

THE SENTINEL

Volume 3, Issue 7

March 2008

The Grand Army of the Republic — More Than Just Veterans

The war was over. The soldiers had gone home to start life anew. What were so many men, literally thousands and thousands of them, to do in order to reshape their lives after four years of turmoil that had left many scarred, both physically and in other ways? The camaraderie that had bound them together was suddenly gone, or was it? As soldiers gathered back in their homes, many, if not most of them, sought ways to maintain the core of what had been the seminal event of their lives—the closeness and friendship of soldier-brothers. Thus was born the Grand Army of the Republic, the huge postwar veterans organization that encompassed all ranks, units and philosophies, developing a secret ritual and structure that became an idealized memory of military life. Eventually the GAR became so big that, in Indiana alone, there were over 500 different Posts.

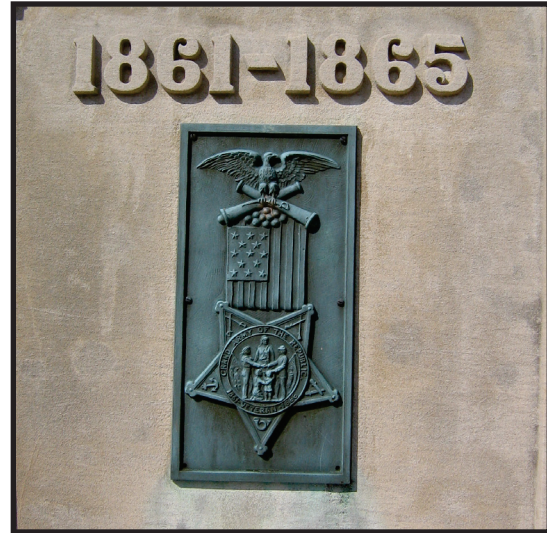
At our meeting this month, David Wiley, examined the GAR's progress toward an inevitable end: from a birth in Illinois and its first grand encampment in Indianapolis in 1866, to an apex of membership in 1892, and turning once again to Indianapolis for a final parade in 1949. Then six men attended out of a total membership of sixteen.

Though always a band of brothers who, as their favorite saying went, had “drunk from the same canteen,” the leadership of the GAR, especially in the early years, was made up of politically ambitious men—mostly former “field and staff”—who were not hesitant to use the organization to capture the soldier vote.

Such partisanship damaged the GAR's growth and reputation, and it was soon necessary to forbid such partisanship, at least overtly. The organization grew throughout the 1870s and 90s, turning increasingly toward the needs of the widows and orphans of slain comrades and of indigent members who lost out during hard times.

By the 80s it was apparent that veteran pensions would be necessary, and after an intense national debate, pushed by the voting ranks of the GAR, the Dependent Pension Act of 1890 became law. Any honorably discharged veteran with ninety days of service and unable to do manual labor would be eligible. Indeed, old age itself became the chief qualifier by 1906.

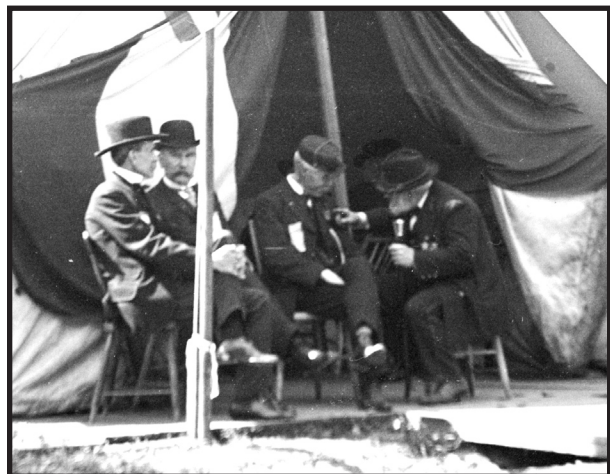
In its declining years, the members spent more and more time promoting celebrative occasions, remembering the sac-



Late in the life of the Grand Army of the Republic, its members became great monument builders. This detail from the edifice at the Rose Hill Cemetery in Bloomington showing the badge of the GAR, which celebrates its service to the nation, and symbolically represents its guiding principles of fraternity, charity, and loyalty. Similar structures may be found in cemeteries and on court house lawns throughout the state—the largest and most conspicuous is, of course, the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Indianapolis.

rifices of the fallen—most notably on Memorial Day, chiefly a GAR invention. They built monuments and memorial halls, they boosted patriotism, especially in the schools, and in discussions and entertainments they called “camp-fires” they recalled how their life was spent not that many years before.

As they grew older, they wanted us to remember something they thought quite important—to remember how they saved the Union, now one and indivisible.



Old soldiers share stories at the Washington GAR Encampment in October 1902. —Library of Congress American Memory Collection

Perryville/Mill Springs in June

The Roundtable is hopefully putting together a Saturday/Sunday excursion to the Civil War battlefield and museum at Perryville, Kentucky, with the same combination the next day at Nancy, Kentucky, where the Battle of Mill Springs was fought early in the war. Right now, the anticipated schedule is an early Saturday departure from Bloomington on June 14, with the afternoon and early evening in Perryville, an overnight hotel stay in nearby Danville, a short drive to Nancy the next morning with an afternoon at the battlefield and museum there, then an evening drive back home. The transportation will be carpooling with volunteers being reimbursed for mileage, meals will be on your own. At this writing, it appears hotel rooms in Danville will run around \$100 since there is a fabulous brass band festival (www.gabdf.com) in town that weekend. Total for the trip with room and gas, but without meals would run \$125-\$150, although we will make every effort to keep it as low as we can. Room sharing, if you are interested in finding a "buddy" could reduce that figure.

Announcements

THE CONTESTED LEGACY OF JEFFERSON DAVIS SYMPOSIUM. Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America and a Kentucky native, is the topic of a day-long symposium set for Friday, June 27, at the Kentucky Historical Society in Frankfort. This year marks the 200th anniversary of Davis's birth. Keynote speaker for "The Contested Legacy of Jefferson Davis" will be nationally known Civil War scholar and author William J. Cooper Jr., of Louisiana State University. Cooper is the author of *Jefferson Davis, American* (2000) as well as other works on slavery and the South, including *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856* (1978), *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (1983), and (with Thomas E. Terrill) *The American South: A History* (1990). The symposium is scheduled for 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., with a break for lunch. Events include two topical panels followed by a roundtable discussion. The program will end with a group discussion on how to interpret Jefferson Davis era Confederate history accurately and sensitively at Kentucky's historic sites. The deadline for registration is Friday, June 20, and seating is limited to the first 200 people. The registration fee includes lunch. Cost is: \$25 general public; \$20 Kentucky Historical Society members; \$10 students (photocopy of student ID must accompany registration form). To register, please contact Julia Curry at 502-564-1792, ext. 4414 or by e-mail at julia.curry@ky.gov. You can also download a registration form at <http://kylincoln.org/events/jefferson.htm>.

5 OPENINGS FOR GUIDED CIVIL WAR BATTLEFIELD TOUR MAY 15-18 NOW AVAILABLE. Five spaces have become available for Civil War Weekend's special guided tour of the Chattanooga, Tennessee - Chick-

amauga, Georgia battlefields on May 15-18, 2008. Package includes three night's lodging at the historic Sheraton Read House in Chattanooga, breakfast and box lunch each day, plus dinner Friday night, as well as expert insight and fascinating trivia from award-winning guide and Civil war historian Robert Freis. A perfect gift for the history lover, or an ideal weekend getaway. \$645 per person for double occupancy or \$795 for single room. Reservations are on a first-come basis, and the number of guests on the Chattanooga-Chickamauga tour is strictly limited, so book your trip now. Visit Civil War Weekend's other 2008 tour offerings at www.civilwarweekend.com

PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S COTTAGE. President Lincoln's Cottage at the Soldiers' Home opens for public tours Feb. 19 after a \$15-million restoration. The Lincolns spent nearly a quarter of his presidency in this 1842 get-away north of Washington DC. It is sometimes known as Lincoln's "Summer White House." Tours are offered every hour between 10 am and 3 p.m. Monday-Saturday and noon-3 p.m. Sunday. Expanded hours are planned for the summer. Adult tickets are \$12. Reservations are suggested. Directions and more information: www.lincolncottage.org

PERRYVILLE BATTLEFIELD UNVEILING. There will be an unveiling at Perryville Battlefield of new plaques noting the separate roles of the 38th and the 80th Indiana Infantry Regiments. These plaques are the result of the cooperation of the Indianapolis Civil War Roundtable, the Kentucky Historical Association and the Perryville Battlefield Preservation Association. This unveiling will take place on April 5th on the battlefield. Anyone interested in attending can contact Andy O'Donnell, Indianapolis Civil War Roundtable, at 317 873-2005 or visit www.perryville.net

Flash Request from Member Joel Foust

Two weeks ago the Civil War Preservation Trust placed Perryville Battlefield on the top ten most endangered battlefield list because of a development that is set to be built on the edge of the battlefield. This development was approved by Boyle County Planning and Zoning, but the Perryville City Council still has to vote on it. You can voice your opposition by calling city hall at 859-332-8361 they are keeping a call log. The Perryville City Council will meet on this issue on April 3 at 7:00 p.m. to vote on the development. Perryville certainly needs economic development, but not on the edge of the battlefield. Please call now and voice your opposition. Contact: Joni House, Preservation Specialist, Perryville Battlefield State Historic Site— Joan.House@ky.gov

Help Support the Roundtable!

April is our annual "Dues Date" so we are asking for your support in order to help with many things, including refreshments, mailings, support to the Monroe County History Center, the Overlease Library and more. Please take a minute and consider giving a little, or more, to help the Roundtable continue to bring you quality programs and events.

Next Month

Join us on April 8th at the Monroe County History Center and hear Doug Rolfe, newly "minted" Civil War buff, talk about his introduction to the study of field artillery through his life long interest in fine scale railroad modeling, complete with a beautiful caisson and limber model.

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Or on the web at <http://mypage.iu.edu/~rawatson/roundtable/>.