolution to the national body threatening that “it is time we were speaking in thundering tones and sentiments demanding our well-earned rights from the nation we saved . . . we are coming three hundred and fifty thousand GAR strong to oppose enemies in high places as we did in the field.”<sup>57</sup>

Even while efforts continued on behalf of the disability pension bill in Congress, new calls arose for a service pension act granting eight dollars per month to all who had served in the war for sixty days or more. The national body voted overwhelmingly in favor of service pensions at its 1888 session to be echoed at the Nebraska encampment in the next year. Some wondered whether by asking so much the Grand Army would instead receive nothing, thus failing to help those with real disabilities.<sup>58</sup> Pensions were becoming like Topsy--“they just growed and growed.” The rising demands for disability and service pensions were fueled by a belief that such payouts were a right of the soldier, captured in George Lemon's assertion that, “Pensions to disabled soldiers were as much a part of the contract as interest to the bondholders, and it is downright dishonesty to deny them.”<sup>59</sup> Even more alarming to many commentators was the lip-smacking declaration of President Benjamin Harrison's newly appointed Commissioner of Pensions James Tanner (a legless ex-corporal from New York and a powerful figure within the national GAR): “God help the surplus.”<sup>60</sup>



Tanner would soon overstep his bounds, to be replaced by Green B. Raum.

Tanner's peccadilloes failed to stop the enactment of a new Disability Pension Act in June 1890. Under its provisions any veteran with over ninety days of service received six to twelve dollars a month, "proportioned to the veteran's inability to earn support by *manual labor*."<sup>61</sup> (emphasis added) With no service connection having to be proved by the veteran and a liberal interpretation as to what constituted incapacitation for manual labor, even the well-to-do professional was as likely to receive a pension as the poverty-stricken and crippled. By the end of the decade, about half a billion dollars in pensions had been distributed to nearly one million recipients.<sup>62</sup> The days of the budget surplus had become one with history, infuriating William Glasson, who cried that, "It lays an extravagant and unjust burden upon taxpayers to insure a privileged class."<sup>63</sup>

Glasson was joined by a host of other critics. The patrician ex-general Charles Frances Adams, Jr. wrote of the "entering wedge" effect--a never-ending cycle of demands for arrears, then dependent pensions, service pensions, rate increases, land bounties, and other bonuses.<sup>64</sup> Reformer Edwin L. Godkin's *The Nation* maintained a continuing drumbeat of criticism, castigating pension agents as "sharks" who keep the veterans "in constant ferment."<sup>65</sup> Those same veterans were now using patriotism as a "club for securing undeserved pensions," and the Grand Army had "[fallen] under the control of this set."<sup>66</sup> Critic William Sloane argued in the *Century* that the state has the right to the services of its citizens in an emergency with no corresponding legal or moral expectation of a pension by the men who had served.<sup>67</sup> *Harper's Weekly* and *Forum* both

weighed in on the side of reform with the former calling for abolition of pension attorneys, while the latter recommended a change back to litigated testimony (as opposed to *ex parte*) and removing from the list all those not in poverty.<sup>68</sup> When Harvard President Charles W. Eliot declared in 1896 that the Grand Army's main purpose was to extract money from the treasury, James Tanner delivered this withering retort:

. . . that on bended knee he crawl into that sacred presence [Harvard's tribute to Civil War dead, Memorial Hall], and lift his eyes and gaze upon the tribute that Harvard paid to the loyal dead of the country. Then I would still advise, that without rising, he turn and crawl out, and seeking for the nearest pigpen, crawl into that and apologize to the swine for his presence among them.<sup>69</sup>

While history has left unrecorded, Eliot's response, in Nebraska such disputes played themselves out in the pages of Omaha's newspapers. When an *Omaha Herald* editorial in 1884 scorned disability pensions in general and Senator Charles Manderson's pension in particular, the *Republican* was quick to rebut the charges, arguing that pension amounts were too small to provide sole support, and that, in the absence of a means test, the only consideration was whether the applicant was "so disabl[ed] by disease or wounds as to be entitled under the law to a pension." The paper summarized Manderson's notable career, asserting that he had been shot in the back "while gallantly exposing his life for his country."<sup>70</sup> In 1887 the *Omaha Bee* attacked Manderson's pension bill, then pending in the U.S. Senate, as opening up a large new class of pensioners, also claiming that ex-POWs with disabilities were already covered and that many "may not have suffered at all." A furious *Republican* editorialist wondered how any loyal man could disagree with Manderson's measure, calling rebel prisons "charnel houses" which had produced

comrades who were “wrecked physically [and] weakened mentally.”<sup>71</sup> The *Republican* continued its defense of the Senator's bill during the next year, castigating the editor of the *Washington Post* as having a “Confederate brigadier notion of pensions,” while accusing the *Omaha World* of having insulted over forty prominent Omahans who were ex-POWs by its suggestion that “pension legislation has gone very nearly far enough.”<sup>72</sup>

After the national encampment voted in favor of service pensions in 1888 the *Omaha Herald* delivered this stinging rebuke:

Shall the old soldiers be allowed to acquire the entire earth? . . . They have been elected and appointed to the best offices . . . flooded the magazines with high-priced sketches . . . come mighty near possessing all the monuments, and they draw more than \$80 million a year in pensions . . . [do they now] want every able bodied one of them to have a cash quarterly stipend?

To this, the *Republican* could only reply that the veterans would soon be able “to acquire whatever . . . is necessary,” and that they had earned anything the government chose to give them.<sup>73</sup> Less understandable was the paper's placid acceptance of a decision by the Assistant Secretary of the Interior in 1889 to the effect that “A dishonorable discharge does not involve the forfeiture of a soldier's pensionable rights.”<sup>74</sup> When the Disability Pension Act of 1890 mandated an honorable discharge as a pension prerequisite, there grew a thriving industry in the submission of private bills in the U.S. House and Senate, on behalf of veterans seeking to have dishonorable discharges changed for offenses ranging from desertion to murder. One contemporary denounced the “iniquity of the Special Acts . . . in their insolence--in their contempt for history, their indifference to the honor of the pension roll.” The absence of Grand Army dissent from these morally

repugnant bills at Nebraska and national encampments was a discredit to the GAR.<sup>75</sup>

In 1889 Nebraska pensioners had grown to 8,538.<sup>76</sup> By the summer of 1891 the ever-growing business in disability claims had apparently enticed the *Omaha Bee* into a change of heart, as it proudly announced the establishment of the “Bee Bureau of Claims,” which would be “manned by the ablest lawyers and specialists.” The editors of the *Bee* had made arrangements with William Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner*, which had already set up a Washington, D.C.-based agency. Through its alliance with Hearst, the *Bee* offered to handle all claims in Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and South Dakota for those seeking military pensions, compensation for “Indian Depredations,” land and mining rights. The paper solicited the business of “old, weary, infirm” soldiers, widows of veterans (who must have married the soldier prior to June 27, 1890) and soldiers' parents. The *Bee* promised lower fees than pension agents, claiming it only wanted to clear expenses and provide “relief of the people from the rapacity of legal sharks.” The paper unfortunately failed to provide a subsequent recapitulation of the success or failure of the endeavor; but, given the spirit of the times, it surely should have been successful.<sup>77</sup>

The Pension Act of 1890 had given considerable latitude to the Pension Bureau in the rating of disabilities (i.e., establishing the rate of compensation in a given case). Under President Harrison's administration (1888-1892) the Grand Army had had its own way. When Grover Cleveland was reelected in 1892, storm clouds threatened with the appointments of Hoke Smith to be Secretary of the Interior and William Lochren as Commissioner of Pensions.<sup>78</sup> The first warning shot, signifying a massive change in the

administration of pensions, came with an announcement by Secretary Smith in May 1893 that any doctors hired in the future as pension examiners would be aged twenty-five or under. The *Nebraska Defender* characterized the move as one whose purpose was to exclude physicians who were themselves veterans, and who “might be inclined to have sympathy for old soldiers.”<sup>79</sup> Continuing suspensions and re-examinations of pension allowances under the Smith-Lochren tandem induced the *Defender* to publish this piece of doggerel:

My name is Smith, they call me Hoke.  
This fact you might just mention:  
It always gives me fiendish joy  
To cut a soldier's pension.

To Union vets, I will admit,  
They made us all skedaddle,  
But now I think they'll not forget.  
The rebs are in the saddle.<sup>80</sup>

By the end of 1894 Smith published a report which showed that under Cleveland, only twenty-eight percent of pension claims had been allowed, in comparison to the Harrison Administration, which had approved eighty-three percent.<sup>81</sup>

Shortly before the year's end, Cleveland himself blasted the pension system, remarking that “thousands of neighborhoods have well known fraudulent pensioners.”<sup>82</sup>

When National Commander John Adams requested state commands to poll their members in an attempt to identify frauds by name, Nebraska was quick to respond.

Department Commander A. H. Church called Cleveland's assertion “an insult to the patriotism and citizenship of brave heroes.”<sup>83</sup> At the February 1894 encampment,

Lincoln's Farragut Post, situated in a county with five hundred members, adamantly insisted there were "no cases." The encampment initially passed a resolution (whose wording was later modified by James Thayer), calling the appointment of Hoke Smith "an insult to the Union soldier and a direct slap in the face of every soldier who fought for the Union."<sup>84</sup> Contentiousness over pensions would continue into the McKinley administration, with the 1901 Nebraska encampment considering a resolution that the average pension claimant was treated as "a criminal, forger, or perjurer . . . seeking to defraud the government."<sup>85</sup> Finally, on March 13, 1904, Theodore Roosevelt's pension commissioner issued an executive order recognizing old age as an infirmity and granting service pensions to all veterans after the age of sixty-two, closing the books as it were on the nation's first great entitlement debate between the government and a lobbying group of extraordinary power.<sup>86</sup>

Massachusetts veteran and politician Ben Butler (once renowned as "Spoons" Butler, for having confiscated family silver in occupied New Orleans) remarked in 1890 that if old soldiers continued to act together, they could "make politicians dance like peas on a hot shovel."<sup>87</sup> The truth of this dictum may be found in the party platforms written between 1884 to 1896, which devoted more space to pensions than any issue except for the tariff.<sup>88</sup> Promises made by the politicians were--for once--promises kept: by 1910 over twenty-five percent of all men over 65 and hundreds of thousands of veterans' widows and children were on a government pension.<sup>89</sup> But why, it must be asked, did the Grand Army receive such favorable treatment when other groups (labor, Southern

sharecroppers, immigrants) were given short shrift? In the closely divided Congressional elections of the 1880s and 1890s, any cohesive and numerically powerful voting bloc could play a significant role in determining the outcome. One historian has estimated that veterans comprised twelve to fifteen percent of eligible voters in five key states: New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois--and one-sixth of them were already receiving pensions in 1885.<sup>90</sup> Equally important to the Grand Army's success in the pension issue was the prominent role of veterans as politicians themselves. We have previously noted the number of Nebraskan veterans who were political potentates (Manderson, Thayer, et. al.). At the national level only Grover Cleveland's tenures interrupted the elections of Union veterans to the Presidency between 1868 to 1900. In 1884 one-third of all northern and border state congressmen were veterans.<sup>91</sup>

The Grand Army's success in gaining such enormous expenditures for pensions required a willing acquiescence on the part of the public. Even William Bayard Hale, a scathing critic of the pension system, was compelled to admit that special examiners sent out by Cleveland to detect fraud were often mobbed by civilians.<sup>92</sup> Civilian support for pensions may be explained when we critique the nature of the pension debate between reformers and veterans. The debaters were separated by different perspectives in time. Stuart McConnell has summarized the dichotomy neatly: "While the reformers saw veterans in the present tense, as civilians who were former soldiers, the veterans had come to see themselves in the past tense, as ex-soldiers first."<sup>93</sup> To the reformers, the veteran was just another civilian, who may (or may not) have once done great things.

(Even here, the reformers trod lightly as they tended to attack pension attorneys or a few prominent Grand Army leaders, rather than all veterans.) Past services did not relieve the veteran of the obligation to prove that he was needy and required governmental assistance. But the veteran knew that he had once participated in events so far beyond the pale of normal American experience that a Vermont comrade could unhesitatingly state:

The veteran soldiers are the aristocracy of the land . . . I mean by aristocracy the heroes who have proven the best men in the land - the dauntless hearts, without whose valorous devotion, we should not have today a Union, or the world a home for liberty . . . he has proved the possession of immortal and self-sacrificing courage.<sup>94</sup>

Nebraska's John L. Webster had echoed those sentiments in a 1880 Memorial Day speech given in Omaha: "The Grand Army of the Republic is made up of men who are entitled to wear garlands upon their heads and the dead to be encased in golden coffins."<sup>95</sup>

The popularity and prominence of encampments, reunions, campfires and Memorial Day celebrations demonstrated civilian acceptance of veterans as leading members of society. Their wartime experiences appealed to Victorian conceptions of manliness and gave them a moral superiority in civilian eyes over the questions of the reformers. Such attitudes as expressed above may also explain the "close ranks" attitude of the Grand Army towards pension frauds and the Special Acts. No combat unit is weaker than its weakest link, and the tendency among military men is to protect its own. If the Grand Army may be accused of greed and of overlooking the abuses of a public entitlement, it is perhaps more understandable, coming from a group which still saw itself as the "boys" who had saved the Union. This feeling was captured by one of their



number at a Gettysburg reunion:

. . . I was myself startled . . . to hear *my own voice* breaking the almost painful stillness with “Comrades of the 111th New York Infantry,” and *realized* that I was actually speaking those words upon the *World's Greatest Battlefield* and to men who in the strength of their young manhood really lay behind the same wall upon which I stood, with their eyes strained, every sense quickened, their fingers upon the triggers of their Springfield Rifles, watching the advance of the Flower of the South . . .<sup>96</sup>

The pension system thus established under the auspices of the Republican Party has been characterized as more generous than the pension systems then in place in Europe, although the latter plans covered much larger groups of the elderly.<sup>97</sup> Historian Larry Logue has noted that after 1900 nonemployed men were more likely to be Union veterans, concluding that the safety net of the pension allowed men to retire when they otherwise would not. Thus had the Grand Army become pioneers in retirement from work, a concept later established for all the elderly under Franklin Roosevelt.<sup>98</sup> But if the Grand Army had taken care of its own, what of the nation they had re-created, transformed through their power into their own image? Disturbing changes were afoot in Nebraska and the nation. Strangers were coming into the land at alarming rates. If Paul Vandervoort's cry of “America for Americans” was to remain true, the answer would lie in the seedbed of future generations, the schoolhouse. And Grand Army men would rally one last time around the symbol over which so many of them had fought and died--the flag.

## ENDNOTES

1. William M. Sloane, "Pensions and Socialism," *Century Magazine* 42 (June 1891): 182, 184.
2. Vinovskis, "Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War? Some Preliminary Demographic Speculations," 26.
3. Definitions are from William H. Glasson, History of Military Pension Legislation in the United States (1900:reprint, New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 10.
4. Ibid, 70.
5. Ibid, 72-75. Also see Allan Nevins, The Organized War 1863-1864, Vol. 3 of The War for the Union (New York, 1971), 1-8. The Congressional Act here referred to may be viewed as a part of the growing recognition that the war would be a prolonged and ever-bloodier conflict. Casualties at Shiloh in April 1862 had been a warning flare of what was to come.
6. Glasson, Military Pension Legislation, 73.
7. Ibid, 81-82.
8. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1882, 872.
9. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 145.
10. Larry M. Logue, To Appomattox and Beyond: The Civil War Soldier in War and Peace (Chicago:Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 96-97. This useful synthesis provides a much needed chronological overview of the soldier and veteran from initial enlistment to his last days. See also, Glasson, Military Pension Legislation, 91, who states that Commissioner Bentley had been "continually advertised and drummed from one end to the other by claim agents," resulting in "a demand for pension

legislation.”

11. Glasson, Military Pension Legislation, 77.
12. Ibid., 100.
13. Ibid., 95.
14. Ibid., 101. Also see McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 146. New Claims in 1880 totaled 138,195, “higher than those of the previous five years combined.”
15. Glasson, Military Pension Legislation, 102.
16. Amy E. Holmes, “Such is the Price We Pay’: American Widows and the Civil War Pension System,” in Toward a Social History of the American Civil War, 172-175. The figure on percentage of Union widows as a total of all widows is derived from the 1890 census. Holmes does not give the exact percentage for Nebraska, but illustrates it on a map of the United States, showing states between the two numbers given in the text.
17. Eugene V. Smalley, “The United States Pension Office,” *Century*, Vol 28 (July 1884): 429-430.
18. See George W. Adams, Doctors in Blue: The Medical History of the Union Army in the Civil War (New York: Henry Schumanm 1952), 132-133; 138-143; 224-229. Chronic bone infections or unhealed broken bones resulting from wounds could cause “years of misery.” Alcohol and quinine were “the sovereign remedies” of Civil War physicians. Diarrhea and dysentery were treated with laxatives (!) and opium, epsom salts or castor oil. A study by New England health insurance companies showed that soldiers were “five times as likely to die of disease as was the civilian.” Adams concludes by stating that “The effect of the war upon the health of the men who participated was, on the whole, bad. Many a veteran carried with him for years, or for life, the *sequelae* of his army diseases.”

19. Senate Resolution of December 8, 1882, List of Pensioners on the Roll, January 1, 1883 (1883; reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1970), 714-715.
20. Ibid, 716-717.
21. Ibid, 741.
22. Ibid, 727.
23. Ibid.
24. See Smalley, "The United States Pension Office," 430-434. He recommended that traveling government surgeons determine disability. The examples noted above represent only a sampling of widespread inequities in pension payouts.
25. List of Pensioners on the Roll, January 1, 1883, 713-761. The list shows monthly payments and does not include arrears. The taxation figure is derived from Department of the Interior, Census Office, Compendium of the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880) Part II (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1883), 1557.
26. Compendium of the Tenth Census, Part II, 1346. The census counted 152,614 people employed in Nebraska.
27. Nebraska's farm incomes were not shown in the census. Farm laborers in New York state earned about \$360 a year in 1883. See Scott Derks, ed., The Value of A Dollar, 13.
28. American homes in the late twentieth century are filled with items that cannot be considered as necessities, except in the minds of those fueled by today's consumer-driven society. To name only a few: VCRs, computers, multiple television sets, cable access, cellular phones. The comparison of veteran's pensions to initial Social Security payouts is derived from Logue, The Civil War

Soldier in War and Peace, 132. Unfortunately, he does not provide a direct statistical analysis.

29. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1882, 873-874.
30. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 147.
31. Vandervoort's role is mentioned in McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 148, 156, 179, 203. A more detailed narrative can also be found in Davies, Patriotism on Parade, 38, 90, 106, 164, 148-149, 162, 195, 202.
32. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 148.
33. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1883, 9.
34. Ibid, 61, 10.
35. Davies, Patriotism on Parade, 147-153.
36. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1884, 111-112.
37. Ibid, 119; Davies, Patriotism on Parade, 148-149.
38. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1884, 121.
39. Ibid, 1885, 41.
40. Ibid, 1881, 815.
41. Davies, Patriotism on Parade, 161.

42. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1885, 193.
43. *Omaha Republican*, March 3, 1890 (Editorial).
44. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 148. Also see Glasson, Military Pension Legislation, 88-117, for a summary of pension legislation passed during this period. The extension of the limit on filing arrears was not passed in the 1880s by a Congress perhaps daunted by an estimated price tag of \$471,000,000. A law passed in 1896 allowed pensioners whose original arrears claims had been denied to apply again. Glasson termed the Dependent Pension Act of June 27, 1890 “the most important pension law ever enacted.” It relaxed standards of proof for claims by widows or minor children. It provided a pension to any veteran able to show “a mental or physical disability . . . which incapacitates them from the performance of manual labor in such a degree as to render them unable to earn a support.” Glasson also refers vaguely to a “general invalid pension law” which provided higher disability rates. POWs never received a special pension, but were later included in the service pension granted in Theodore Roosevelt’s administration.
45. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1885, 100.
46. Davies, Patriotism on Parade, 166.
47. Ibid, 166. Seventy-five Nebraska posts had responded to a National Grand Army Circular requesting them to vote on the “GAR Pension Bill.” Of those responding, 2,027 voted in favor of the bill, while only five comrades opposed it. See Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1887, 42.
48. Quoted in *Public Opinion*, 2 (February 12, 1887): 369-370, 372.
49. Quoted in *The Nation*, 49 (March 28, 1889): 258.
50. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1887, 85.

51. *Omaha Republican*, March 18, 1887.
52. *Ibid.*, March 21, 1887. Also see *Ibid.*, January 16, 1887 (Editorial), which asserted that “Grand Army posts in Omaha have, contributed hundreds--possibly thousands--of dollars,” in support of indigent veterans.
53. *Ibid.*, June 8, 1887 (Editorial). Cleveland subsequently declined to attend.
54. Proceedings of the National Encampment. 1887, 49.
55. *Ibid.*, 211-212.
56. *Ibid.*, 214-216.
57. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1888, 92. The resolution was passed in reaction to the continuing battle in the U.S. Senate over a new dependent pension bill. The resolution also urged Senator Manderson “to stand fast for the rights of those who stood as a wall of fire against treasonous hosts.”
58. See Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1888, 190-191 and *Ibid.*, 1889, 67. The national body voted 446 to 22 in favor. Nebraska passed its resolution of support unanimously.
59. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 157.
60. Davies, Patriotism on Parade, 170.
61. Glasson, Military Pension Legislation, 113.
62. *Ibid.*, 116, 133.

63. Ibid., 117.
64. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 157.
65. "The Pension Sharks," *The Nation*, 49 (March 28, 1889): 258-59.
66. "The New Pension Policy," *The Nation*, 49 (May 30, 1889): 458-59.
67. Sloane, "Pensions and Socialism," 180-182.
68. "Pension Reform," *Harper's Weekly*, 37 (June 17, 1893): 565-66 and John Warner, 'Half A Million Dollars A Day For Pensions,' *Forum*, 15 (June 1893): 439-451.
69. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1896, 100.
70. *Omaha Republican*, March 13, 1884 (Editorial). It should be noted that being shot in the back during the chaos of Civil War combat was no proof of cowardice. The *Herald* was insisting on a romanticized version of warfare which, as seen in Chapter One, the soldiers themselves had long discarded.
71. *Omaha Republican*, December 23, 1887 (Editorial and Letter to the Editor). Manderson's measure was two-fold. It provided pensions of twelve dollars per month to all who had served ninety days or more, had received an honorable discharge, and who suffered from "physical or mental disability not [a result] of their own vicious habits." (Text in *Omaha Republican*, December 26, 1887.) The bill also paid ex-POWs a sum based in proportion to the number of days they had been a prisoner, without necessarily showing a specific disability See *Omaha Republican*, January 10, 1888 (Editorial).
72. *Omaha Republican*, January 3, 1888 (Editorial). See also Davies, Patriotism on Parade, 168, which discusses the ultimate fate of Manderson's bill. Passed by the Senate in March 1888, it was then amended by the Democratic House to such an extent that the GAR pension committee called it "a sham, a pretense and a



mockery.” The measure died when the two Houses were unable to come to agreement.

73. As quoted in *Omaha Republican*, September 19, 1888 (Editorial).
74. *Omaha Republican*, September 20, 1889 (Editorial).
75. Between 1881 to 1911 nearly 32,000 private pension bills were introduced in the House and Senate of the United States, virtually all of which urged a special dispensation so that those previously ineligible might receive a pension, a correction of a veteran's record from dishonorable to honorable status, or an increase of an exiting pension. (See William Bayard Hale, “The Pension Carnival: The Growing National Scandal of the Private Pension Act,” *The World's Work*, 22 (February 1911): 13970.) Quote is from William Bayard Hale, “The Pension Carnival: 'Correcting' Records of the Dishonorably Discharged,” *The World's Work*, 22 (March, 1911): 14168. On the same page Hale notes that in the previous session of Congress, 23,054 Special Bills were on the calendar of the House Committee on Military Affairs, “All but 300 of these Bills were for the relief of deserters, dishonorably dismissed soldiers and the like.” Hale also recounts the case of a veteran in Tulsa, Oklahoma, who had been convicted of the murder of another soldier during the Civil War. In 1910 twenty members of the Grand Army post there signed a petition supporting his request to receive an honorable discharge. Nebraska and national encampment records show no efforts being made to stop this practice. See *Omaha Bee*, 13 March 1892 (Editorial), which condemned the Special Bills as “a gross injustice to brave and honorable men . . . more reprehensible than pronounced traitors [i.e., Confederates] . . . records of odium [which place] a premium upon desertion and other crimes.” See also Charles Francis Adams, “Pensions - Worse and More of Them: The Menace and Mendacity of the Old Soldier: Congressional Oratory and Ignorance” *The World's Work*, 23 (January 1912): 327-334. Adams characterized the two million men who joined the army as “a very miscellaneous body,” whose quality “constantly deteriorated” as the war went on. Adams' upper-class antagonisms are highlighted by his description of late-joining soldiers as “recent importation's from Europe, or picked up in the slums and from the gutters of the great cities.” Grant, Sherman and Sheridan might have taken issue with this, as those same soldiers had brought about the Confederacy's collapse.
76. *North Nebraska Veteran*, December 23, 1889. This paper was published twice monthly out of Norfolk, Nebraska, for about one year. Copies are available in the

Archives section of the Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln. Personal copy provided to the author, courtesy Mr. David Wells, of Omaha.

77. *Omaha Bee*, August 30, 1891.
78. Davies, Patriotism on Parade, 182-183.
79. *Nebraska Defender*, May 1893.
80. *Ibid.*, September 1893.
81. Cited in *Ibid.*, November 1893.
82. Cleveland quoted in Circular Letter #2, 4 Dec 1893, promulgated by National Commander-In-Chief John G. Adams, and cited in Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1894, 133.
83. *Ibid.*, 133.
84. *Ibid.*, 89, 110.
85. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1901, 99-100. The resolution was modified into a complaint that “new, harsh and unjust rules of evidence are being imposed.”
86. Executive Order cited in Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1904, 6.
87. Quoted in Donald L. McMurray, “The Political Significance of the Pension Question, 1885-1897,” Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 9 (June 1922): 23.
88. *Ibid.*, 20.

89. Figure cited in Roslind Rosenberg, review of Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States, by Theda Skocpol, *New York Times Book Review*, January 31, 1993.
90. McMurry, "The Political Significance of the Pension Question, 1885-1897," 20.
91. Ibid, 24.
92. William Beyard Hale, "The Pension Carnival: Capitalizing the Nation's Gratitude," *The World's Work*, 22 (December 1910): 13736.
93. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 162.
94. Quoted in Linderman, Embattled Courage,. 286.
95. *Omaha Republican*, May 30, 1880.
96. Quoted in Linderman, Embattled Courage, 286.
97. Sociologist Theda Skocpol, cited in Logue, The Civil War Soldier in War and Peace, 132.
98. Ibid., 133.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### “No Room For Anarchists”: Patriotism and the Schoolhouse

A unifying thread in the tapestry of America consists of the continuing search for a national identity--the never-ending quest to answer a question first propounded by French settler Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crevecoeur in the eighteenth century, “What then is the American, this new man?” George Washington came to believe that if “the oppressed and persecuted of all Nations and Religions” were to form a “new race,” they would have to intermix with the people already there, becoming “assimilated to our customs, measures and laws: in a word, soon become *one people*.” John Quincy Adams echoed those views, admonishing a German emigre to “cast off the European skin, never to resume it.”<sup>1</sup> Economic and social turmoil in the 1880s and 1890s compelled the Grand Army to address this issue, as they engaged in a struggle for national meaning and identity with immigrants, labor unions, academics and unreconstructed Confederates. And if they considered themselves the keepers of the national flame, what better group to do so, a comrade might have observed, than the men who had saved it? The new battleground would take place in the nation’s schoolhouses, and the weapons of choice would be school histories, military instruction, devotion to the flag and patriotic programs. The passion of the Grand Army for this cause was captured as early as 1884 by Nebraska’s Department Commander John C. Bonnell, who proclaimed that

Patriotism is to nations what the love of life is to individuals . . . amongst all the noble passions of man, patriotism or the love of country is the most powerful, because it embraces all others . . . It is well that the Grand Army exists to teach the children and rising generations lessons of patriotism and valor.<sup>2</sup>

Outbreaks of violence between capital and labor in 1877 caused the predominantly middle and lower class ranks of the Grand Army to close in opposition to labor. While President Hayes declined an offer by GAR Commander-in-Chief John Robinson to “furnish thousands of volunteers for the restoration and preservation of order,” at the local level the National Guard/Grand Army connection often led to behind-the-scene and even open Grand Army ties to strike-breaking.<sup>3</sup> We have previously noted the involvement by Nebraska veterans holding political office (Albinus Nance as Governor and Samuel Alexander as Secretary of State) in quelling the 1880 Smelting Works strike in Omaha. Veteran Leonard W. Colby of Beatrice headed the state Guard from 1882 to 1896--the same Guard which subsequently ended strikes in Omaha in 1882 and 1894.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, when two hundred workers rioted during an 1885 strike in South Bend, Indiana, local Grand Army posts in that city provided seventy men to assist company security<sup>5</sup>

Grand Army fears of the doctrines associated with the rise of labor unions (nihilism, anarchism, socialism, and communism) were exacerbated with the influx of a “new immigration” in the 1880s. Stuart McConnell has remarked upon the relatively homogeneous make-up of the Grand Army--predominantly white and native-born, with substantial minorities from Germany, Ireland, Canada and England. As we have seen, Nebraska Grand Army demographics essentially mirrored this pattern.<sup>6</sup> These men now faced the unsettling prospect of an America increasingly populated by millions of new settlers from southern and eastern Europe--Jews, Slavs and Latins bringing with them

problematic cultural and political differences which were frightening to some, appalling to others. A worried *Omaha Republican* concluded that “vicious and pauper emigration is becoming a serious threat.”<sup>7</sup> George Lemon’s *National Tribune* decried the masses of Poles, Bohemians and Italians as “the driftwood and sediment of centuries of brigandage, piracy and tyrannical government.”<sup>8</sup> Worries over the perceived clannishness of the newcomers caused another Grand Army paper to ask wrathfully,

What good results either to ourselves or themselves can be referred to by the presence of our foreign born rotten banana sellers, thieving rag dealers, Italian organ grinders, Chinese washmen and Bohemian coal miners, whose aspirations would make a dog vomit?<sup>9</sup>

Data drawn from censuses conducted between 1880 and 1900 simultaneously allayed and inflamed Grand Army fears, a “good news/bad news” trend not completely evident until after the 1900 census figures had been compiled and disseminated. Absolute numbers of foreign-born residents skyrocketed dramatically during the twenty year period while actually declining in Nebraska. During the same time, the overall percentage of foreign-born *declined* in Nebraska while holding steady in the nation at large (See Tables XV and XVI). Meanwhile, however, the per cent of *increase* among the “new immigrants” mushroomed phenomenally, with Hungarians, Italians, Poles and Russians achieving triple digit increases in each of the two decades (See Table XVII). Despite superficial implications of data on the foreign-born population trend, census figures also give the lie to those who might have conceived of Nebraska as a WASPish haven. Heavily populated Douglas County displayed a rich ethnic mixture after the 1890 census, with over twelve per cent of its foreign-born residents consisting of emigres from

southern and eastern Europe, primarily Bohemia (See Table XVIII). Ten years later one in five of the state's foreign-born population could be classified as part of the "new immigration" (See Table XIX). By 1910 twenty-five to thirty-five per cent of Nebraska's native whites had foreign or mixed parentage.<sup>10</sup> Most ominous to Grand Army men worried over the nation's future were the demographics of the schoolhouse. In 1900 nearly thirty per cent of those in the school-age cohort (aged five to twenty) were foreign-born, with almost thirteen per cent of these newcomers classified as illiterate.<sup>11</sup>

But if such statistics serve to place Grand Army attitudes in context, another and home-grown foe had already risen again to challenge Northern veterans in the arena of school histories. Prior to the Civil War, the teaching of United States history had only been sporadically offered as part of school curriculums. In the war's aftermath, Border States (Maryland, West Virginia, Missouri) and states of the ex-confederacy (Arkansas, South Carolina, Mississippi, North Carolina) passed legislation mandating the teaching of United States history in schools.<sup>12</sup> Parallel efforts came to fruition in the rest of the nation throughout the 1870s and 1880s, with Nebraska legislators passing an 1881 act prescribing general history, political economy, civil government and American history as requirements to obtain a teaching certificate.<sup>13</sup> By 1892 the United Confederate Veterans (UCV) had established a historical committee whose purpose was to screen and recommend texts which adhered to the Southern point of view, urged on by Confederate veteran Stephen L. Lee who proclaimed that, "The nation cannot afford to have the people of the South lose their self-respect, or the future citizens of that large and most

Table XV. Comparison of Native-Born and Foreign-Born Nebraskans in 1890 and 1900.

|                  | <u>1890</u>     | <u>1900</u>     |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| TOTAL POPULATION | 1,058,910       | 1,066,305       |
| NATIVE BORN      | 856,368 (80.8%) | 888,958 (83.3%) |
| FOREIGN BORN     | 202,542 (19.1%) | 177,347 (16.6%) |

Source: Bureau of the Census, Compendium of the Eleventh Census 1890, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 468, and Bureau of the Census, Abstract of the 12th Census of the United States 1900, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 42.

NOTE: See Edgar Z. Palmer, "The Correctness of the 1890 Census of Population for Nebraska Cities," Nebraska History, 32(December 1951): 259-267. Palmer's preliminary study strongly suggests that cities in southeastern Nebraska (Omaha, Nebraska City, Hastings, and others) padded their population figures.

Table XVI. Comparison of Native-Born and Foreign-Born in the Nation, 1880-1900.

|                  | <u>1880</u>          | <u>1890</u>          | <u>1900</u>           |
|------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| TOTAL POPULATION | 50,152,783           | 62,947,714           | 75,994,575            |
| NATIVE BORN      | 43,475,840           | 53,698,154           | 65,653,200            |
| FOREIGN BORN     | 6,679,943<br>(13.6%) | 9,249,560<br>(13.3%) | 10,341,276<br>(14.6%) |

Source: Abstract of the 12th Census of the United States 1900, 8.



Table XVII. Population and Percent of Increase for Selected Nationalities, 1880-1890.

| COUNTRY    |             |             |             | %INCREASE        | %INCREASE        |
|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------|------------------|
|            | <u>1880</u> | <u>1890</u> | <u>1900</u> | <u>1880-1890</u> | <u>1890-1900</u> |
| BOHEMIA    | 85,361      | 118,106     | 156,891     | 38.4             | 32.8             |
| HUNGARY    | 11,526      | 62,435      | 145,714     | 441.7            | 133.4            |
| ITALY      | 44,236      | 182,580     | 484,027     | 312.8            | 165.1            |
| POLAND     | 48,557      | 147,440     | 383,407     | 203.6            | 160.0            |
| RUSSIA     | 35,722      | 182,6644    | 423,726     | 411.3            | 132.0            |
| OTHER      |             |             |             |                  |                  |
| COUNTRIES* | 93,005      | 127,467     | 273,467     | 37.1             | 114.5            |

Source: Abstract of the 12th Census of the United States 1900, 9.

\*NOTE: The Census Bureau lumped into this category all non-Northern European countries, not previously listed.

Table XVIII. Population of Selected Foreign-Born Nationalities in Douglas County, Nebraska, 1890.

| <u>COUNTRY</u>     | <u>POPULATION</u> |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| TOTAL FOREIGN BORN | 40,757            |
| BOHEMIA            | 3,139             |
| RUSSIA             | 633               |
| ITALY              | 541               |
| POLAND             | 536               |
| HUNGARY            | 150               |
| OTHER COUNTRIES*   | <u>70</u>         |
|                    | 5,069 (12.4%)     |

Source: Compendium of the 11th Census, 1890, 650.

NOTE: \* non-Northern European

Table XIX. Population of Selected Foreign-Born Nationalities in Nebraska, 1900.

| <u>COUNTRY</u>     | <u>POPULATION</u> |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| TOTAL FOREIGN-BORN | 177,347           |
| BOHEMIA            | 16,138            |
| HUNGARY            | 9,461             |
| RUSSIA             | 8,083             |
| POLAND             | 3,164             |
| ITALY              | 752               |
| TURKEY             | 55                |
| RUMANIA            | 24                |
| OTHER COUNTRIES    | <u>18</u>         |
|                    | 37,695 (21.2%)    |

Source: Abstract of the 12th Census of the United States, 1900, 59.

promising section of the country brought up without that pride in their ancestors which leads to noble and patriotic action.”<sup>14</sup>

But the Grand Army was also prideful of its nation-making accomplishments, and four years prior to the UCV’s establishment of a history committee, it had already expressed alarm at the tone and direction of school histories. Wisconsin’s John Hancock submitted a Report to the 1888 national encampment decrying the “national system” of education which caused publishers to go “beyond the bounds of reason in attempting to placate both North and South.” Hancock’s Report cited chapter and verse from histories shocking to Grand Army sensibilities. A South Carolina text written by W. J. Duffie laid the cause of the war to the fact that “Congress kept passing laws which it had no right to pass according to the Constitution.” A Kentucky history referred to the Northern armies inducing “thousands of European mercenaries” to enlist, with the result that the South’s “gallant children . . . were condemned to stake her most precious jewels against the trash of Europe.” More maddening yet to Hancock’s audience were excerpts from the memoirs and school history authored by ex-Confederate Vice-President Alexander H. Stephens. In his memoirs, Stephens had described Confederates as “self-sacrificing patriots . . . heroes and martyrs,” while his school history asserted that the national government “had no rightful military jurisdiction over . . . Fort Sumter,” and that the attempt by federal authorities to retain control over it was “an act of war.”<sup>15</sup>

Hancock angrily concluded the Wisconsin Report by asserting that such Southern histories made respectable “what we deem treason,” and even castigated some textbooks

used in Northern schools which “illustrat[ed] rebels as heroes.” In the absence of a nationally run education system, the Report recommended that all Grand Army men join together in influencing public opinion so that secession and nullification (“this monstrous heresy”) would be depicted as treasonous in public school histories. Comrades were even urged to appeal to Confederate veterans, who now “profess[ed] to love the Union,” to use their influence. The encampment, having already interrupted the speaker with frequent cries of approval, adopted the Report unanimously, authorizing that copies of it be sent to all Grand Army Departments and to Teachers’ Associations around the country.<sup>16</sup>

Nebraska’s 1888 encampment had preceded the national group’s by several months, having already appointed a five-man school committee headed up by J. H. Culver of Milford, Nebraska. Culver had submitted a resolution citing histories which “palliate, and in some cases emulate” States Rights doctrines, which could eventually “poison the mind of those who are to follow in the administration of the offices of state.”<sup>17</sup> The Report submitted to the 1889 encampment strongly echoed the hostility of the Wisconsin Report towards textbooks used in Northern schools which “cater to disloyal sentiment in the South,” along with Southern texts which propounded the rights of secession and nullification. It cited passages in Barnes’ Brief History of the United States which listed climatic and occupational differences between the sections as primary causes of the war. In the Committee’s eyes, Barnes had portrayed the War as an armed contest between two great factions, rather than as “the mighty effort of a government to preserve her national integrity and enmity.” In praising Confederate strategy and bravery,

Barnes had disparaged the Union soldiers, and Culver's committee linked the book to the actions of a mayor's wife "in a leading Nebraska city" who had penned essays defending secession. While affirming the bravery of their Confederate opponents, the report insisted that "the objects for which they fought were, and are eternally wrong, and that nullification and secession are treason."<sup>18</sup> Culver's committee concluded with a plea that "no more important action can engross our attention." The encampment adopted his report, and a year later authorized the substantial sum of \$72.50 for printing ten thousand copies to be distributed through the office of George Lane, State Superintendent of Public Education, and himself a comrade.<sup>19</sup>

Throughout the 1890s the national Grand Army continued to urge adoption of different textbooks. Omaha's Thaddeus Clarkson expressed the GAR's fundamental discontent in his address as national Commander-in-Chief to the 1897 encampment:

It is certainly not the object of the Grand Army of the Republic to keep open the wounds of the war, but of this we are determined, that one side in that great struggle was right and the other side was wrong - and we were not the wrong side, and we don't intend that our children be taught that we were.<sup>20</sup>

The national encampment would see marked improvement in "the tone and sentiment" of textbooks in 1898 and controversies over them would sputter out, as the Spanish-American War cemented feelings of reconciliation between the sections.<sup>21</sup> Historian Bessie Pierce later characterized these Grand Army endeavors under the chapter heading of "Propaganda Groups," while Stuart McConnell has viewed the arguments over school histories as a fight by the veterans against "neutrality and nuance" on the part of textbook authors.<sup>22</sup> Their comments illuminate long-standing tensions between academicians and

the military, as well as debates between liberals and conservatives over what and how history is to be taught. The American Legion's condemnation of the Smithsonian's *Enola Gay* exhibit in 1995, coupled with National Endowment for the Humanities chairman Lynne Cheney's attacks on national history standards, demonstrates this continuing dilemma. Neutrality and nuance are not characteristics of men who believed it necessary to give "the last full measure of devotion" in an apocalyptic struggle for the preservation of a nation. In their own minds, they had not just been combatants in a war, they *were* History.<sup>23</sup>

In 1891 the national encampment named a committee on Patriotic Instruction whose mandate was to devise a "systematic plan of teaching the lessons of loyalty to our one country and one flag."<sup>24</sup> Subsequently formed state committees would expend their energies in three parallel, yet intertwined areas: patriotic programs in the schools, military instruction, and the veneration of the flag. With the 1888 change of venue of Omaha's Memorial Day celebration from cemetery to schoolhouse, veterans in that city were already leading the country in veteran school visitations and patriotic programs.<sup>25</sup> With prominent comrades like Thaddeus Clarkson at the forefront, members of Omaha posts would spread out amongst city schools shortly before Memorial Day to provide insight on its meaning. The *Omaha Bee* detailed their efforts in 1891, estimating that fourteen thousand children had been "subjected to a shower of patriotic instruction." Clarkson himself managed to give the speeches and conduct flag presentations at three schools (Pacific, Hartman and Webster) within ninety minutes. After the singing of

patriotic songs (“America,” “Star Spangled Banner,” “Rally Round the Flag”), and the presentation of a flag, Clarkson gave ten-minute talks on the origin of Memorial Day and the cause of its observance. At Omaha High School, “filled to overflowing” with parents and friends, Colonel Chase spoke to the assembly on the history of the flag, the significance of the Stars and Stripes, and the origins of Memorial Day. A speaker at the Izard School called the flag “a composite photograph of all the United States meant to me.”<sup>26</sup> The *Bee* strongly approved of all this, suggesting that contact between students and veterans would be “an inspiration to patriotism [influencing] their entire lives.”<sup>27</sup>

These Grand Army school visits were part of a larger tide of concern over patriotism and patriotic symbols which distinguished the 1890s, a period Stuart McDonnell has called “that high decade of . . . the ‘civil religion’ of the United States.”<sup>28</sup> Such concerns had impelled the *Omaha Bee* to present a lengthy article on patriotism to its readers in 1890. The *Bee* characterized the public mind as filled with worry over the obligations of citizenship, specifically, “purification” of the ballot, immigration restriction and the preservation of “peculiarly American” institutions. The paper had solicited the views of several nationally known educators on the subject and, by and large, their opinions would have pleased the Grand Army. Katherine Connor, a history professor at Wellesley, recommended the study of history and civics “in as graphic a fashion as possible,” in response to the tide of immigration then arriving in the great cities, a movement which was “increasing in volume and degenerating in character.”

C. W. Borden, an educator from Syracuse, New York, insisted upon a focus on

the institutions of this country, with specific application to the rights and duties of citizenship in the state, county, town and village. A piece by W. T Harris, a member of the Department of Interior's Bureau of Education, provided some dissent from prevailing opinion and presaged twentieth century conflicts between local sentiment and Washington bureaucrats. While stressing the importance of teaching American history, Harris saw danger in cultivating a patriotism which led to sentimentality and reaction. He even scoffed at the patriotic feelings engendered by the Civil War:

. . .the war of the rebellion did not indicate too little patriotism, but too narrow patriotism - a patriotism that appeals to passion, rather than just appreciation of a common good . . . . If by patriotism is meant love of country, right or wrong, . . . such patriotism is not a very high virtue.<sup>29</sup>

Harris's viewpoint should have signaled the Grand Army that not all educators would welcome their attempts to inculcate patriotic feelings in the schoolhouse--another sign of veteran/academic discontent.

The 1895 Nebraska encampment requested the state legislature to set aside a portion of each school day to be devoted to "the instruction of the principles of patriotism and love of country"<sup>30</sup> While legislative response to the initiative was undetermined, by 1900 comrade John Whitehead of Broken Bow would advise State Patriotic Instructor Brad Cook that Washington and Lincoln's birthdays were being generally observed in central Nebraska with "elaborate programs" featuring songs and declamations, flag salutes, drills, and essays on the "Father and Savior" of the country. President McKinley's assassination would lead to the inclusion of exercises celebrating *his* birthday for at least several years after the turn of the century.<sup>31</sup> Despite Cook's assessment of



these programs as “the most important our Order has ever undertaken,” by 1910, the frailties of age and an increasing generational divide were lessening the impact of the veteran school visitations.<sup>32</sup> Department Commander L. D. Richards noted in that year that the children did not seem as interested as previously in the Memorial Day exercises. Richards recommended that the teachers and children should henceforth prepare and present the programs, at which Grand Army members would be present as guests.<sup>33</sup> If the “boys” could no longer continue to interest the children with the exploits of fifty years ago, they could themselves become the objects of veneration.

While the Grand Army had generally enjoyed pleasant relations with the education community in the implementation of patriotic exercises and veteran visitations, they would encounter more extensive opposition to the concept of military instruction in the school. Many veterans placed the need for military instruction in the context of their own experiences. President Benjamin Harrison recalled the difficulties that he and other young officers had in the drilling and preparation of an untrained citizenry for the coming conflict; the pace of war had now “greatly quickened” and required a better trained soldier.<sup>34</sup> *Education* magazine provided a forum for a Regular Army officer who expressed views echoing and expanding Harrison’s position. Lieutenant John Cree envisioned the necessity of a one-million man army requiring previous training in any future conflict--a war made more likely by greater American involvement in world trade and with national insistence on enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine causing prickly relationships with Great Britain and Spain. Cree also posited a second area in which

military instruction could play a positive role--the inculcation of habits of "subordination, self-respect, punctuality, neatness, obedience and courtesy." Such habits--and the physical exercise accompanying military drill--would promote manliness and form law-abiding citizens.<sup>35</sup> Labor disturbances in the 1890s accompanied the push for military instruction, with the Department Commander of Idaho seeing the concept as an opportunity "to prevent these scenes of lawlessness which are being enacted all over our land, and which are a disgrace to the civilization of the age."<sup>36</sup>

Spurred on by the Lafayette Post of New York City, the national encampment of 1893 approved the concept of military instruction, and in 1894 established a Special Aide in Charge of Military Instruction who had authorization to appoint state aides.<sup>37</sup> Nebraska Department Commander A. H. Church heartily endorsed this declaration "for the supremacy of the law of the land," and expressed "the unanimous consent of the Grand Army of the Republic in saying that there is no room in our beloved America for anarchists or dissention from the issues settled by the late war of rebellion."<sup>38</sup> Charles Burmeister, the first state Aide for Military Instruction, reported good progress by 1895. Grand Army men were lobbying Nebraska's congressional delegation in support of a bill authorizing the War Department to detail Regular Army officers as instructors. Lobbying had also been initiated to gain the governor's consent to use National Guardsmen as instructors in the smaller towns.<sup>39</sup> The real showplace of state efforts was at the Omaha High School, which had a thriving battalion of four hundred cadets, "well drilled by a Regular Army Officer"--sufficiently drilled to be featured in a national magazine

(*Munsey's*) touting the “self-evident” advantages of a system producing “brave, honorable and manly” cadets.<sup>40</sup> Burmeister was optimistic enough to forecast a day when every school in the state would possess a squad of cadets.<sup>41</sup>

But if he and his cohorts believed they were to have an unopposed march towards the attainment of their goals, they were quickly disabused of this notion by George Wingate, the Special Aide in Charge of Military Instruction for the national Grand Army. After citing the lack of Congressional funds sufficient to provide many instructors, Wingate expressed surprise at the extent and bitterness of opposition to a project which would “permanently ensure. . . the protection of the country from a foreign enemy or from domestic dissension.” The list of opponents was long--the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, who believed such activities would make children “blood-thirsty;” ethical writers (William Dean Howells/Henry George) and scholastic authorities, whom he scoffed at as in favor of the flag and the republic, but “opposed to any method of protecting the one or sustaining the other;” labor unions, who thought military instruction threatened the liberty of the working classes; some military men, who surprisingly opined that the use of arms in school drill would damage government property; certain newspapers which held that the volunteer system was sufficient to shield the country in any future conflict. Nevertheless, Wingate forecast an ultimately successful endeavor, with substantial progress having been made in the Eastern and Middle states. (New York led the way with an enrollment of twenty thousand cadets.) Even the South showed promise, buoyed by strong support from ex-Confederate General Joseph Johnston.<sup>42</sup>

Criticisms by educators that military instruction interfered with an already overburdened curriculum were rebutted at the 1896 national encampment. A report to that body insisted that the Grand Army did not wish to interfere with the three R's; military instruction was an optional subject incorporating civics, and teaching the duties of a citizen, respect for authority and reverence for the flag.<sup>43</sup> Such opposition took its toll. Within a year, the national encampment would be told of the program's "retrogression" in New York City, accompanied by difficulties elsewhere, due to: the expense of the program (uniforms, weapons), lack of instructors, crowded curriculum, and opposition on "sentimental grounds" (a belief that military instruction fostered a warlike spirit). In the South, Grand Army controversies over school histories had fostered embittered opposition by the UCV to military instruction. The program's full implementation would require Congressional legislation detailing army officers and noncommissioned officers (NCO's) in towns of twenty-five thousand or more.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile in Nebraska, military instruction was finding a home in a few selected areas. In 1900 newly-appointed Patriotic Instructor Brad Cook (who was to hold the position until his death in 1911) submitted a sixteen page (!) report to his Nebraska comrades showing a total of 1,085 cadets, at least forty of whom were women.<sup>45</sup> Cook had appointed a patriotic instructor for each county and urged them to beat the drums of support for pending congressional bills authorizing the detailing of active or retired military officers and NCO's as military instructors. The legislation authorized up to one hundred instructors in each state, and apportioned officers and NCO's to each city based

on population, with a commissioned officer in each state capital regardless of size. School systems were to provide reimbursement to the instructors for quarters and extra-duty pay.<sup>46</sup> Cook urged support for the bills, based on his belief that “having patriotism taught in our schools [would insure that] there will never be the need of maintaining a large standing army.”<sup>47</sup> In 1901 Congress passed a bill allowing only retired officers to serve as military instructors, with at least one Senator voicing opposition to NCO’s as “incompetent” to offer such instruction.<sup>48</sup> (NCO’s would eventually be authorized.)

At some time during this period, the members of Lincoln’s Farragut Post gathered in Antelope Park on a Fourth of July to hear a speech by the Honorable Elmer J. Burket. In a fleeting echo of nineteenth century Germany’s *kulturkampf*, Burket insisted on “the Home, the Church and the School” as the essentials in making a citizen. He rang the tocsin with his unhesitating endorsement of the positive effects of military training:

I have no use for any person who condemns Compulsory Military Training. I like to see these farmer boys and our city boys taught to hold up their heads and step out with vim and vigor. It makes a boy a man . . . . It is not necessary that the boy go to war, but that he shall be a man with his head in the air.<sup>49</sup>

As the decades passed, the renamed Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) program had achieved a kind of equipoise, though not perhaps that wished for by Mr. Burket. By 1994 twenty-two schools, all located in urban Omaha and nearby Bellevue, instructed 1,425 cadets in subjects encompassing drill and ceremony, government, map reading, technology, communication, drug abuse prevention and physical fitness.<sup>50</sup> In the nation at large, JROTC constitutes the most visible and far-reaching legacy of the Grand Army. Despite continuing resistance from what General Colin Powell has described as

“liberal school administrators and teachers,” the program continues to thrive. Powell has called it “a social bargain,” especially in the inner-city, where JROTC members receive “a taste of discipline, the work ethic, and [the] experienced pride of membership in something healthier than a gang.” In 1992 Congress approved funding for the expansion of the program from fifteen hundred to thirty-five hundred schools.<sup>51</sup>

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. once remarked that, “The point of America was not to preserve old cultures, but to forge a new *American* culture.”<sup>52</sup> And under the press of the “new immigration” of the 1880s, the Grand Army would attempt to enshrine the flag as *the* symbol of American culture, becoming the fourth point of their patriotic program. Nebraska Department Commander H. C. Russell had spoken for many when he observed in 1888 that, “Men do not die for money! But to save the flag, they gladly die.”<sup>53</sup> The 1894 encampment expressed the equally fervent belief that America’s public schools were “[its] most splendid accomplishment, and through them can love of country best be taught.”<sup>54</sup> The *Omaha Bee* would capture this linkage of flag and schoolhouse in accounts of activities at Blair and Ashland, Nebraska. In 1889 all the school children of Blair met at the West School to participate in a program honoring the flag, which students there had purchased. Grand Army members were invited and “attended in a body,” with the *Bee* expecting other schools also to purchase flags.<sup>55</sup> A far more elaborate affair took place five months later in Ashland, on a day (April 30, 1890) designated as flag day. Some two to three hundred townspeople and six hundred pupils joined together in a parade celebrating the raising of the flags over all school buildings.<sup>56</sup> As if seized by the

same impulse, local posts all over Nebraska and the nation engaged in an epidemic of flag presentations, with 396 school districts in Nebraska becoming the recipients of Grand Army largesse by 1894.<sup>57</sup> However, an 1892 proposition by the Omaha City Council to provide flags over every school at taxpayer expense brought down the wrath of the *Bee*, whose editorialist thought it “buncombe” to divert funds appropriated for education to the purchase of liberty poles and bunting. After calculating that expenses would amount to \$2,475, the paper pleaded that patriotism was “not a mere sentimental notion inspired by the perpetual waving of [the flag] . . . It must be a deep rooted conviction.”<sup>58</sup> But equally deep-rooted was the Grand Army’s fervently held belief that, “the flag *must* float everywhere, and be revered and respected by everyone.”<sup>59</sup>

Nebraska’s patriotic initiatives found their champion in Brad Cook. The zealotry which he had brought to his previous stints as the Assistant-Adjutant General in the 1880s transformed itself into a patriotic fervor that was still evident in his writings between 1896 and 1911. No statistic was too small to gather, no heights of oratorical zeal were beyond him in urging his comrades on to new lobbying efforts--whether with local school teachers and principals, the state legislature, or Congress itself. He became a one-man industry, whose reports in Nebraska encampments mirrored the length and intensity of Allan Bakewell, his national counterpart. Both men cited the new immigrants as a *raison d’etre* for their work. Bakewell once referred to the children of the new citizens as the basis for this particular branch of the Grand Army’s work to “go on, and on, and on, unceasingly.”<sup>60</sup> In 1904 Cook expressed his apprehension at a recent Immigration Bureau

report that seventy per cent of that year's 750,000 immigrants had come from "the illiteracy of Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Russia." One year prior to this, he had couched his concern in terms more akin to Schlesinger's concept of the continuing attempt to define an American culture:

. . . the children of these new citizens *must* be taught the object lesson of the "Stars and Stripes" . . . for it is through *them* [the children] that the parents must love the lessons of true citizenship, obedience to law and reverence for the history of their adopted country.<sup>61</sup>

Notwithstanding the previously expressed opposition of the *Omaha Bee*, Cook submitted a measure to the 1896 encampment calling on the state legislature to purchase flags and flag staffs for all schools. The banners were to be flown daily, weather permitting, with Cook citing unspecified emergency conditions as the basis for the act.<sup>62</sup> The encampment endorsed the bill, and it sat before the legislature for some years. Nebraska's lawmakers failed to pass the act, apprehensive perhaps, at a putative outlay of funds in excess of \$300,000.<sup>63</sup> Undaunted by the legislature's hesitation to spend real money, Cook continued to collect statistics on patriotic observances in the schools and to press forward with a variety of initiatives. Cook's goals (passed on by the national GAR) included : the flying of the flag on every schoolhouse, a daily salute to the flag, adoption by schools of a "Manual of Patriotism," and all schools to conduct patriotic exercises in recognition of national holidays.<sup>64</sup> A typical sample of Cook's endeavors may be found in his 1906 report to the national encampment:

209 # of posts  
 209 # of posts w/Patriotic Instructors  
 6,797 # of schools



800 # of schools flying flags  
 7,500 # of schoolrooms w/flags  
 180,771 # of pupils saluting flags  
 YES anarchistic element in state  
 150 # of anarchists in state <sup>65</sup>

The Grand Army, despite initial reluctance, eventually joined in a movement to have June fourteenth designated as Flag Day, with Governor Ezra Savage adding Nebraska to a growing list of states recognizing it in 1901.<sup>66</sup> Increasing veneration of the flag was accompanied by a push to outlaw its desecration. In 1905 Nebraska lawmakers passed two measures in response to Grand Army pressure: the first act provided punishment for the desecration, mutilation or improper use (in advertising) of the flag; the second made it a misdemeanor for any person to engage in “horse racing, ball playing or in any game of sport” on Memorial Day.<sup>67</sup>

The Grand Army attempts to use the flag as the primary symbol of a unifying American identity became associated with the expansionist movement into Cuba and the Philippines. Brad Cook passed on with approval a letter, addressed to him by Edgar S. Dudley, a fellow-Nebraskan and a member of the Judge Advocate General’s staff in Havana:

You may oppose *Expansion* all you wish, but the truth is we were born to carry the principles of political and religious liberty to the *World* . . . the Lord so directed our armies and fleets that our manifest destiny is so evident . . . that a fool can’t escape seeing it.<sup>68</sup>

In the wake of McKinley’s assassination, Allan Bakewell insisted that the foul deed had “revealed . . . the hidden enemies to the peace and prosperity of the country.”<sup>69</sup> But all could come together under the folds of the Stars and Stripes. A proposed 1900 “salute

to the flag” scenario by Bakewell and Cook bespoke both the military bent of its proponents and an attempt at inclusiveness which may ring strangely to modern ears: After the flag was brought forward to the teacher, each student would render a military salute (palm outward) and repeat the Pledge of Allegiance (initially reading, “I pledge allegiance to *my* flag); elementary students would say this instead:

I give my hand, my head, my heart to my country,  
One country, one people, one flag.<sup>70</sup>

The Grand Army’s patriotic endeavors gradually slowed, reflecting their declining numbers, and subsumed by a younger generation’s “Americanization” movement. A more coercive edge began to develop, as even immigrant-friendly leaders like Theodore Roosevelt insisted that “Either a man is an American and nothing else, or he is not an American at all.”<sup>71</sup> A national Grand Army leader declared in 1915 that “A chief function of our public school system is to train the pupils into a proper attitude towards the state.”<sup>72</sup> Nebraska’s own Clarendon Adams (elected national commander-in-chief in 1918) fired a last cannon shot for his state and the Grand Army when he addressed a group of Columbus, Ohio citizens in 1919:

If any man attempts to raise the red flag of anarchy in this country, shoot him on the spot . . . . We are here also to instill as far as possible the firm and splendid proposition of America for Americans [applause], a country of one language, and that the American language [applause]; a country of but one flag, and that the American flag. [applause]<sup>73</sup>

At least two historians (Stuart McConnell and Wallace Davies) have been critical of the Grand Army flag and patriotism campaigners. McConnell has characterized the Grand Army’s nationalism as “one that embraced an antebellum form of liberal

capitalism rather than linguistic-cultural prescription, emphasized republican preservation rather than dynamic change, and treated the Civil War as a unassailable monument rather than an equivocal triumph.” In McConnell’s terms, their conception of loyalty was based on a loyalty to the national state, “loyalty to order itself, loyalty to the status quo.”<sup>74</sup> As America approaches the end of the twentieth century, current trends could be used to turn McConnell’s arguments around. The liberal capitalism which he criticizes the Grand Army for relying upon has become the economy of choice in the wake of communism’s fall, with many perceiving it as *the* primary agent of “dynamic change” in a society. If the Grand Army defended the status-quo--and it did--even a super-patriot like Allan Bakewell could observe that the flag stood for “the equality of man, and of woman to man.”<sup>75</sup> If the Grand Army treated the Civil War as a “monument” during the school histories fight, they had at least done battle again with a doctrine (states’ rights) which had come near to tearing the country apart and under the guise of which Jim Crow laws were being imposed against an entire race. And if the Grand Army proclaimed republican preservation” as its goal, we are now seeing in the 1990s a counter-trend of ethnicity, which in Arthur Schlesinger’s view, “rejects the unifying vision of individuals from all nations melted into a new race.”<sup>76</sup>

Wallace Davies has argued that the patriotic efforts of the Grand Army and hereditary societies reflected the dominant trends of the era. The benefits of a renewed emphasis on history and the flag were offset by “efforts to dictate the precise contents of an expanded curriculum, their reliance upon outward symbols and ritualism, and their

insistence that the interpretation of the past conform to their prejudices.”<sup>77</sup> The Grand Army’s reliance on symbols and rituals stemmed perhaps from their inability to articulate the deepest meaning of their wartime experiences, even to one another. When a movement grew to place all Nebraska battle flags in Lincoln, Edgar Dudley tried and failed to enunciate that great unknowable thing:

I need not repeat such words to you who have seen those flags, or others under which you fought, waving where shot and shell was making havoc with the noble lines of those who stood by them . . . . Language cannot describe those scenes, but they have given to everyone who witnessed them a love for those emblems of Freedom, a sorrow for those comrades who died under them . . . . Comrades may die - their names be otherwise forgotten, but these mementos will remain there, dumb witnesses of valor and patriotism.<sup>78</sup>

Ex-soldiers do not necessarily become facile communicators. Their attempt to pass on to successive generations the remembrance of national heroes and traditions fell short, unable to frame the meaning of what they had seen and done to a civilian world uncomprehending of the face of battle. And yet the themes they espoused--of order, community and respect for the past--still have validity for a society, which in Arthur Schlesinger’s words, is beset by “the fragmentation of the national community into a quarrelsome spatter of enclaves, ghettos, tribes.”<sup>79</sup>

Back so many years ago, when the Grand Army was on the upswing and its members in their young middle age, Department Commander James Savage had confidently assured his comrades that “we . . . need no other memorials than our own recollections . . . to keep vivid within our bosoms the sacred memories of the past.”<sup>80</sup> But now they were dying at an ever faster pace. Recollections were no longer sufficient, with

one prominent comrade insisting on the need for “monuments in solid granite, erected in public squares or cemeteries.”<sup>81</sup>

Monuments they would build.

### Endnotes

1. Crevecouer, Washington and Adams quoted in Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., The Disuniting of America (New York: Norton Co., 1991), 12, 24-25.
2. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1884, 20.
3. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1878, 522 and Davies, Patriotism on Parade, 289.
4. See Gephart, "Politicians, Soldiers and Strikes: The Reorganization of the Nebraska Militia and the Omaha Strike of 1882," 89-120.
5. *Omaha Republican*, January 14, 1885.
6. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 208-209.
7. *Omaha Republican*, July 8, 1887 (Editorial).
8. Quoted in Davies, Patriotism on Parade, 294.
9. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 294.
10. Bureau of the Census, Abstract of the 13th Census of the United States, (Washington, D.C.; Government Printing Office, 1910), 85.
11. Bureau of the Census, Abstract of the 12th Census of the United States 1900, (Washington, D.C.; Government Printing Office, 1904), 14,17. Of the 26,041,940 members of the school age group, 7,565,232 were either foreign-born or had one or both parents foreign-born. The 12.9% illiteracy rate within the immigrant group may be contrasted with a 4.6% rate among native whites and a staggering 44.5% among African-Americans.

12. Bessie L. Pierce, Public Opinion and the Teaching of History in the United States (1926; reprint, New York: DaCapo Press, 1970), 13,15-17.
13. Ibid., 11.
14. As cited in Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 116-117.
15. As cited in Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1888, 211-215.
16. Ibid., 215-216.
17. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1888, 91.
18. Ibid., 1889, 61-65. The report does not give Barnes' first name. One may infer that his text was used in Nebraska schools, as the report links it to the actions of a mayor's wife in an unnamed Nebraska city.
19. See Ibid., 72 and also Ibid.,1890, 62.
20. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1897, 63.
21. Ibid., 1898, 192. Nebraska encampment records during the 1890s focus more on flags, patriotic instruction and military instruction in the schools. Fuller accounts of the textbook controversies may be found in Pierce, Public Opinion and the Teaching of History in Public Schools, 64-171 and Davies, Patriotism on Parade,234-241. The Grand Army chose not to engage in debate over even more blatantly distorted writings about Reconstruction. See Mark Krug, "On Rewriting the Story of Reconstruction in the U. S. History Textbooks," The Journal of Negro History, 61 (July 1961): 133-153.
22. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 226.

23. Ibid., 226-227. McConnell cites John Logan's comparison of the Civil War to only two other events: the creation of the world and the founding of the Republic.
24. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1891, 275.
25. Davies, Patriotism on Parade, 242, describes the practices of veterans visiting schools just before Memorial Day as "originating in the Middle West . . . soon spread[ing] throughout the rest of the country."
26. *Omaha Bee*, May 30, 1891. Colonel Chase's first name is not given in the article, nor is the name of the speaker at the Izard school provided.
27. Ibid., May 30, 1891 (Editorial).
28. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 230.
29. *Omaha Bee*, May 4, 1890. One wonders how Harris came to construe a war fought over the country's dissolution (which eventually freed over four million slaves) as a "too narrow patriotism."
30. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1895, 97.
31. Ibid., 1900, 61; Ibid., 1903, 79.
32. Ibid., 1911, 69.
33. Ibid., 1910, 65.
34. Benjamin Harrison, "Military Instruction in Schools and Colleges: An Open Letter by Ex-President Harrison," *Century Magazine*, 47(January 1894): 469.



35. John Cree, "Military Education in Colleges," *Education*, 15(April 1895): 473-477.
36. Quoted in Davies, Patriotism on Parade, 339.
37. See *Ibid.*, 340, and Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1894, 244-246.
38. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1894, 131.
39. *Ibid.*, 1895, 116-117.
40. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1895, 240; Whidden Graham, "Our Schoolboy Soldiers," *Munsey's*, 15(July 1896): 460.
41. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1895, 240.
42. *Ibid.*, 1895, 233-234. For detailed critiques by opponents, see Benjamin O. Flowers, "Fostering the Savage in the Young," *Arena*, 10 (August 1894): 422-432 and A. B. Ronne, "The Spirit of Militarism," *Popular Science Monthly*, 47(June 1895): 235-237. Flowers saw in the rise of military instruction "the triumph of despotic Europe" over republican traditions, terming it "ungodly and savage drill . . . a crime against civilization." I was unable to locate similar attacks in Nebraska.
43. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1896, 160.
44. *Ibid.*, 1897, 211-216.
45. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1900, 55-58. Cook's figures only add up to 1,008 and are broken down as follows:
  - 40 Military Academy, Kearney
  - 80 High School, Kearney
  - 90 High School, Dodge County
  - 420 Omaha High School

300 University of Nebraska, Lincoln  
3 Doane College  
75 High School, York County

46. Ibid., 51.
47. Ibid., 59.
48. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1901, 155.
49. Unsigned typed manuscript, "G.A.R. and Relief Corps Picnic," no date, located in Muster Rolls, Farragut Post #25, Archives, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.
50. Dr. Carl Novak (Lincoln Board of Education), telephone conversation with author, August 5, 1995.
51. Colin L. Powell, My American Journey, (New York: Random House, 1995), 555-556.
52. Schlesinger, The Disuniting of America, 13.
53. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1888, 83.
54. Ibid., 1894, 89.
55. *Omaha Bee*, December 8, 1889.
56. Ibid., May 1, 1890.
57. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1894, 85. Also see McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 228, who cites two "socially prominent" posts in New

York City as the initiators of this national trend.

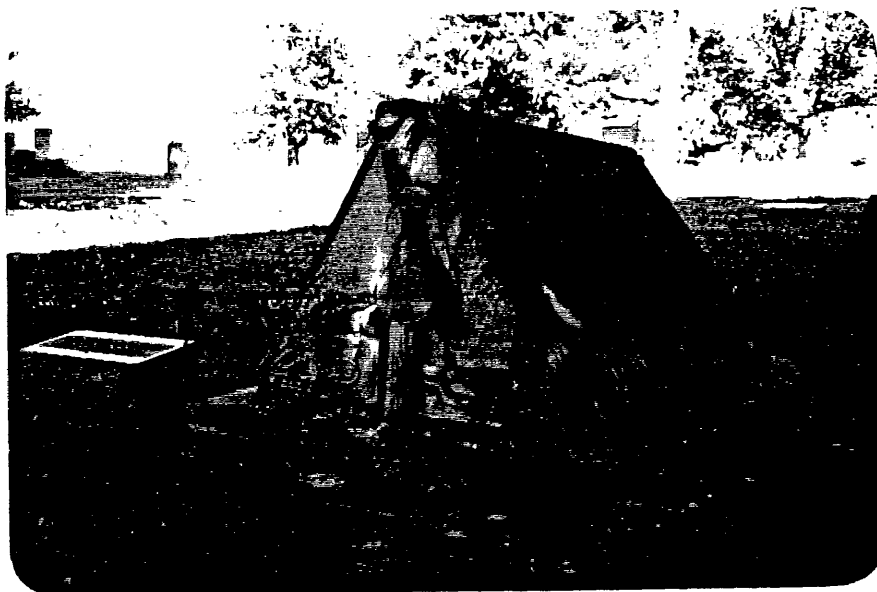
58. *Omaha Bee*, March 9, 1892 (Editorial).
59. National Patriotic Instructor Allan Bakewell, in Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1900, 151.
60. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1902, 285.
61. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1904, 78, and *Ibid.*, 1903, 80.
62. *Ibid.*, 1896, 445.
63. The *Bee* had projected that fifty-five Omaha schools would require the expenditure of \$2,475 for flags and flagpoles. In Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1902, 89, Cook listed 6,758 schoolhouses in the state. The *Bee* estimate, apportioned statewide, would have required an outlay of \$303,930.
64. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1902, 245.
65. *Ibid.*, 1906, 314.
66. See Davies, Patriotism on Parade, 218. The Grand Army's initial reluctance focused on the closeness of this date to Memorial Day and the Fourth of July, believing it would detract from those observances. For Savage's Flag Day proclamation, see Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1901, 252.
67. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1905, 57, 76.
68. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 1901, 94.

69. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1902, 234.
70. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1900, 62.
71. Quoted in Schlesinger, The Disuniting of America, 35.
72. National Patriotic Instructor Levi Longfellow, quoted in Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1915, 78.
73. Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1919, 61.
74. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 232.
75. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1903, 125.
76. Schlesinger, The Disuniting of America, 16.
77. Davies, Patriotism on Parade, 248, 358.
78. Edgar Dudley to Assistant Adjutant-General, Department of Nebraska, 15 March 1887. G.A.R. Collection, Box 1, Folder 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.
79. Schlesinger, The Disuniting of America, 137-138.
80. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1880, 48.
81. Department Commander Herman Bross, in *Ibid.*, 1905, 23.

## CHAPTER NINE

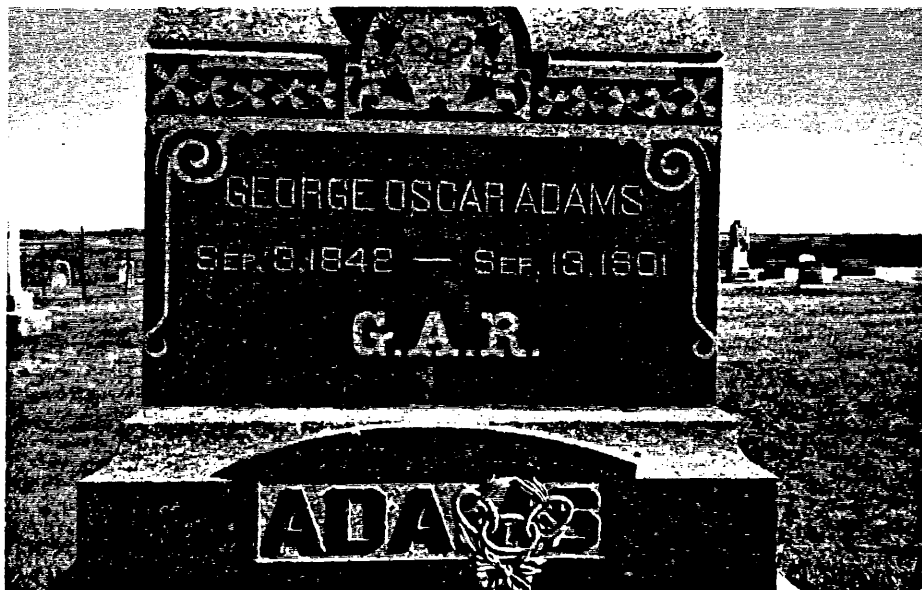
### Of Monuments, Memory, and Time

On an otherwise unremarkable Memorial Day in 1884, Frederick Douglass--ex-slave, abolitionist, fiery orator, Republican politician, and a man whose invitation to the White House by Abraham Lincoln marked a sea change in American race relations--rose to speak before an audience in Washington, DC. Douglass was worried as he began his address, concerned that the increasing rapprochement between the North and South had resulted in an overly sentimental view of the War which emphasized heroism and valor, to the exclusion of emancipation.<sup>1</sup> In tones almost pleading, he advised his listeners, "It is not well to forget the past. Memory was given to man for some purpose. The past . . . is the mirror in which we may discern the outlines of the future."<sup>2</sup> The veterans sitting in Douglass' immediate audience, as well as those in the American heartland, already considered themselves as the guardians of the nation's collective memory. The apocalyptic nature of the Civil War required a permanent commemoration which went beyond reunions and Memorial Day processions, something that would endure for centuries. The Grand Army would soon embark on the building of monuments and special grave markers in town after town. The war they chose to remember was not Frederick Douglass' ideological conflict between freedom and slavery, but the war of courage they had initially gone off to fight. Courage had not been sufficient to carry the veterans through the horrors of combat; nevertheless, it was *that* war which civilians still believed had occurred. In accepting the viewpoint of the greater culture, the veterans



The Final Campfire

SOURCE: David Wells



A Life Summed Up By Three Letters

SOURCE: David Wells



A Lifetime Captured in Four Years

**SOURCE:** David Wells

would acquiesce to a kind of collective amnesia in the midst of remembrance, once characterized by Fredrich Nietzsche as follows:

Forgetting is essential to action of any kind . . . there is a degree of the historical senses which is harmful and ultimately fatal to the living thing, whether . . . a man or a people or a culture.<sup>3</sup>

The veterans' impulse toward monumentality may even have predated their wartime experience. They had grown up during an era (roughly beginning around 1830) where rural or garden cemeteries had been built on the outskirts of many American cities, functioning in some instances as resorts or meditation promenades. Historian Blanche Linden-Ward has characterized Boston's Mt. Auburn Cemetery as a prototype, whose "scenic composition of winding avenues" made it a major tourist attraction. Cemeteries as pleasure spots appealed to "melancholy, Whiggish sentimentality, romanticism and didactic moralism"--all of which were to become features of Grand Army monuments, despite their antithetical combat experiences.<sup>4</sup> A similar change had also occurred in the nature of grave markers themselves, as eighteenth century cherubs and urns transitioned into nineteenth century monuments commemorating the lives of individuals. The greater American culture's interest in ensuring the marking and permanency of graves had been enhanced in the veteran mind by the wholesale nature of death he had experienced during wartime.<sup>5</sup> The memory of the thousands of unidentified graves at places like Fredericksburg and the Wilderness haunted them still. Never again would a comrade become a neglected, anonymous corpse.

Still other factors drove the Grand Army towards monument building.



Alternative forms of remembrance--Memorial Day processions, reunions, campfires, even soldier memoirs--reached the public only in temporary ways, serving to distance the war further into the past. But the veterans believed that what they had accomplished was a millennial event, comparable to the Revolution, and requiring a permanent commemoration. If they could not fully articulate their war to civilians, then bronze, marble and granite must. James Garfield, one of their own, captured this feeling at an 1880 monument dedication in Ohio, using words that soared, painting a synergy between the eternal stone and the events it symbolized:

Great God, was ever such measure of patriotism reached by any man on the earth before. That is what your monument means. By the subtle chemistry that no man knows, all the blood that was shed by our brethren, all the lives that were devoted, all the grief that was felt, at last crystallized itself into granite, rendered immortal the great truth for which they died and it stands there today, and that is what your monument means . . . Fellow citizens, that silent sentinel, that crowned granite column, will look down upon the boys that walk these streets for generations to come, and will not let them sleep when their country calls them.<sup>6</sup>

Stone became blood and remembrance, even while acting as a catalyst and spur to future generations.

While the years between 1870 and 1910 would see what one historian has called “the most notable period in all of American history” for the erection of monuments, Nebraskans were hampered in such efforts by several factors.<sup>7</sup> The geographic dispersion of Grand Army members, accompanied by the weakness of transportation communication links, made difficult the concerted action required to obtain a monument. The vagaries of drought, tornadoes, grasshoppers and depressed farm prices severely limited the means to pay for a monument in this heavily rural state. In the first quarter of 1891 the Department

headquarters exempted all posts in the Western Districts from having to pay their capita tax, while as late as 1895 an Inspector-General complained of “weathering the elements to attend meetings, hard times and crop failures.”<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, in 1893, tiny Alma, Nebraska, erected one of the first monuments in the state, with at least seven more dedicated in other locales throughout the 1890s. The first two decades of the new century witnessed at least another thirty-eight monuments.<sup>9</sup>

In 1904 Department Commander Lee Estelle attributed the boom in monuments to “the fires of patriotism,” while noting that these “enduring memorial[s] speak in inarticulate language of the loyalty of the people”<sup>10</sup> But the monuments also spoke an *articulate* language with inscriptions at once didactic and romantic, factual and poetic. Many simply read, “IN MEMORY OF THE SOLDIERS AND SAILORS OF 1861-1865.” Some urged eternal remembrance:

Geneva: SOLDIERS 1861-1865 - UNION DEFENDERS--AMERICAN IMMORTALS--AN APPEAL TO MEMORY--A CHALLENGE TO OBLIVION

Omaha: THESE MEN WILL PASS AWAY AS A TALE, BUT THEIR WORK WILL ENDURE FOREVER

At least two made tribute to sectional reconciliation:

Alma: DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF OUR COUNTRY’S HEROES OF 1861-1865. OUR COMRADES WHO REST IN THIS SILENT CITY--AND TO THOSE WHO SLEEP IN UNKNOWN GRAVES IN THE REDEEMED SOUTHLAND

Glencoe: GAR 1861-1865 UNION--OUR MARTYRS--NO NORTH--NO SOUTH <sup>11</sup>

Others provided statistics as a basis for remembrance, with the statue in Fremont

Cemetery showing a break-down of figures for “THE BOYS IN THE CIVIL WAR” who had served between the ages of ten to eighteen. Aurora’s soldier statue presented facts in a romantic context:

MEMORIAL TO THE UNION SOLDIER 1861-1865 FOR ALL HE WAS AND ALL HE DARED, REMEMBER HIM TODAY - DEDICATED TO LIBERTY AND UNION, NOW AND FOREVER - 2,350,000 VOLUNTEERS - 360,000 DIED THAT THEIR COUNTRY MIGHT LIVE--WHILE VIRTUE, HONOR, AND LOVE SHALL FLOW - THEIR DEEDS AND FAME SHALL BRIGHTER GROW--ONE COUNTRY AND ONE FLAG

That the memory of those comrades who rested in unmarked graves burned brightly still, is attested to by noting that thirty-nine of Nebraska’s monuments make reference to them. The cenotaph in the Wilcox Cemetery simply reads “UNKNOWN,” while others used imagery to offer a more descriptive homage:

· Table Rock: DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF THEIR COMRADES WHO REST IN UNKNOWN GRAVES - ON PATRIOT’S SACRED CAMPING GROUND THEIR SILENT TENTS ARE SPREAD - THEIR COUNTRY GUARDS THE HONORED MOUNDS - THE BIVOUAC OF THEIR DEAD

Naponee: IN MEMORY OF SOLDIERS UNKNOWN DEAD - PEACEFUL BY THY SILENT SLUMBER--PEACEFUL IN THY GRAVE SO LOW--THOUGH NO MORE WILL JOIN OUR NUMBER--YET AGAIN WE HOPE TO MEET THEE WHEN THE DAY OF LIFE IS FLED--AND IN HEAVEN WITH JOY TO GREET THEE--OUR PATRIOT UNKNOWN DEAD <sup>12</sup>

One may today find Civil War monuments in fifty-two Nebraska counties and one hundred of her towns. The 134 monuments predominantly take the form of obelisks (fifty-six), soldier statues (forty-four) and cannon (thirteen). Other configurations include five cenotaphs, six stained-glass windows on churches, two Lincoln statues (Norfolk Cemetery and Omaha’s Bancroft School), a statue of a “Weeping Angel” in Aurora, and

even a bridge (the Bellevue Bridge over the Missouri River was dedicated as the GAR Bridge in 1952). Monuments were placed in areas of prominence and permanence--cemeteries, courthouses and parks, although, the decline of cemeteries as "pleasure grounds" in this century has greatly reduced the visibility of many memorials. Granite, marble and bronze became the most frequently used composition, with prices ranging from the Fremont Cemetery obelisk (\$90) to Columbus' thirty-two foot high granite obelisk topped by a bronze eagle (\$2,400). The statue in Hastings may have dwarfed everyone: forty-five tons of granite ascending to a height of forty-two feet.<sup>13</sup>

Just as they erected monuments to themselves as a collective unit, individual comrades ensured that their grave markers focused on a wartime experience which had lasted but a few months or years--the turning point around which their lives and character had been so profoundly shaped. As the years moved forward, the once active members of a group which had dominated the affairs of a state and a nation grew increasingly enfeebled, trotted out for Memorial Day parades and other patriotic assemblages. Eventually, some 17,300 veterans came to rest under Nebraska's verdant soil, their passage, along with that of so many others, strikingly captured in the words of national Commander-in-Chief A. G. Weissert: "they are going into camp in the endless beyond, from which there will come to us no scouts, no couriers, and no aides with orders, until we, as individuals, are commanded to move forward and take position in their column on the eternal heights beyond."<sup>14</sup> So there came a day in 1946 when the *Omaha World-Herald* could note on its editorial pages the passing of Nebraska's last Union veteran,

Erastus Harrison Page. The editorialist remarked on the contributions of Page and his fellow veterans, who had shaped the course of politics until the beginning of the twentieth century, concluding with the thought that if the veterans of World War II were as successful as the Grand Army, “the Republic should be in good shape some 35 years hence.”<sup>15</sup>

The historian hoping to come to terms with the legacy of this remarkable group may, like the inscriptions on their monuments, take an approach by turns sentimental, didactic and poetic. We are drawn to the didactic, believing that if enough facts are piled on top of one another, we can demonstrate “what really happened.” German historian Leopold von Ranke scorned such presumption, while calling on his peers to make an even greater leap: “Fact has a spiritual content . . . It is our job to recognize how it really took place . . . intuition is required.”<sup>16</sup> Intuition *must* be applied. How else are we to make the connection between the feeble, quavery-voiced veterans depicted in Ken Burns’ The Civil War with the hale and hearty youngsters who fought a great war, tamed Nebraska’s trackless wilderness, remade a nation, and dominated state and national affairs for so many years afterwards?

To make that connection, to apply that intuition, we must return to their beginning. The “boys” who flocked to the Union banners were products of a Jacksonian America astonishingly free and individualistic in temperament. Its flavor was best captured in English critic Thomas Carlyle’s description of pre-Civil War America as “anarchy plus a street constable.”<sup>17</sup> The loose and untrammled social organizations of

the era initially hampered the army's efficiency, bringing down the wrath of New York

Colonel Charles Wainwright, who snarled:

It is astonishing how little snap men have generally . . . I have not come across more than half a dozen in the lot who can get fairly wakened up. Their orders come out slow and drawling . . . This is doubtless in part owing to the miserable, sleepy, slipshod way everybody does business in our villages and small towns.<sup>18</sup>

The spirit of the age engendered hostility to governmental endeavors. But the exigencies of a protracted and bloody conflict brought Americans together for a common purpose.

For the first time in its history, substantial groups of men would look to the government for every basic of life: clothing, food, shelter, medicine, sanitation, transportation, security, and even burial. The Civil War would not transform the North into a well-oiled machine. Nevertheless, Allan Nevins could note that, "the war changed and stimulated the impulse toward organization, and served as a proving ground . . . for numerous tentative expressions of organization." More important for our purpose, the veterans who mustered out in 1865, possessed "a self-confidence born of success . . . visions of great new ventures became common. Improvisation grew into hardheaded planning, individualism was channeled into disciplined action."<sup>19</sup>

If the veterans possessed confidence and organizational skills, they had also experienced still uncharted depths of depression and disillusionment, unnerved by what they had seen and been compelled to do. Depression set in with the realization after Shiloh and Antietam that no quick victory was possible. Massive numbers had to be employed, with units taking casualties at unprecedented rates. Disillusionment occurred at Fredericksburg and Gettysburg, as onlookers witnessed the death, not just of friends,



Did they ever boom the deep hurrah, or fill a foe with awe?

**SOURCE:** Nebraska State Historical Society  
(Courtesy David Wells)

but of the notion of war as romance, war as chivalry, war as courage. Soldiers also became disillusioned with home front civilians as they completed a transition from departures featuring bands, parades and flag presentations to the war of annihilation captained by Grant and Sherman. While comrades died by the tens of thousands, prosperity moved on apace in the North; economic indicators ranging from the gross national product to personal savings, to farm prices were on the rise.<sup>20</sup> Victory would require what one historian has called “the new severity,” featuring the replacement of company officer elections with promotion examinations, the acceleration of military executions, and the eventual appointment of men as file-followers, whose mission was to shoot any regiments which faltered against the enemy.<sup>21</sup> This new severity intensified the already indelible ties which welded soldiers together, leading a latter-day commentator to note that war is “the ultimate experience of male bonding.”<sup>22</sup>

The first legacy of the men who were to compose the Grand Army of the Republic lay in the “strategy of power” which became the hallmark of United States armies in the twentieth century. The strategy required massive numbers and soldiers with endurance to engage the enemy in continuous battle, much as the men under Grant and Sherman had been required to do.<sup>23</sup> Of necessity, the Army of the Potomac had to partake of the qualities of U. S. Grant, which New York soldier Harold Frederic described as “going in with jaws set and nerves of steel, to smash, kill, burn, annihilate, sparing nothing, looking neither right or left.”<sup>24</sup> They had equally demonstrated the ability to penetrate every part of the national domain while wreaking economic havoc, mirroring and personifying



William Sherman's doctrine that:

we will do it in our own time and in our own way; that it makes no difference whether it be one year, or two, or ten, or twenty; that we will take every life, every acre of land, every particle of property, every thing that to us seems proper; that we will not cease until the end is attained.<sup>25</sup>

The fruits of their victory were felt fifty-three years later at the battle of the Meuse-Argonne, when in three hours Allied artillery expended more rounds than had been fired in the entire Civil War. Within two decades after that, American military doctrine called for overwhelming numbers (as Grant had done), in combination with the destruction of enemy morale and economic resources (as Sherman had done), so that America "might completely impose its political aims upon the vanquished."<sup>26</sup>

The veterans who flocked homeward from Washington's Grand Review in May 1865 were not the same as when they had left; war had simultaneously coarsened and hardened them, while also imbuing them with superior qualities of organizational planning. Uncertain as to how they could communicate their combat experiences to friend and family, veterans retreated within themselves, and promptly entered what Gerald Linderman has described as "the hibernation."<sup>27</sup> Events in Nebraska mirrored this national pattern, with strong and effective organizational growth not occurring until after 1878. But Americans had already been a "nation of joiners" in the years leading up to the Civil War, so the impulse for veterans to join in a fraternal association was already present, eventually becoming a reality.<sup>28</sup> One sociologist has contextualized the post-war boom in fraternal groups as a dual response to the rise of industrialization and the growing participation of women in social life, with the Grand Army in particular seeking

to “become brothers again.”<sup>29</sup>

This all may be true as far as it goes. Nevertheless, the historian is confronted with a great paradox, war’s “dirty little secret,” as it were. War is killing, war is maiming, war presents every dirty way there is to die, and goes against the grain of every moral and religious tenet. Why, then, should the Grand Army of the Republic ever have existed at all? Nebraskans unfortunately, left little in the way of private letters or memoirs which might explain this enigma. For enlightenment, we may turn instead to a recent biographer of George Patton, and himself a veteran, who elucidates the problem thusly:

It is one of the great paradoxes of war that while most soldiers have little affinity for what they are obliged to do on a battlefield, they suffer withdrawal symptoms when it ends . . . Yet such is the enigma of war that it still manages to induce a sense of euphoria in defying death or maiming injury, and walking away intact. For the soldier who is ruthlessly thrust into months or even years of living on the edge, the abrupt cessation of war more often than not brings with it an inchoate but acute sense of letdown . . . The end of war rips the fabric of that special bond men in combat share with one another--a bond so compelling that neither subsequent family happiness nor material success can ever replace it.<sup>30</sup>

The Grand Army represented an attempt to recreate and replicate that order and discipline which had provided to its members the most unforgettable and haunting moments of their lives.

Eventually, then, peacetime brought about the transformation of the soldier’s camp into “the camp of fraternal brotherhood.” The comrade who uttered those words--Nebraska Department Commander Henry Palmer--went on to tell his 1884 audience in Weeping Water that, “This great fraternity--the principles of which will live long after its

membership has crumbled into dust--is a living monument to the sacrifices for freedom."<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the very act of coming together loosened the bonds of reticence in which the veterans had hitherto bound themselves. Enjoying as they did the remembrance of old times amongst themselves, they determined to present their memories to the public at large. Those memories took the form of reunions, campfires, Memorial Day celebrations, patriotic instruction and monument building. But while Frederick Douglass had abjured his audience to use their sense of memory, and had posited the past as a "mirror," it must also be noted that the very act of recreating the past can distort the image shown, much as a carnival sideshow. The Grand Army's invocation of its past would be forever distorted by its inability or refusal to articulate the true harshness of combat, with John Logan's early recognition of the fact that, "To keep the scenes of war with all its horrors vivid before the [public] mind . . . would hardly meet with the approval of this intelligent age."<sup>32</sup> Then too, by the time they reached the point where they *could* talk about their wartime experiences, most veterans had been successfully reintegrated back into that civilian community from which they had once been so alienated. In Bruce Catton's words, "They were pillars . . . of the community; the keepers of its patriotic traditions, the living embodiment . . . of what it most deeply believed about the nation's greatness and high destiny."<sup>33</sup>

Other paradoxes confronted the veterans as they began to share their past. Historian Michael Kammen has observed that post-Civil War America minimized the truly revolutionary aspects of the American Revolution, while promoting a "conservative,

organic view of society.”<sup>34</sup> The veterans who were a part of this world view would go on to minimize the equally revolutionary nature of a Civil War which had freed four million African-Americans, enlisted 186,000 black soldiers, and which had produced three constitutional amendments that eventually led to a profound alteration of the relationship between the states and the national government. Kammen defined these paradoxes as a series of dichotomies: remembrance versus amnesia, reconciliation versus intransigence, New South versus The Lost Cause, and patriotism versus treason.<sup>35</sup> The remembrance of the war of courage by the Grand Army was accompanied by an amnesia of the ideological context of that great struggle, despite Frederick Douglass’ protest that, “I am not of that school of thinking which teaches us to let bygones be bygones, to let the dead past bury its dead . . . the past is not dead and cannot die.”<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, that whole range of Grand Army activities which we may call “remembrance of things past,” constitutes its second great legacy. For perhaps the first time in American history, a cohesive and influential body which covered the entire socio-economic spectrum made a sustained effort to turn Americans away from the overweening force of an individualism in which little thought or attention had ever been paid to what went before. If veterans have been castigated by Stuart McConnell and Mary Ann Clawson for excluding females, blacks and ethnic groups, the Grand Army has also been rightly praised by W. Lloyd Warner for Memorial Day activities which “integrated all ethnic and economic groups into a sacred unity.”<sup>37</sup> They have also been criticized for their insistence on a patriotic instruction which described more the United

States of 1860 than 1890, and a cult of the flag which promoted loyalty to the national state over loyalty to principles of racial or social justice--an accusation which is on the mark.<sup>38</sup> It is equally important to note that in their youth they had discovered freedom in order, individual rights counterpoised by community obligations. In defining their culture, they selected as a symbol what so many of their immediate community had given their lives to defend--the flag. The remembered dead made it seem disloyal to think of the world in new terms, while loyalty to the new national state they had themselves created overrode other considerations. If the Grand Army's descendants prize individual freedom the more, they may still find a "usable past" in the efforts of that order to retain a communitarian spirit for a society torn apart by so many centrifugal forces.

The third legacy of the Grand Army lay in that broad based system of federal pensions and state run soldiers' homes, which transcended the bigotry of the age by including African-Americans, native-born whites, ethnic whites, and women (widows).<sup>39</sup> By 1910 average pensions as a proportion of average annual earnings had reached thirty per cent for veterans and twenty-five per cent for widows. By contrast, pensioners in Germany and Britain received only seventeen per cent and twenty-two per cent respectively of average annual earnings.<sup>40</sup> In that same year, slightly over twenty-two per cent of Nebraska's elderly received a government stipend.<sup>41</sup> The recipients of this government largesse were regarded by themselves and by most of their contemporaries as having earned this money through their wartime services, despite criticisms by Harvard President Charles Eliot and the Mugwumps. But those protests did have a later effect,

noted by sociologist Theda Skocpol, of ensuring that “Civil War benefits would become an obstacle rather than an entering wedge for more general old-age pensions and workingmen’s insurance in the United States.”<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, the veterans’ pensions had given a new meaning to the concept of retirement at sixty-five, following the 1900 Pension Bureau definition of that age as a “disability” for pension purposes.<sup>43</sup> By World War II, Roosevelt’s policy intellectuals had reconfigured veterans’ benefits to include small business loans, free government burial, home loans and payments for college--programs so successful that one historian has called them, “one of the most remarkable and successful instances of social welfare without socialism . . . veterans make more money, are more likely to own their own homes, and their families are better fed and better educated than nonveterans of their own age.”<sup>44</sup> The Grand Army had been able to obtain pensions through their close ties with the Republican Party. Skocpol has described this as a relationship wherein “Republican politicians and governmental officials discovered that expanded Civil War benefits, along with minutely adjusted protective tariffs [that paid for] generous benefits, could be used to distribute rewards at strategic times to the right combinations of party supporters.”<sup>45</sup>

The Grand Army’s close ties to the GOP constitute a fourth legacy, a legacy of nonconcurrence by its successor groups, the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars. For the Grand Army had contested a *civil* war, one in which the Democratic Party had been depicted as the party of Copperheadism and defeat. Indiana’s Oliver Morton, an important figure in the early formation of the Grand Army, had originally raised the

bloody flag with hair-raising effect:

Every unregenerate rebel lately in arms against his government calls himself a Democrat. Every man who labored for the rebellion in the field, who murdered Union prisoners by cruelty and starvation . . . calls himself a Democrat. Every one who shoots down negroes in the streets, burns up negro school-houses and meeting-houses, and murders women and children . . . calls himself a Democrat. In short, the Democratic Party may be described as a common sewer and loathsome receptacle, into which is emptied every element of treason North and South, every element of inhumanity and barbarism which has dishonored the age.<sup>46</sup>

As late as 1888, the *Omaha Republican* could less eloquently reflect this viewpoint as it explained to its readers the differences between the parties:

The Republican Party represents the idea of an indissoluble union, the equality of all men, black and white, the rule of the majority. The Democratic party represents the idea of states' rights, of nullification, of secession, of slavery.<sup>47</sup>

When it came time to fight the wars of the twentieth century, concepts of bipartisan foreign policy generally carried the day. No particular party could lay claim to saving the nation; and for the World War II generation, there were no benefits to fight for--the G.I. Bill was already in place by 1944.

No more self-conscious group of veterans than the GAR has ever existed in this country. Hamlin Garland spoke affectingly about his father, whose army service had become "his most moving, most poetic experience," and who wore on all special occasions his Grand Army blue coat and veteran's bronze lapel button.<sup>48</sup> Nebraska's Grand Army was so protective of its distinctive garb that in 1901 they successfully lobbied the state legislature to make it a misdemeanor for non-veterans to wear a GAR badge for the purpose of obtaining aid or assistance.<sup>49</sup> Truly they considered themselves

a special breed, evoked in a poem by Nebraska Chaplain W. A. Pillsbury:

By Communion of the banner,  
Crimson, white and starry banner,  
By the baptism of the banner,  
Children of one church are we.

Creed nor faction can divide us,  
Race nor language can divide us,  
Still whatever fate betide us,  
Children of the flag are we.<sup>50</sup>

Historian John Keegan has recently asserted that “Space, not time, is the American dimension,” attributing the doom of small city life and the ruination of the larger inner cities to the American determination to:

command their continent from coast to coast, all three thousand miles of it, to have no internal frontiers, to spend a common currency, to obey, often not to obey, a uniform code of law, to recognize a single government, to be one people . . . Traveling America confronted settled America and traveling America triumphed.<sup>51</sup>

The Grand Army had been an integral part of that decision ‘to recognize a single government.’ Equally, however, they had traveled not just through the space of the American Southland, but had also determined to remain together as a unique entity through time. Separated at war’s end, they had found their way to Nebraska, eventually coming back together as filaments are drawn to a magnet. The camaraderie they enjoyed together failed to protect them from the ravages of each year’s succession. As we gaze upon those aging faces, we wonder, as did George Patton:

‘Tis hard to see the slobbering lips  
And bleary lashless eye,  
The firm set mouth and eagle gaze  
They had in days gone by.



Have those scrawny necks like withered kelp  
 Ever boomed the deep hurrah?  
 Has the shuffling tramp of those dragging feet  
 Ever filled a foe with awe?<sup>52</sup>

In applying that historian's intuition called for by von Ranke, we echo the question asked by a Confederate veteran, "Were these things real? Did I see our country laid waste and in ruin? Did I see soldiers marching, the earth trembling and jarring beneath their measured tread?"<sup>53</sup>

Nebraska's once howling wilderness today presents a pleasing picture of prosperous farms and cities, its earth providing mute testimony to the departed 'trembling and jarring' of the veteran host which had flocked there. They had come from a thousand towns and cities, these redeemers of the Union, these children of the flag. Their epitaph and eulogy would be penned by a son of the Midwest in the third decade of the twentieth century. F. Scott Fitzgerald conjured the awe and mystery which this land once held for its inhabitants, while Nebraska's Grand Army had transmitted to posterity a mystical love for a nation reborn out of their blood. They were the vanguard of a generation which had failed utterly and succeeded beyond measure. If we are ever to define ourselves as a people and chart our destiny as a country, the history of the Grand Army of the Republic can provide a key to that self-knowledge. In moving through the river of time they had never failed to remember the past, these guardians of the American dream:

Its vanished trees . . . had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in his history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder . . . .

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.<sup>54</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. Douglass' state of mind in the 1880s is derived from a reading of Blight, "For Something Beyond the Battlefield," 1158-1163.
2. Quoted in Kammen, Mystic Chords of Memory, 121.
3. As quoted in Blight, "For Something Beyond the Battlefield," 1173. Also see Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1881, 788, in which Chaplain J. F. Lovering told the Grand Army, "You are the custodians of sacred memories."
4. Blanche Linden-Ward, "Strange but Genteel Pleasure Grounds: Tourist and Leisure Use of Nineteenth Century Rural Cemeteries," in Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture, ed. Richard E. Meyer (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), 294-295.
5. See Blanche Linden-Ward, "Putting the Past Under Grass: History as Death and Cemetery Commemoration," *Prospects* 10(1985): 280-282. Linden-Ward attributes the interest in locating and marking graves as a response to urban crowding and to Calvinist teachings concerning the need for individuals to come to terms with death.
6. Quoted in McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 166, 188.
7. Kammen, Mystic Chords of Memory, 115.
8. The exemption of Western District posts from the per capita tax is mentioned in J. C. Morgan to J. B. Sawhill, 17 January 1891, GAR collection, Nebraska State Historical Society. Inspector General's Report is from Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1895, 86. Also see A. C. Kimball to James D. Gage, 26 August 1895, GAR Collection, NSHS. Kimball remarked upon the rejoicing of his post when the Department Headquarters "remitted their tax for the last term as they were all poor and hard run."
9. David Wells, "Nebraska Civil War Monuments," Unpublished, 1994). Mr. Wells, a private citizen in Omaha, has photographed virtually every Civil War monument

in Nebraska. He then made a photocopy of each picture, alphabetically by city. Each unnumbered page lists place, date of dedication (where available), and the inscription. He obtained dedication dates for approximately forty-six percent of the monuments, and has graciously allowed the author to make copies of the collection. Future references will be made to Wells, "Nebraska Monuments."

10. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1904, 52.
11. All inscriptions from Wells, "Nebraska Monuments."
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Figure on numbers of veterans buried in Nebraska is from Ken Martin, Civil War Veterans Buried in Nebraska, 5. A. G. Weissert quoted in Proceedings of the National Encampment, 1893, 60.
15. *Omaha World-Herald*, May 10, 1946 (Editorial). The last member of the national Grand Army, Albert Woolson, died on August 2, 1956. See Final Journal of the Grand Army of the Republic (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1957), 3.
16. Quoted in William Safire, Freedom: A Novel of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 1110. Despite its composition in novel form, Safire's "Underbook" on sources and commentary provides an illuminating and scholarly view of a variety of historical debates on Civil War issues.
17. Quoted in Harold Hyman, A More Perfect Union: The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on the Constitution (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1973), 65.
18. Allan Nevins, ed., A Diary of Battle: The Personal Journal of Colonel Charles Wainwright (1962; reprint, Gettysburg: Stan Clark Military Books, 1982), vii.

19. Nevins, The War for the Union: The Organized War 1863-1864, 272-73, 330-331.
20. See Nevins, The Organized War 1863-1864, 212-270. The GNP rose from \$3,804,000,000 in 1860 to \$4,019,000,000 in 1864 without including the Southern states. In New York and Massachusetts personal bank savings nearly doubled in the period 1860-1865. The value of farm crops rose 103 per cent, while some made millions in iron, mining and oil. Also see Mitchell, Civil War Soldiers, 60-68, for soldier disillusionment.
21. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 171-176.
22. Mary Ann Clawson, Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender and Fraternalism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 124.
23. Russell F. Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany 1944-1945 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 2-4.
24. Quoted in Linderman, Embattled Courage, 210-211.
25. William T. Sherman, The Memoirs of William T. Sherman (New York: Library of America, 1990), 365.
26. Data on the Meuse-Argonne offensive is from Carlo D'Este, Patton: A Genius for War (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 254. World War II military doctrine and quote is from Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants, 3.
27. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 266-268. Also see Nevins, The Organized War 1863-1864, 117, who states that society in general had become "tougher, harsher, and coarser."
28. Nevins, The Organized War 1863-1864, 272.
29. Clawson, Constructing Brotherhood, 14, 124.

30. D'Este, Patton: A Genius for War, 267-268. D'Este is no stranger to the academic life--a retired U.S. Army lieutenant-colonel, he possesses a B.A., M.A., and an honorary doctorate in humane letters from Norwich University. His academic background, coupled with his "having been there," allows D'Este to provide a more direct, persuasive and insightful viewpoint on veteran motivation than perhaps the sociologist or historian who has never been part of war's process.
31. *Omaha Republican*, February 5, 1884.
32. Quoted in Linderman, Embattled Courage, 270.
33. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 280.
34. Kammen, Mystic Chords of Memory, 89.
35. *Ibid.*, 101.
36. Quoted in Blight, "For Something Beyond the Battlefield," 1173.
37. Warner, The Living and the Dead, 247. Also see Clawson, Constructing Brotherhood, 14-15, 110, and McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 218-219. While McConnell criticizes the Grand Army for placing its allied female groups in a subservient status, more study is required into the nature of the relationship.
38. McConnell, Glorious Contentment, 232.
39. Theda Skocpol, Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 532.
40. *Ibid.*, 134.
41. *Ibid.*, 541. The exact figures are: 15,182, of the 51,000 Nebraskans 65 or older received a pension.

42. Ibid., 532.
43. Logue, To Appomattox and Beyond, 132.
44. Geoffrey Perrett, Days of Sadness, Years of Triumph: The American People 1939-1945 (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973), 341-342.
45. Skocpol, Protecting Soldiers and Mothers, 527.
46. Quoted in Eric L. McKittrick, Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 318.
47. *Omaha Republican*, November 28, 1888 (Editorial).
48. Linderman, Embattled Courage, 279.
49. Proceedings of the Nebraska Encampment, 1901, 131.
50. Ibid., 1893, 77.
51. John Keegan, Fields of Battle: The Wars for North America (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1996), 16.
52. D'Este, Patton: A Genius for War, 315.
53. Ken Burns and Geoffrey Ward, The Civil War: An Illustrated History (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1990), 417.
54. F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York: Scribner, 1923), 159.

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