

## Topic Page: [Grand Army of the Republic](#)

### Summary Article: **Grand Army of the Republic**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(GAR), organization established by Civil War veterans of the Union army and navy. Principal figures in the founding of the GAR were John A. Logan and Richard J. Oglesby. The first post was formed (Apr. 6, 1866) at Decatur, Ill., and at the first national encampment, held at Indianapolis, Ind., on Nov. 20, 1866, 10 states and the District of Columbia were represented. Gen. Stephen A. Hurlbut, the first commander in chief, was succeeded by Logan, who was followed in office by Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside. They were the most prominent military men to head the GAR. By 1890, when the GAR reached its peak, more than 400,000 members were reported. The members sought to strengthen the bonds of comradeship, to preserve the memory of their fallen comrades (they secured the general adoption of Memorial Day to achieve this purpose), to give aid to soldiers' widows and orphans and to handicapped veterans, and, most of all, to fight for pension increases and other benefits. Although the organization was nonpolitical, GAR members were overwhelmingly Republican and formed a reliable bloc of that party's strength in the years up to 1900. Soldier preference in federal appointments became the rule, and pension legislation was usually enacted by the Republicans with their support in mind. The *National Tribune*, founded (1877) by George E. Lemon, a powerful pensions attorney of Washington, D.C., kept GAR members posted on pension matters. The organization scored a great victory in 1879 with the passage of the Arrears of Pension Act, which led many more veterans to apply for pensions. Theoretically, only those who suffered disabilities in service were entitled to pensions, but it became the practice for lenient Congressmen to introduce private pension bills. These were almost always granted until Grover Cleveland, the first President to examine the bills critically, found many of them to be fraudulent. The fact that Cleveland was a Democrat further confirmed GAR members in their staunch Republicanism. Auxiliary societies associated with the GAR were the Sons of Veterans (1881), the Women's Relief Corps (1883), and the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic (1886). A separate veterans organization, the United Confederate Veterans, was organized in 1889, but its membership (less than 50,000 at its peak) never approached that of the GAR. With the coming of the 20th cent. the GAR declined rapidly in numbers and influence. The 83d and last encampment was also held at Indianapolis, on Aug. 28–31, 1949, with 6 of the 16 surviving members in attendance. The last member of the GAR died in 1956.

See Dearing, M. R. , *Veterans in Politics: The Story of the G.A.R.* (1952).

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