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THE GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC IN IOWA SOCIETY AND POLITICS

by
Charles T. ^{hurman}Mindling

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of History in
the Graduate College of the
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Gen.


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INTRODUCTION

Students of Recent American History have shown that in the four decades following the Civil War, Union veterans of that conflict, organized as the Grand Army of the Republic, often wielded an undue amount of influence in shaping public thinking as well as deciding political issues and contests. In this thesis I propose to examine the impact of the Grand Army of the Republic on the society and politics of the Midwestern State of Iowa.

All told, more than sixty-three thousand veterans returned from the Civil War to make their homes in Iowa; of this number probably more than one-half at one time or another were members of their local Grand Army posts. In this study of those thirty (plus) thousand veterans I shall attempt to develop and explain: 1) the origins and growth of the G.A.R. in Iowa; 2) the Grand Army's effect on State politics and the State Treasury; and, 3) the influence of the Grand Army in determining the civic values in Iowa's society.



Chapter I

ORIGINS AND INFANCY OF THE G.A.R. IN IOWA

Four years before the Grand Army of the Republic arrived on the Iowa scene politicians of both Republican and Democratic leanings foresaw the values of the "soldier vote." As Union armies continued to meet defeat after defeat at the hands of the Confederates, opposition to the war steadily mounted. As compared with the majority of 23,000 votes given to the Republican Party in the election of 1860, Samuel Kirkwood -- ardent defender of the Union cause -- received less than a 17,000 majority vote in the gubernatorial election one year later.¹

In the summer of 1862 the Democratic Party convened at Iowa City and nominated a State ticket of candidates pledged to do all in its power to terminate the war immedi-

1 Herbert S. Fairall, Manual of Iowa Politics, pp. 57-60. It is the contention of Marie Rulkotter that the Grand Army of the Republic wherever it flourished was a political result of the Civil War; according to her thesis Radical Republican politicians, bent upon maintaining their own political supremacy by capturing the vote of veterans, sponsored and organized the G.A.R. for Republican purposes. A study of the origins of the Grand Army of the Republic in Iowa tends to demonstrate the validity of Rulkotter's conclusions. See Marie Rulkotter, "The Civil War Veteran in Politics," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin), 1938.

ately, to reinstate the South into the Union, and to retain slavery. Quite clearly something had to be done or the Democrats, reinforced with "Copperhead" elements, might possibly gain control of the Iowa government; an event that would jeopardize the role of Iowa in the Union cause.²

On September 3, four weeks before the State election of 1862, Governor Kirkwood called a special session of the Ninth General Assembly and asked that such legislation that would permit the Iowa soldier in the field to vote be enacted immediately. Coming directly to the point, the Governor warned the Assembly that "under existing laws these citizens cannot vote, and unless the laws can be changed, it may be that the cause they are periling life in the field to maintain may be lost at home through supineness or treachery."³ Over loud and vociferous cries of "unconstitutionality" by the Democratic minority, the suffrage bill for soldiers became law on September 11. Although the soldiers voted in the October elections, the Republican majority of 16,000 votes in 1861 was reduced to 15,000 in 1862. Presumably the 19,000 soldier votes had maintained Unionist control of

2 Fairall, op. cit., pp. 61-62; Benjamin F. Gue, History of Iowa, vol. II, pp. 81-90.

3 Benjamin Shambaugh, Messages and Proclamations of Governors of Iowa, vol. II, pp. 315-16.

the State government.⁴

In the Democrats' refusal to support the soldiers' suffrage law, the Republicans were handed a political weapon that would be used repeatedly in elections to come; henceforth Democrats could be referred to as an ungrateful second degree citizenry, contemptuous of the patriotism that had propelled the soldier to the battlefield. The Democrats, however, were quick to recognize that they had committed an unforgiveable political sin. In its haste to make amends the Democratic convention, meeting in the summer of 1863, to nominate a governor, went out of its way to extend the "warmest" thanks to the nation's defenders:

Living, they shall know a nation's gratitude; wounded, a nation's care; and, dying, they shall live in our memory, and monuments shall be raised to teach posterity to honor the patriots and heroes who offered their lives at their country's altar. The widows and orphans shall be adopted by the nation, to be watched over and cared for as objects fully worthy of the nation's guardianship.⁵

To further prove their devotion to the patriotic civilians and soldiers of Iowa, the convention nominated a soldier for the governorship. Brigadier General James A. Tuttle, on leave from his army duties, was present at the Demo-

4 Laws of Iowa, 1862, (Extra Session), pp. 28-34; Fairall, op. cit., pp. 60, 64; Edward Benton, "Soldier Voting in Iowa," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, XXIX, p. 32.

5 Fairall, op. cit., p. 65.

cratic convention. When Martin L. Fisher, civilian nominee for the governorship declined the honor, the central committee named Tuttle as the Democratic candidate.⁶

Meanwhile, the Republicans geared themselves for the coming election. At their nominating convention, they guaranteed the soldier "continued encouragement and support," while pointing out that the Republicans "approve of the action of the General Assembly" in passing a law "giving our brave soldiers in the field the opportunity to vote at our elections...." Like the Democrats, the Republicans nominated a soldier-politician for the governorship. When the convention reached a deadlock between the major candidates, Colonel William A. Stone, with one arm in a sling, appeared at the convention and received the nomination.⁷

With election returns in, Republicans could note that their campaign to capture the soldier vote was successful. The Iowa soldiers, properly impressed by "Copperhead fire in the rear" cast 16,000 votes for Colonel Stone as compared with 3,000 for General Tuttle. Yet the Republicans could also notice that the soldier vote had not determined the election. Colonel Stone had received a total of eighty

6 Ibid., p. 64.

7 Ibid., p. 67; Gue, op. cit., vol. II, p. 95; Cyrenus Cole, Iowa Through the Years, p. 302.

thousand to Tuttle's 56,000. Without the soldier vote the Republican candidate would still have been elected by a majority of 16,000.⁸

When peace returned in 1865, Republican politicians, apparently of the opinion that little more of practical value could be gained in courting the soldier vote, were willing to ignore the returning veterans as a political unit. In the words of Robert Beath, Commander-in-Chief of the G.A.R. in 1883:

The returning veterans who desired to take an active part in politics in 1865-66, were looked uponas 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 'politigs' to those who better understood that science.⁹

At any rate, the Republican platform of 1865 merely extended "grateful thanks" to the "brave citizen soldiery"; while but one soldier--the incumbent governor-- was nominated for State office on the Republican ticket.¹⁰

The veterans, however, were not so easily convinced that their new position so low on the political totem pole was justified. On August 23, 1865, a body of

8 Fairall, op. cit., p. 67; Benton, op. cit., p. 38.

9 Robert Beath, History of the Grand Army of the Republic, p. 28.

10 Fairall, op. cit., pp. 69-70.

veterans convened at Des Moines with the purpose of securing material recognition of their Civil War services. Dwelling not on the sentimental glories and patriotism of war, these soldiers declared that those "...who have faithfully served their country, in the army and navy of the United States.... [have] preference for all offices of profit, honor or trust, either by appointment or otherwise...." Foreshadowing the principles of the Grand Army of the Republic that was to appear on the political scene a few months later, the soldiers' convention cherished "with grateful remembrance, the memory of our dead soldiers," and promised that both sympathy and substantial assistance would be tendered to the disabled veteran, the widow, and the orphan. To insure its pledges to the Iowa veterans, the soldiers' convention drew up a platform incorporating its demands, and nominated a ticket of four veterans to oppose the Republicans in the coming elections.¹¹

Democrats were beside themselves in joyful anticipation. Now was the time to redeem themselves in the minds of veterans and voting friends of veterans. As a matter of fact, the Democrats held their convention at the same time and in the same city as had the Soldiers' Party. Accepting the soldiers' arguments, the Democrats

11 Ibid., p. 70-71, Gue, op. cit., vol. III, p. 3.

hailed "with joy the return of these brave men from the battlefield;" believed that it was the "duty" of Iowa citizens to distribute "civil honors and offices of the State" to worthy veterans; and promised "fostering careto the widows and orphans of those who died in the service of their country."

For good measure the Democrats declined to make any nominations, but resolved to give their full support to the candidates of the Soldiers' Party. The fact that General Thomas H. Benton, candidate for Governor on the Soldiers' ticket, had long been prominent in high Democratic circles did not detract from Democratic willingness to support this new political organization.¹²

In the Fall election veterans expressed themselves in terms that Republicans could not misunderstand; the election of 1865 helped shape the pattern of Iowa politics until the turn of the century. Although the Republican candidates defeated the Soldier-Democratic coalition by a mean 70,000 to 54,000 votes, it was obvious that the Soldier Party had chipped the Republican's majority of 38,000 votes in 1863 to 16,000 in 1865. Republican politicians could see that their Democratic opposition, by championing the veterans' case, had redeemed itself

12 Fairall, op. cit., p. 71-72; Gue, op. cit., p. 4.

in the thinking of Iowa's ex-soldiers. To worldly Republican politicians it was not a pleasant experience to contemplate.¹³

For Republican leaders the problem at hand was two-fold: (1) how to neutralize in the future the effectiveness of an Iowa Soldiers' Party or any organization of similar ilk in the service of the Democrat Party; and, (2) how to reinstate subtly within the ranks of Republicanism those veterans now aligned with the Opposition. A tailor-made answer was available for immediate use. From the anvils of Illinois politics there was being forged a soldiers' organization that bore close resemblance to the Iowa Soldiers' Party. The new organization, however, was a handmaiden of the Republican Party.

Richard J. Oglesby, Governor of Illinois, and John A. Logan, a prominent Illinois political-general, may be regarded as the Founding Fathers of the Grand Army of the Republic. Both men had been generals during the war, had been wounded, were politically ambitious, and hoped to realize their political goals by obtaining the support of Illinois veterans. From the minds of two other Illinois veterans, Oglesby and Logan fashioned the framework of the G.A.R.; during the Civil War two close friends, Chaplain

¹³ Cole, op. cit., p. 314; Fairall, op. cit., p. 72.

William J. Rutledge and Major B. F. Stephenson, had concocted an idea for a Union of post-war veterans. Chaplain Rutledge would have organized veterans along sentimental lines, dedicated to the noble principles of "liberty, equality, fraternity, and sympathy" with a "soldiers' reunion every full moon." The more earthy Stephenson agreed with his comrade that a veterans' organization should be founded, but insisted that "the motivating forces of benevolence and fraternity should be tempered with a dash of Republican politics."

Oglesby and Logan, while wholeheartedly sympathizing with Stephenson's concept of a veterans' society, realized that Rutledge's ideas were of vital importance. With the Grand Army "...professing benevolent purposes, the partisan aims of the G.A.R.'s leaders could be concealed from popular view." So while Logan travelled up and down the State of Illinois in the spring of 1866, pleading for Orphan Homes and asking for legislative support in behalf of his senatorial candidacy, Stephenson and his associates were drawing up the rough draft of the G.A.R.'s ritual, principles, and constitution in the offices of Colonel John Snyder, private secretary to Governor Oglesby. By the end of 1866, the Illinois G.A.R. was working for the political interests of Logan and Oglesby.¹⁴

14 Rulkotter, op. cit., pp. 63-97; Beath, op. cit., p. 35.

In the meantime a small group of Davenport veterans had banded together in the summer of 1865 and formed the "Old Soldiers' Association of Scott County, Iowa." Like the constitution of the G.A.R., the objects of the "Old Soldiers' Association" were to provide assistance to the disabled veterans, widows, and orphans, and to cherish the memories of by-gone days.¹⁵ When, in the early summer of 1866, the "Old Soldiers' Association" heard that the G.A.R. "was sweeping through Illinois and Wisconsin, and plans were being made to extend it to Minnesota, Indiana, and Ohio," the Association authorized Brigadier General Addison H. Sanders to visit B. F. Stephenson at Springfield, Illinois, for the purpose of bringing the Association into the G.A.R. Sanders' visit with Stephenson was fruitful. On July 12, 1866, a charter was issued by Stephenson to General Sanders and nine other members of the "Old Soldiers' Association," authorizing an Iowa Department of the G.A.R. to be organized at once. Twelve days later the "Association" reorganized, becoming Post Number 1, of the Department of Iowa. Sanders, who was elected Commander of both the post and department, immediately began to organize posts throughout the State. A Circular was sent to all parts of Iowa, announcing that

¹⁵ Harry Downer, History of Scott County, vol. I, p. 660.

the G.A.R. "'like a prairie-fire...has overrun certain states in the Northwest and now that fire is being kindled in Iowa.'"¹⁶ Bearing all organization fees, Sanders travelled up and down the State, exhorting Iowa veterans to join this benevolent organization, dedicated to the relief of widows, and orphans of veterans. So successful was Sanders that by September, at least forty-five posts had been organized and the provisional department was put on a permanent basis. In June, 1868, the Davenport Western Soldiers Friend reported that 138 G.A.R. posts were functioning in Iowa.¹⁷

While the G.A.R. maintained that it was exclusively a fraternal and charitable organization, viewers of the political scene could readily see that the G.A.R. was an organization of a decided political bent. At the very first encampment of the department, held at Davenport in September, 1866, Commander Sanders, at the

...earnest request of the delegates, and against his mild protest for such action...had ferried over the river into Illinois, the whole unanimous body to hear General Logan make a political speech in Rock Island. They were received with great applause and the Commander was invited to preside at the big meeting. But this honor he declined.¹⁸

16 Beath, op. cit., p. 553; Sanders quoted in Harry Downer, History of Scott County, vol. II, p. 676.

17 Beath, op. cit., p. 553; Davenport Western Soldiers Friend, June 6, 1866.

18 Addison Sanders, quoted in Downer, History of Scott County, vol. I, p. 676.

The Iowa delegates were delighted with the oratory of Logan. According to Colonel C. L. Godfrey, Senior Vice Commander of the Iowa Department, "...the utmost enthusiasm prevailed...and the speech...[was] one of the most eloquent...ever heard." The Iowa delegation was assured by Logan of the Republican Party's solicitude in matters dear to the hearts of veterans.¹⁹

By the spring of 1867, it was obvious that the Grand Army would be a factor in Iowa politics. As early as January, the editor of the Davenport Gazette, musing over possible Republican candidates for the coming gubernatorial election, decided that Brigadier General J. B. Leake, was "pre-eminently the man for the office." Leake, a charter member of the Iowa G.A.R. had the political advantage of having been a Confederate prisoner of war. Moreover, in September, 1866, General Leake had replaced General Sanders as Commander of the Iowa Department of the G.A.R.²⁰

19 Iowa State Register, (Des Moines), September 30, 1866. Hereafter, this newspaper will be cited as: Iowa State Register.

20 Davenport Gazette, January 2, 1867; Gue, op. cit., vol. IV, p. 165; Jacob Swisher, The Iowa Department of the Grand Army of the Republic, p. 30.

The Grand Army, however, was not willing to depend on sympathetic newspapers alone for the advancement of soldier causes. The Picket-Guard, official newspaper of the G.A.R., had been established in January at Davenport and by February was making its demands known. Modestly reminding the Republican Party that Governor Stone owed his "...election and re-election to the fact of his being a soldier," the Picket-Guard let it be known that the next governor of Iowa also "must be a soldier."²¹ However, the Picket-Guard was not yet willing to reveal what comrade it would prefer for the position.

Soon other high ranking soldier-politicians were being mentioned as potential gubernatorial material. Early in April the comrades of the G.A.R. post of Anamosa formally brought the name of their post commander, Brigadier General William T. Shaw, before the public as a competitor for the nomination.²² A few days later, at the second G.A.R. encampment, Shaw's chances for the nomination were enhanced when the Grand Council of the G.A.R. appointed him to succeed General Leake as Department Commander.²³

21 Picket-Guard, quoted in Davenport Gazette, February 6, 1867.

22 Anamosa Eureka, quoted in Davenport Gazette, April 24, 1867.

23 Davenport Democrat, April 18, 1867.

A third soldier possibility for the governorship was Brigadier General James A. Williamson who would become Commander of the G.A.R. in January, 1868.²⁴ Colonel Samuel Merrill, another comrade, let it be known that he too would welcome the nomination.²⁵ For good measure the Newton post of the G.A.R. publicly endorsed its commander, Major S. G. Smith, for lieutenant governor. Although the G.A.R. may not have been united in its choice for a governor, it was obvious that the Grand Army preferred Republican candidates.

By June, when the Republican State Convention met at Des Moines, the Grand Army had declared its official choice for the Republican governorship. At the doors of the convention hall, representatives of the Picket-Guard distributed over a thousand sheets of literature advising the delegates why they should select comrade Merrill. Under the chairmanship of General J. B. Leake, the convention proceeded to nominate Colonel Merrill on the second ballot over the opposition of two "civilian" candidates and General Williamson. Both General Shaw and General Leake withdrew their candidacies before the convention.²⁶

24 Davenport Gazette, April 17, 1867; Beath, op. cit., p. 554.

25 Davenport Gazette, April 17, 1867.

26 Davenport Gazette, June 26, 1867; Gue, op. cit., vol. III, p. 17.

Although the Grand Army was at least partially responsible for the nomination of Colonel Merrill, it was not content to rest on its laurels. Immediately after the Democrats nominated Charles Mason for governor, the Picket-Guard embarked on a course that was to characterize the 1867 gubernatorial campaign. Although Mason was fifty-seven years old in 1861, the Picket-Guard insisted that he had remained home in order to harass the war effort behind the lines. The fact that Mason attended West Point with Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee led the Picket-Guard to believe that Mason had directed the "fire in the rear". Contrasting Mason with Merrill, the Picket-Guard left no doubt where the G.A.R. stood with reference to the two candidates:

Mason is an able traitor, a cowardly coward.... We don't believe he is honest and the record that he has is black with desolation. How different with Merrill--thoroughly honest and upright; a record sparkling with the jewelry of noble deeds and heroic sacrifices for his country and her ideas. we shall adhere to him who but changes the stars and stripes for the platform they represent, and leads us as of old into the thickest of the fight-- and if past success is an omen of the future, we are on the road to a successful, overwhelming victory. Hurrah for Merrill!²⁷

In the meantime fiery editors of partisan newspapers quickly realized that the Grand Army was more than a

27 Picket-Guard, quoted in the Iowa City Republican, July 24, 1867.

fraternal or charitable organization. When the editor of Iowa's leading Democratic paper, the Dubuque Herald, flatly proclaimed that "little is known of the Grand Army of the Republic save it is an organization in the hands of political scoundrels, glittering in historic brass," the Burlington Hawkeye heatedly informed the public that when "...copper-heads and rebels...assert popular liberty with bayonets and villanous salt-petre...the Herald will learn more of the Grand Army of the Republic."²⁸ Again, when the Dubuque Herald found occasion to brand the G.A.R. in uncomplimentary terms, Edward Russell, editor of the Davenport Gazette, sprang to the G.A.R.'s defense. Rather pointedly Russell informed the Herald that "...everybody knows how the Democracy attempted to galvanize itself...with a pure soldier coating..." in the election of 1865, but now the Democratic Party was showing its true colors. "From feeding honey it has come to throwing mud."²⁹

Whether the individual posts of the Grand Army followed the lead of their organ, the Picket-Guard, in the gubernatorial campaign is not recorded in the newspapers.

28 Dubuque Herald and Burlington Hawkeye, quoted in Iowa City Republican, April 13, 1867.

29 Davenport Gazette, June 5, 1867.

However, the Picket-Guard had drawn the lines within which the campaign was to be fought. Catering to the militant susceptibility of the Iowa voter Radical Republican newspapers took up the Picket-Guard's cry and added one of their own. Chiding the Democrats for failing to include a single soldier on their ticket, Editor Brainard of the Iowa City Republican concluded that his direst suspicions were confirmed: "The Republican ticket represents loyalty and freedom; the democratic ticket, rebels and slavery."³⁰

On the eve of the election the Republicans made the supreme effort for the soldier vote. Maintaining that the whole campaign could be reduced to one issue, "Shall loyal men or rebels rule?" they shuddered to think what would happen should unredeemed rebels elect their "true and constant friend, Charles Mason." Only a patriotic and loyal element could save the government from Mason!

Every man who would see the rebels triumph... should vote for Charles Mason...but every man who would sustain the Boys in Blue who suffered and sacrificed so much, can only do so by voting for that gallant soldier, Colonel Sam Merrill.³¹

³⁰ Iowa City Republican, September 4, 1867.

³¹ Iowa City Republican, August 14, September 4, October 2, 1867; Davenport Gazette, August 28, September 4, 11, 16, 23, 30, 1867.

Radical Republicans could be highly gratified with the results of the election. Comrade Merrill won most handily with 27,000 votes to spare, as compared with Governor Stone's majority of 16,000 two years before. The lesson taught them by the Democrats two years before had been well learned. By extending generous sops in the direction of the "soldier vote"; by nominating soldier candidates for high political office; and by "waving the bloody shirt" thus rekindling the hatreds stemming from the war, Republicans fastened onto a method of campaigning that proved indestructible by their opponents. Strangely enough, the Democrats played into the hands of the Republicans. Rather than following up their technique of supporting soldier candidates as they had in 1865, the Democrats preferred to put their faith in "civilian" candidates. By contrast the Republicans could self-righteously point to the four soldiers on their ticket as an indication that only Republicans were fitted for the protection of the ex-soldier.³²

What role the Grand Army of the Republic played in causing a trend toward the Democratic Party in 1865 to shift toward the Republican in 1867 is difficult to

32 Fairall, op. cit., pp. 76-78.

measure. Yet, although "almost every member of it was a republican and the organization voted republican,"³³ the G.A.R. did not have the numerical strength to elect, by itself, Merrill over Mason. In January, 1868, three months after the gubernatorial election, only five thousand veterans were members of the Grand Army.³⁴ At a time, however, when the activities of rebels and "Copperheads" still were fresh in the public mind, the type of political propoganda issued by the Grand Army may have been the determining factor in the election.

Although the original Iowa Department of the G.A.R. had started with but ten charter members and one post in July, 1866, and had spread over eastern and central Iowa to include 130 posts in January, 1868, it was not destined to long remain a political and social force in Iowa society. At the annual encampment held at Davenport in January, 1868, only eight posts of the 130 then chartered were sufficiently interested to send delegates. The Assistant Adjutant General reported in August, 1869, that "...no general interest [is] manifested by the posts of the department." In January, 1870, it was reported that the strength of the order did not exceed 500 members. The

33 Addison H. Sanders quoted in Downer, op. cit., p. 676.

34 Department of Iowa, G.A.R., Proceedings, 1883, p. 10.

following year National Headquarters ordered the Iowa Department dissolved.³⁵

Certainly a major reason for the decline of the G.A.R. was its most active participation in both national and state partisan politics. As early as January, 1868, National authorities felt called upon to curtail Grand Army political activities by inserting into the G.A.R.'s constitution a paragraph to the effect that in no way should the Grand Army "use its influence...for partisan purposes." And, in the following year the National Encampment officially ruled that absolutely "...no discussion of partisan questions shall be permitted at any meeting of the Grand Army of the Republic."³⁶

Actions, however, spoke louder than words. On the national political front, men high in Grand Army circles were covering over the G.A.R. with an odor most offensive to the political nostrils of ardent Iowa Democrats. When John A. Logan, already Commander-in-Chief of the G.A.R., plunged the organization into the heart of the post-war fracas between President Andrew Johnson and

35 Ibid.; Beath, op. cit., p. 554. In the late sixties and early seventies, the Grand Army in all sections of the country for one reason and another declined almost to the point of non-existence. See Beath, op. cit., pp. 517, 524, 531, 548, 563.

36 Ibid., pp. 45, 98; Frank H. Heck, The Civil War Veteran in Minnesota Life and Politics, pp. 238-39.

his Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, anything that Grand Army comrades might say about the elevated, non-partisan plane on which they moved could not be taken at face value by a knowing public.³⁷

Thus when the G.A.R. post at Davenport wired Commander Logan in Washington offering to send 250 muskets to secure Stanton from the "treasonable designs" of President Johnson, the Davenport Democrat, branded the organization as a "Grand Army of Despotism, an organization that has been telling us for two years that its object was to take care of widows and orphans of deceased soldiers." Continuing in the same vein, the editor suggested that "it has probably got them all taken care of and now wants to make widows and orphans of those who will not submit to congressional usurpation."³⁸ Whether the Grand Army proclaimed it was or wasn't in politics, most Iowa Democrats no doubt regarded it as an organization that might well be disposed of.

There is some evidence that the comrades of the G.A.R. had come to believe that their leaders were little more than politicians who were using the organization as

37 Rulkotter, op. cit., p. 120-23; Beath, op. cit., p. 92-24; Heck, op. cit., pp. 243-46.

38 Davenport Democrat, March 5, 1868.

a political machine to further their own ambitions. A few days before the Iowa Republican convention of 1869, one comrade, although sympathizing with the Republican Party, hoped that the veterans who had served as privates or non-commissioned officers, would be given due attention when the nominations for high office were parcelled out. Explaining that the vast majority of the comrades who had served in the lower ranks were thrust aside by the "bre-vetted gentlemen...who could be secured by the thousands during the war," the comrade suggested that the G.A.R. might dissolve unless the enlisted men were accorded more substantial recognition by their leaders.³⁹

C. Augustus Haviland, editor of the Davenport Western Soldiers Friend and earnest supporter of the Grand Army, also took the leadership of the Grand Army to task. Haviland, who sent free copies of his newspaper-- in which he included information on how to secure government bounties at cheap rates-- to every G.A.R. post in Iowa, bitterly accused commanders of various posts of keeping the paper out of the hands of the members lest it give them too much information. Haviland concluded that many of the officials were claim agents who had organized posts for their own peculiar purposes.⁴⁰

39 Davenport Gazette, June 16, 1869.

40 Davenport Western Soldiers Friend, March 28, 1869.

Perhaps the attitude of the comrades themselves caused a public reaction detrimental to the organization. As "self-constituted saviors" of the Union, some comrades developed the idea that veterans should be allowed to control elective and appointive offices as "a reward for their wartime services". As early as June, 1867, a Marengo comrade warned the G.A.R. members that a generous public would not allow itself to be pressed much farther. Nor should it, declared the comrade. Four of the six State officials were veterans, while many of the county offices were held by veterans elected by the voluntary expression of the public.⁴¹

The actions taken by G.A.R. Post Number 3 of Iowa City in directing the affairs of the local post office illustrates the attitude of some G.A.R. members. In a petition signed by members of the post, Comrade E. A. Lucas, Postmaster of Iowa City, was accused of not abiding by the precepts of the G.A.R. According to the petition, Comrade Lucas forced a fellow comrade out of the employment of the post office by paying him the inadequate salary of four hundred dollars a year. Reminding Lucas that "the G.A.R. cordially aided you in getting the office..." the post urged that Comrade Rodgers be reinstated in his former

41 Davenport Gazette, June 5, 1867.

position "...with a reasonable increase in his old salary...."⁴²

Again when Iowa Citizens failed to turn out in sufficient numbers to make a financial success of a theatrical performance given by Post #3 to raise money for the relief of soldier orphans, the G.A.R. expressed its temperament by resolving:

That we wish our fellow citizens to understand that when we ask them for contributions to our charitable funds...we demand it as a right, that they should contribute to that fund.

And that before God they have no right to put us aside with any excuse whatever.... In the days when...their own persons were liable to the danger of the draft...they were...eloquent in their promises...to the family of the soldier...should he fall; and now that he has fallen, we, the Grand Army of the Republic, simply demand the fulfillment of that solemn covenant.... We shall steadily press upon their recollections...the covenants which were so eagerly made during the dark hours of the Republic and leave the answer of duty with their own souls.⁴³

If the sentiments of other posts scattered over the State were comparable to those expressed by the Iowa City post, it is quite possible that a public antithesis toward the organization was aroused. In the light of such an attitude perhaps it is not surprising that the first

42 Post #3, Iowa Department of the G.A.R., to Comrade E. A. Lucas, 1867, G.A.R. Letters, Iowa State Historical Society collection.

43 Iowa City State Press, April 3, 1867.

Department of the Iowa Grand Army of the Republic, which seemingly showed great promise for the future in 1866, was a thing of the past by 1869.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Davenport Gazette, June 30, 1869; Iowa State Register, August 7, 1869; Beath, op. cit., pp. 30, 98-99; Western Soldiers Friend, August 15, 1869; Swisher, op. cit., p. 28.

Chapter II

THE RESTORATION YEARS

Though the history of the original Grand Army of the Republic in Iowa was both ill-fated and short-lived, the idea of a union of veterans lingered on. Beginning in 1872 Grand Army officials on the national level initiated a program of planned encouragement calculated to rejuvenate interest in existing posts and to promote the founding of new posts throughout the land. Thus it was in 1872 that J. H. Goldron of Iowa City attempted to form a provisional department with headquarters in that city. To convince Iowa veterans, however, that the Grand Army had benefits to offer was not a job quickly done. Two years later the Iowa department included only three posts and fifty-eight members. In the meantime, the Iowa City post found itself unable to retain its membership and was forced to dissolve. At the same time the Commander-in-Chief complained that he was unable to learn that the Iowa department had an organized existence, with the exception of Torrence Post at Keokuk. By 1876 the department painfully had increased its strength by one post and thirty-four members. The latter seventies, however, saw the sustained efforts of Grand Army organizers

take effect. Membership increased from 119 in 1878 to 435 in 1879 - officers thereupon shifted the department from a provisional basis to one that was permanent.¹

Between 1880 and 1890 enlistments within the ranks of the G.A.R. reached ever-upward: February, 1882, 70 posts and 1,300 members were in good standing; April, 1883, 157 posts with 4,800 members in good standing; April, 1884, 16,500 members; in 1890, 435 Iowa post halls were filled with 20,324 dues-paying comrades. The task of organizing the Grand Army in Iowa was completed. Henceforth department officials placed little value upon efforts to induce more veterans to join - the period after 1890 was utilized in consolidating the membership. At the close of World War I, 6,201 comrades still were basking in the reflected memories of the War of the Rebellion.²

The problem of accounting for such an amazing restoration of the Grand Army in Iowa society is one that is not easily solved. Certainly the influence exerted from above by national G.A.R. leaders must have had a good deal of effect in encouraging the re-emergence of the

1 Iowa Department, Grand Army of the Republic, Journal of Proceedings, 1883, pp. 11, 13, 17; 1948, p. 106.

2 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1948, pp. 106-7; 1884, p. 102; 1885, p. 22.

Grand Army not only in Iowa but also in every other "Northern" State of the Union. 1890, the year in which the Grand Army in Iowa was most successful in terms of membership, saw the national organization of the G.A.R., 409,489 members strong, standing on the threshold of almost unlimited power and strength.³

Paralleling the development of the Grand Army of the Republic was the Grand Army's relentless campaign for a Federal pension system that would financially subsidize nearly every veteran in the Union. No doubt the passage of the Arrears of Pension Act of 1879 excited the Iowa Veteran's interest in belonging to an organization that would advance his economic well-being. One cannot avoid noticing the close relationship between the upward surging of G.A.R. membership and the Grand Army's mounting clamor for universal pensions during the decade of the eighties. By the same token, once a satisfactory pension policy was secured in the early nineties the interest of veterans in Grand Army activities slackened, membership declined regularly, and Grand Army influence on politics and society rapidly subsided. The lure of possible pensions to be realized through the Grand Army undoubtedly was reason enough to many an Iowa veteran to join the local

³ Department of Iowa, Journal, 1948, pp. 106-7.

Grand Army post.⁴

One should not assume, however, that all G.A.R. members enrolled within the Iowa Department were exclusively interested in adding their mite to the pension campaign. Adjutant Generals and Inspector-Generals, both secretarial officials in the hierarchy of leadership, forever complained about members who were shirking their responsibility to participate in meetings. Despite their annual words of encouragement set against a background of blue lamentations aimed at the conscience of a wayward or lax laity, department officials always were plagued with the task of whipping up enthusiasm in G.A.R. activities. In 1889 Department Inspector Thomas Beaumont reported that nearly sixty percent of the twenty thousand men in the Order failed to attend

4 In an effort to maintain the strength and influence of Iowa posts Commander J. J. Steadman, in 1892, urged that a vigorous campaign be instituted to recruit new members. Said Commander Steadman: "It is of vital importance to the Veterans of the State to enroll themselves at once as members of the Grand Army. Evidence is multiplying on every hand to prove that the enemies of the citizen soldier...are waging an unrelenting [sic] contest upon every veteran who receives a pension...." Despite Steadman's alleged fears, membership in the department dropped from 19,078 comrades in 1892 to 17,658 in 1893. Department of Iowa, Journal, 1893, p. 102; 1948, p. 106. For a development of this argument see chapter IV, "Pensions, the Breath of Life," in an M.A. thesis by Benton H. Wilcox, The Grand Army of the Republic, (University of Nebraska), 1930; see also: W. B. Glasson, Federal Military Pensions in the United States, pp. 182-93, 218.

the regular post meetings.⁵ For that matter many Iowa veterans felt in no way compelled to be associated with the Grand Army or with the advantages the Grand Army had to offer--pension, social, or fellowship. Of some thirty-nine thousand Civil War veterans living in Iowa in 1886 more than twenty-two thousand preferred not to be members of the Grand Army. Shortly after the turn of the century only eleven thousand veterans of the twenty-five thousand living in the State were comrades in the organization.⁶

In the attempt to arrive at an explanation of the Grand Army's development within Iowa society one should not discount the labors of local and state politicians. Of the forty men who served as Commanders of the Iowa Department between 1870 and 1918, at least twenty-two held at one time or another some elective public office; one served as Lieutenant Governor of Iowa, another as Chief Justice of the Iowa Supreme Court, and at least nine others held elective office in the local community.⁷

5 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1885, p. 22; 1886, p. 57; 1889, p. 40; 1892, pp. 22-23; 1894, pp. 18-20.

6 William L. Alexander, List of Ex-Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Living in Iowa, 1886, p. viii; Census of Iowa, 1905, pp. lxxiii-lxxiv; Department of Iowa, Journal, 1948, pp. 106-7.

7 Jacob Swisher, The Iowa Department of the Grand Army of the Republic, pp. 58-114, passim; Department of Iowa, Journal, 1948, pp. 106-7; County Histories too numerous to cite were also consulted.

Obviously Grand Army leaders were unable to urge openly that the organizations be patterned along political lines for the benefit of any one political party or for any political group of men. Judging, however, by the political activities engaged in by the Grand Army rank and file headed by its Republican leaders in the elections of the eighties, one must admit that political motivation was a factor in the growth and development of the Grand Army in Iowa. A later chapter deals more expansively with this topic.

In his study of the Minnesota Civil War veterans, Frank Heck advances a reasonable supposition that the remarkable growth of the Grand Army may be attributed partially to the veterans' desire for an "escape" from the hum-drum of everyday living in an "unimaginative" society. Thus, "the elements of danger and adventure in their Army experience may well have become increasingly satisfactory, in retrospect, to men in their forties and fifties, who found themselves living fundamentally drab and unexciting lives as they followed the routine of the farm, the factory, or the store. Possibly the Grand Army, with its stirring encampments, parades, and campfires, reminded men who found the present unheroic, and not always even social, that in the past they had been

heroes, or at any rate comrades."⁸

Certainly the attractions of fellowship and a "good time" offered by G.A.R. membership must have enticed many veterans to the Grand Army. As far as can be ascertained two of the first commanders of the reorganized department, James C. Parrott of Keokuk and A. A. Perkins of Burlington, both merchants with no political ambitions, mentioned to potential comrades neither pensions nor politics as reasons for joining the G.A.R. On the contrary, to allay any suspicion among potential comrades, both commanders emphasized that political goals and party ties were beyond the province of G.A.R. activities.⁹

Consequently the earlier encampments of the Grand Army were little more than small social gatherings. The department records for 1875 and 1876 show that nothing more than "an oyster supper was served" or "a repast was partaken of and the remainder of the evening devoted to social enjoyment." After the fourth annual encampment, the Burlington Hawkeye reported to its readers that the "Grand Army of the Republic had a social meeting Saturday

8 Frank Heck, The Civil War Veteran in Minnesota Life and Politics, p. 24; Department of Iowa, Journal, 1882, pp. 78-79; 1886, p. 45; 1891, p. 38; Iowa State Register, February 5, 1880; April 24, 1884; April 8, 1890.

9 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1883, pp. 28-29; Iowa State Register, January 23, 1879.

evening at Dr. Virgil's office" and "were handsomely banquetted by Major A. A. Perkins, provisional department commander."¹⁰

By 1879 exuberant comrades were ready to expand their encampment activities. Meeting at Des Moines on the twenty-second of January, the fifth annual encampment convened at 7:30 p.m. and broke up in the small hours of the next morning. In the meantime, comrades conducted official business, listened to as many as ten speakers unwind on subjects ranging from "The Loyal Women of the War" to "A Review of the Battle of Shiloh," heard the "Orphans Quartette" render innumerable selections, witnessed four squad drills, adjourned for dinner, and managed to get in a few hours of "promenading" before "taps" sounded at 4 a.m.¹¹

Beginning in the mid-eighties and extending through the century, some Grand Army social activities bore a family complexion. In 1883 the G.A.R. on the national level took steps to organize the feminine relatives and wives of Grand Army members into a sister-auxiliary society, the Women's Relief Corps. By the end of the year

10 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1883, pp. 19, 26; Burlington Hawkeye, January 24, 1878.

11 Iowa State Register, January 24, 1879.

six corps were operating in Iowa; in 1885 fifty-two corps were auxiliaries to as many Iowa Grand Army posts; 8,616 W.R.C. members and 258 corps were reported for 1895.¹²

So successful were the ladies in promoting G.A.R. interests and in "getting out" their husbands to post meetings that one G.A.R. Commander asked the department encampment to enact a rule requiring each post to organize a corps of women. For one reason or another, however, the encampment delegates failed to comply with the Commander's request.¹³

Once the local W.R.C. was organized the ladies generally met simultaneously with the men of the G.A.R. Upon completion of their respective and separate business, both the post and corps meetings were adjourned and a social hour of "campfiring" and recreation followed. By 1895 the Iowa W.R.C. had assumed outright the Grand Army's task of raising money to relieve destitute comrades, veterans, and veterans' families.¹⁴

With the assistance of the W.R.C., Grand Army members expanded their program of social entertainment.

12 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1884, p. 87; 1885, p. 88; 1895, pp. 7-9.

13 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1896, p. 16.

14 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1884, p. 37; 1885, p. 88; 1893, p. 47; 1894, p. 60.

As a rule Washington's birthday provided an occasion for celebration within the ranks of the G.A.R. In 1882, the Maxwell Post celebrated the revered occasion by treating the community to an evening of dining and dancing. By 1889 the practice of so honoring the first President was so common among Iowa posts that the Department Commander ordered all posts to arrange the "usual details" of their campfires to celebrate the birthday of Washington.

Posts like that of Manning sponsored reunions of veterans, reunions complete with fried chicken, speeches, sham battles, and free passes to county fairs; plays and minstrels, with the cast drawn from the veteran and his family, were staged to raise money for post furnishings, charity, and incidental expenses; pie and ice cream suppers were promoted for no excuse other than enjoying food, gossip, and companionship.¹⁵

To the G.A.R. member, however, the important social activity of his organization came in early or mid-summer when the department held its annual State convention or encampment. Grand Army comrades literally deserted

15 Iowa State Register, November 5, 1879; February 24, 1882; April 23, September 4, 1885; Department of Iowa, Journal, 1889, p. 133. A more adequate treatment of G.A.R. fellowship on the local level may be found in Heck, op. cit., pp. 33-45.

their local post halls and descended on the host city for a two or three day session of holiday merry-making. In 1892, for example, more than fifteen thousand of Iowa's some twenty thousand G.A.R. members were guests of Des Moines for the sixteenth annual encampment.¹⁶

At these encampments convening comrades regularly were greeted in advance by effusive newspaper editors. Department officers and civic leaders were on hand to extend the heartiest of welcomes,¹⁷ gigantic parades were mapped out, evening "campfires" of elaborate entertainment were planned,¹⁸ and politicians bloomed.¹⁹ Most of all, the encampment provided its delegates the

16 Iowa State Register, April 8, 1890.

17 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1885, pp. 4-8, 22-28; 1886, pp. 8-21; 1891, pp. 39, 46-48; 1893, pp. 6-18; 1897, pp. 1-6, 1899, pp. 1-10, 88, 98, 104, 127; 1902, pp. 13-24, 144-66.

18 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1889, p. 139; 1904, p. 154; 1905, p. 31; Iowa State Register, February 5, 1880; April 5, 1883; April 6, 7, 8, 1890; Burlington Post, April 13, 1889; Iowa City Republican, April, 1887; Cedar Rapids Gazette, May 20, 1903; Oskaloosa Herald, May 17, 1905; Des Moines Register and Leader, June 7, 1904.

Occasionally such campfires produced a good deal of excitement within the G.A.R. At the 1892 encampment, when Colonel D. B. Daily bluntly told his audience of Iowa veterans that nine of the twelve principal battles of the Civil War were fought by the Army of the Potomac, the "western veterans interrupted him with all kinds of epithets and the shouts of rivals made a pandemonium." After the chairman achieved a measure of order, the undiplomatic Colonel Daily proceeded to break

the opportunity to renew friendships and to forget the responsibilities awaiting back home; like a small boy fingering a loose tooth comrades could zestfully remind themselves of the days when they marched shoulder to shoulder against a real enemy and suffered the "tortures of the damned" at the hands of the Confederacy. The official business of the encampment, to the great majority of visiting G.A.R. members, was merely incidental. With no stretch of the imagination it may be said that the G.A.R. Encampments were the "Granddaddies" of later American Legion Conventions. The pattern was set.²⁰

up the campfire by asserting that out of the forty-five regiments that lost more than 200 men, the Army of the Potomac had forty-three, compared to the western army's paltry two. Iowa City Republican, May 18, 1892; Iowa State Register, May 13, 1892.

- 19 Politicians of every rank and color flocked to the annual sessions. In the earlier years, the encampments particularly welcomed such men as Senators William Allison and James Wilson, and W. W. Belknap, member of President Grant's ill-famed cabinet. As the years passed Johnathan Dolliver and Albert Cummins, neither a veteran, were in great demand as speakers at the Grand Army encampments. James B. Weaver, a member of the Grand Army, also was a favorite orator.
- 20 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1886, p. 87. At the annual encampment of 1886, one sympathetic member of the Women's Relief Corps had an opportunity to witness and record a scene among Grand Army comrades that "...showed...dignity at a discount and justice and judgement bending beneath a load of frolicking humanity.

It was a general doing duty as a cavalry horse for a captain, and 'toting' him down the aisle. Gravity succumbed and a general uproar followed. As night grew apace a hunt was made for overcoats, to use for pillows. One strong temperance man from Des Moines could not find his, because he could not find one with a bottle in it, and a general hunt ensued among the pockets for the lost bottle.... Altogether the Grand Army boys strike you as a band of lovers, each seeming to feel they cannot do too much for the other, and the way they find all manner of gentle excuses to soften the rough exterior that is sometimes exhibited among their numbers is lovely to behold." Iowa State Register, April 24, 1886.

Chapter III

THE TANGIBLE GOALS

The Grand Army, some twenty years following the war, awoke to the realization that many former comrades-in-arms were not faring so generously in terms of economics at the hands of Iowa society. For several years members of local G.A.R. posts scattered throughout the State had faithfully assumed the fraternal and charitable chore of supporting and financing their less fortunate comrades. By the mid-eighties, however, in light of the fact that Time would increase the number of indigent and feeble veterans, sentiment developed within post halls to the effect that some other provisions should be made to meet the needs of deserving comrades. Why should not these worthy veterans "be provided with a home by the Government they risked their lives to save." The 1885 encampment ordered the appointment of a special committee of eleven to draft and present to the next legislature a bill providing for an appropriation of "not less than one hundred thousand dollars" for the establishment of a soldiers' home.¹

¹ Department of Iowa, Journal, 1883, pp. 104, 126-27; 1884, p. 22; 1885, p. 22; 1886, p. 94.

Under the leadership of A. M. Whaley in the Senate and W. H. Redman in the House, both men members of the G.A.R., the General Assembly responded to the Grand Army's wishes with but six dissenting votes in the House and unanimous consent in the Senate. The Legislature agreed to appropriate seventy-five thousand dollars for the erection of the home and twenty-five thousand dollars for its maintenance for the first year. On the thirty-first of March, 1886, the bill became law.²

After the bill was signed, however, an unexpected difficulty arose in locating the home. The law had provided that the House and Senate should ballot in joint convention until the location of the home was decided. Lobbyists were at work. No less than twenty-two patriotic cities and towns offered free land and other enticing benefits for the privilege of locating the soldier's home in twenty-two different cities and towns. After sitting for two days and balloting sixty-one times, the joint convention dissolved, willing to wash its hands of the whole affair.³

2 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1886, p. 95; Laws of Iowa, 1886, pp. 61-62.

3 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1886, p. 95; Journal of the Iowa House of Representatives, 1886, pp. 289-618.

The Grand Army was disgusted; the Department Commander urged the members of the G.A.R. to speak in no uncertain terms. By the end of April the House and Senate received a flood of some two hundred and fifty petitions from irate comrades demanding that the location of the home be determined at once. Soon thereafter, a bill was passed directing the governor to set up a commission for the purpose of selecting a site for the Iowa Soldiers' Home. By April, 1887, the Department Commander reported to the annual encampment that the soldiers' home at Marshalltown would open its doors to disabled and dependent ex-soldiers and sailors in the following September.⁴

The satisfaction realized in establishing a soldiers' home merely served to stimulate further the Grand Army's drive to care for its own at State expense. Plans and specifications drawn up by veterans for hospital facilities adjacent to the Marshall town Soldiers' Home were accepted and implemented by State authorities. Appropriations were regularly sought and granted to improve and expand physical accommodations at the Soldiers' Home. At the request of the Grand Army, the Legislature agreed that residents of the Home should not be required

⁴ Department of Iowa, Journal, 1886, pp. 52, 94; 1887, p. 17; Laws of Iowa, 1886, p. 17; Journal of the Iowa House of Representatives, 1886, pp. 103-776, passim; Journal of the Iowa Senate, 1886, pp. 127-627, passim.

to part with any portion of their Federal pensions for the privilege of living on public funds. Moreover, family dwelling units were erected on the Soldiers' Home grounds where homeless veterans with wives might live out their declining years in rest and comfort.⁵

For those veterans who could not support themselves but refused to submit to the "indignities" of living at the Marshalltown home, the Grand Army persuaded the legislature to enact a second system of public relief. Thus, in 1889, the Twenty-Second General Assembly --made up of fifty-six Civil War veterans and ninety-three non-veterans-- authorized County Supervisors to set up a Soldiers Relief Commission to administer relief funds, collected through local taxation, to indigent veterans outside the soldiers' home. In 1891, the Department Commander announced that during the preceding year, seventy-eight counties distributed nearly ninety thousand dollars to needy veterans and their families, thus partially relieving the G.A.R. posts from the Herculean task of supporting their comrades.⁶

A third proposal for relief of a sort to veterans who might in the foreseeable future become objects of

5 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1887, p. 102; 1891, p. 18; 1892, pp. 13-14, 65-66; 1896, pp. 69-72; 1900, p. 21.

6 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1890, p. 20; 1891, p. 133; Laws of Iowa, 1888, pp. 140-141, Iowa Official Register, 1886, pp. 60-67.

public charity was set forth officially in 1888 when Commander Tuttle urged that G.A.R. comrades and veterans be given preference over non-veterans in securing employment in both State and Federal government positions. Resorting to the familiar brief that such consideration had been faithfully earned, and therefore justly due, on the field of civil conflict, the Grand Army soon advocated that all veterans should receive prior treatment in the matter of public employment and political patronage. It was not until the twentieth century, however, that the G.A.R. was able to persuade the Legislature to see the matter through the eyes of the Grand Army.

Pointing out that President Theodore Roosevelt had in an executive order given qualified veterans of the Civil War preference in securing Federal positions, Department Commander George Metzger called upon the Legislature to enact a similar measure for Iowa in 1902. Finally, in 1904, a law was spread on the books giving qualified Iowa veterans preference in public employment. Coming so late in the productive years of the veterans' lives the preference law was of little practical use to aging comrades.⁷

⁷ Iowa State Register, December 4, 1883; Department of Iowa, Journal, 1888, pp. 12-13; 1901, pp. 28-30; 1902, pp. 21-22; 1904, p. 18.

Nevertheless, the Grand Army meant to retain the recognition it so laboriously had acquired. When in the case of Comrade C. H. Shaw versus the Council of Marshalltown, the law was declared unconstitutional by the Marshalltown District Court, the Grand Army carried the case to the Iowa Supreme Court, where the District Court's decision was reversed. Thus "the will of the loyal people..." of Iowa had been upheld. The fact that Comrade Charles A. Clark gratuitously donated his attorney services to the defense of the Grand Army's case before the Court probably accounts for the department electing him commander in the following year. Clark was the only Democrat to serve as commander of the G.A.R. in Iowa.⁸

While obtaining beneficent legislation for living comrades the Grand Army at the same time was wringing from the State a system of public welfare that subsidized the veteran's widow and orphan. State legislation fostered by the G.A.R. even guaranteed the impoverished comrade in death a modest headstone and adequate burial. And, through the efforts of the G.A.R., Iowa Regimental battle flags of Civil War vintage found a final resting place in hermetically sealed glass cases

⁸ Department of Iowa, Journal, 1905, pp. 18-19; 1906, pp. 46-47.

in the rotundra of the Iowa capitol building. To the tune of nearly two hundred thousand dollars an imposing memorial shaft was erected on State House grounds in mute testimonial of the sacrifices made and blood shed by sons of Iowa in the fraternal strife. In 1902, the G.A.R. secured from the Legislature another one hundred and fifty thousand dollars to erect monuments at Vicksburg in honor of Iowa soldiers who participated in that famous seige. "Imprisonment for a term of not to exceed thirty days, or a fine not to exceed twenty dollars" was the penalty meted out by a Grand Army-minded Legislature for persons illegally wearing the G.A.R. badge or attempting to obtain under false pretense any assistance in the name of the G.A.R. Spurred on by two comrade-legislators the General Assembly agreed to finance the compilation of a Roster listing the military data of every living veteran in the State of Iowa.⁹ By 1892 so healthy a respect did the Legislature have for G.A.R. feelings that it agreed to turn over to the Grand Army a room in the capitol building to be used as permanent headquarters for the G.A.R. department. In 1894 the State Legislature set a bi-annual precedent when it saw

⁹ Laws of Iowa, 1884, p. 172; 1888, pp. 139, 172; Department of Iowa, Journal, 1889, pp. 21, 69; 1890, pp. 22, 65, 75, 77-86; 1892, p. 12, 1895, p. 16; 1902, p. 14.

fit to appropriate fifteen hundred dollars for the maintenance and furnishing of the room.¹⁰

In general terms the Grand Army encountered little difficulty in convincing Iowa law-makers that G.A.R. desires should necessarily be satisfied. Usually legislators were willing to bend over backwards in granting the Grand Army all it asked, and more. Only in those situations where the members of the G.A.R. failed to agree among themselves on the matters of legislative goals did the successive legislatures, nearly always of Republican persuasion and heavily sprinkled with men affiliated with the G.A.R., prove obstinate.¹¹

To the average G.A.R. member and to the department organization, the State Legislature was of less practical value in realizing the Grand Army's primary

10 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1892, pp. 70-71; Journal of the Iowa Senate, 1894, p. 323.

11 When the measure calling for the furnishing of the Grand Army's new headquarters came up before the Senate, that body approved by a vote of 28 to 4. Two of the four dissenters were Democrats, while one of the two Republicans was Warren Garst, a member of the Grand Army. Writing to a close friend, Commander "Phil" Schaller revealed his disapproval: "Was sorry to see that our senator Garst was one of the two Republicans who voted against it. I wrote him a letter and made it very expressive. I am now sorry that I did not vote for his Democratic opponent; he could not have done worse, and might have done better." Commander Philip Schaller to Adjutant General A. L. Leonard, March 5, 1894, G.A.R. Papers.

legislative objectives -- Federal pensions to all Civil War veterans, disabled or no. As a matter of fact in its earlier years when most comrades still were in the prime of manhood the Grand Army bothered itself only very slightly with the subject. Although it was in 1879 that the proposal of Henry J. Cummings, an Iowa congressman and member of the Grand Army, was enacted into the famous Arrears of Pensions Act, the Iowa department was not sufficiently interested to make any official comments on pensions until 1882. Even then, the encampment merely expressed its hope that Congress would not heed those people who insisted that the Arrears Act should be wiped off the statute books. A year later, although enough interest had been kindled among Grand Army members to warrant the appointment of a standing committee on pensions, the encampment delegates saw no point in demanding a more liberal policy, but instead stamped their approval on the Arrears Act of 1879.¹²

By 1882, however, James and Richard Clarkson, co-editors of the Iowa State Register and political dictators of the Republican machine in Iowa,¹³ were telling

12 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1883, pp. 82, 104-6, 126; Iowa State Register, March 1, 1882; William H. Glasson, Federal Military Pensions in the United States, p. 158.

13 Cyrenus Cole, Iowa Through the Years, pp. 416-17, 397.

the Grand Army that "Southern traitors" were again in control at Washington and were doing their level best to deprive the disabled Iowa veterans of their pitifully small pensions.¹⁴ A year later the Register, after rolling out the editorial red carpet to the G.A.R. encampment convening at Des Moines, asserted that the "Pension Roll is the Republic's Honor Roll," held that the government's first duty was to reward its saviors, "even should it ...take the last cent of money from its deep coffers, and compel the levy of more tax still to pay it...." Nor did the Clarkson brothers ask the G.A.R. to lead where the Register would not follow. The Register demanded that every veteran of the Union Army over fifty years old be pensioned for his services. The Grand Army encampment was deeply gratified with such an "able article" and tendered its "sincere thanks" to the Iowa State Register. Though the department did not immediately accept the Register's arguments, it was soon to stand hand in hand with the paper in the matter of pensions, and the Register hoped in matters political.¹⁵

Four years before the Iowa department went on

14 Iowa State Register, February 23, 1882.

15 Iowa State Register, April 4, 1883; Department of Iowa, Journal, 1883, p. 129.

record as favoring any pension revision upward, an Iowa Legislature passed a resolution directing Iowa Congressmen to use their best efforts to repeal the Arrears Act "amendment" that limited arrears pensions to applicants who filed their claims prior to July, 1880.¹⁶ Early in the eighties, the Grand Army on the national level made ready to secure pension reform. As early as 1881, representatives of the G.A.R. were authorized to facilitate liberal pension administration in Washington. Beginning in 1883, a standing committee of five, known as the Committee on Pensions, was annually appointed by the Commander-in-Chief to press pension legislation on the United States Congress.¹⁷

Very shortly thereafter the Iowa department of the G.A.R. reconsidered by swinging into step with the national policy of demanding more and better pensions. In April, 1884, the encampment asked that Congress repeal the arrears limitation and extend a pension to every "... last veteran until he has been placed beneath the sod." By 1886, so ardent and forceful were Iowa Grand Army demands for a more liberal pension program, that Governor Larrabee, in his inaugural address, asked that the Federal

16 Laws of Iowa, 1880, p. 183; William H. Glasson, op. cit., pp. 172, 173.

17 Glasson, op. cit., p. 186.

government do justice to "...every soldier and sailor who staked his life for the preservation of the Union."¹⁸

At the encampment of 1886, however, the Department Commander advised the delegates that undue agitation for an extreme pension system would turn public and congressional opinion against the Grand Army with the result that nothing would be gained. Rather, said Commander Manning, the Iowa department should adopt the more sensible policy of the National Pension Committee: "...to only ask for what they think they can get, and as fast as they get what they ask for, to apply for something else." The encampment took heed. Accordingly, the Commander was instructed to telegraph Comrade J. S. Struble, Iowa Congressman, to work for the passage of any pension measure that the G.A.R. Committee on Pensions might deem wise.¹⁹

By February, 1887, it looked like the Grand Army's fondest dreams had come true. Congress had passed a Dependent Pension Bill that would grant a pension to veterans who were mentally or physically disabled, provided they were dependent on daily labor for a livelihood. When President Cleveland vetoed the measure, the bottom of the G.A.R. world seemingly dropped out.²⁰

¹⁸ Department of Iowa, Journal, 1884, p. 23; Iowa State Register, January 15, 1886.

¹⁹ Department of Iowa, Journal, 1886, pp. 50, 114.

²⁰ Glasson, op. cit., pp. 208-217.

"G. Cleveland, late of Buffalo," came in for a good deal of abuse at the department's annual encampment of 1887. Denying that they were "pension grabbers, treasury raiders, or the scum of the earth," and asserting that they were "the peers of any...men on earth," the G.A.R. delegates believed that they were the victims of the "...condensed venom of twenty years of suppressed treason and disloyalty." Believing that "God could not forgive a Nation guilty of such ingratitude," the encampment expressed its "emphatic disapprobation of President Cleveland's veto of the Dependent Pension Bill."²¹

But however disagreeable the action of Cleveland may have been to the G.A.R., it was able to do little more than protest. Not until 1890, two years after the defeat of President Cleveland in 1888--a defeat which the Iowa Grand Army undoubtedly helped to effect--²² was the G.A.R. vindicated by the passage of a pension law similar to the one vetoed in 1887.²³

After the passage of the Dependent Pension Act of 1890, Department Commander Mason Mills, suggested that the

21 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1887, pp. 15, 20-21, 91-102; Iowa City Republican, April 27, 1887; Iowa State Register, April 22, 1887.

22 Donald L. McMurry, "The Soldier Vote in Iowa in the Election of 1888," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, vol. 18, pp. 335-356.

23 Glasson, op. cit., pp. 231-36.

time had come when the Grand Army, as a body "...should no longer pass resolutions making sweeping demands...and charging Congress and the people are neglecting us." With the government granting a monthly check to the veteran's widow, to the dependent parents of deceased veterans, and to all honorably discharged veterans "suffering" from mental or physical disability incapacitating them from manual labor to earn a living, the Grand Army's former position was no longer tenable.²⁴

Commander Mills probably echoed the sentiments of his department. Encampments after 1890 busied themselves with matters that commanded more interest. Now and then a skeptical comrade thought he detected the "damnable work of the spy and confederate in the pension bureau," but with 37,934 Iowa pensioners receiving a total of 35,594,059 from a grateful government in 1895, the Iowa department did not believe that any "further demands could be reasonably sustained."²⁵

24 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1891, p. 15.

25 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1893, pp. 12, 102; 1896, pp. 28-30; Iowa Official Register, 1896, p. 126.

Chapter IV

THE GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC IN IOWA POLITICS

After its reorganization in 1872 until the mid-eighties when the G.A.R. felt the need to promote political legislation in the interest of veterans, the Iowa Grand Army generally remained aloof from partisan politics. During the late seventies and early eighties, G.A.R. officials constantly announced for all to hear that the Grand Army was first and foremost a fraternal and social organization. By 1879 retiring Commander A. A. Perkins expressed the opinion that the newly organized department had conducted itself in such a manner that no longer was the G.A.R. subjected to the usual accusations of political prejudice. Not only were Republican veterans joining the order but also great numbers of Greenbackers and Democrats were enlisting in the Grand Army. Properly qualified veterans of all political hues were welcome to seek haven and solace under the auspices of the G.A.R., said Commander Perkins.¹

1 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1883, pp. 28, 41; Iowa State Register, January 24, 1879.

When in 1879 the Grand Army escorted ex-President Grant across the State, the pleasant feature surrounding the occasion was that both Republican and Democrat comrades participated in Grant's reception. The only fault that the Iowa State Register, could find with the Grand Army's reception of Grant at Albia, was that Colonel Peter Ballingall, who had decorated that city for the occasion, was a prominent Democrat.²

By 1883 the G.A.R. was assuring itself of a position of consequence in Iowa. From a membership of 3,818 in 1882, G.A.R. numerical strength soared to 11,001 in 1883. Although Commander George Hogin professed to believe that the new comrades had joined for the "pleasure of association," he nevertheless advised the encampment to select its officers with care. Warning that politicians, who aspired for "positions for the honor they confer," would use the G.A.R. for partisan purposes, Commander Hogin hoped the G.A.R. would not repeat its mistakes of the sixties.³

Commander Hogin had cause for anxiety. There could be little doubt that the editors of the Iowa State Register hoped that the G.A.R. would again align itself

2 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1883, p. 50; Iowa State Register, November 6, 1879.

3 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1883, pp. 104, 106; 1948, p. 106.

with the Republican Party. As early as 1880, editors James and Richard Clarkson - the latter, a veteran, who had seen to it that he was a charter member of Crocker Post #12⁴ - had appealed to the infant G.A.R. to support James Garfield in the presidential election of 1880.⁵ At the 1881 encampment, Governor John H. Gear had broken the G.A.R. rules by making a semi-political speech before the G.A.R. delegates.⁶

No doubt Commander Hogin saw partisan elements afoot within the 1883 encampment itself. The encampment went on record as endorsing the Iowa State Register as a true friend of the G.A.R.; it was a newspaper that would fight for the "boys in Blue" when the chips were down. At the same encampment, the delegates elected John B. Cooke - an ex-carpetbag senator of the North Carolina legislature⁷ - to the high office of Department Commander. During Cooke's administration the Iowa Depart-

4 Johnson Brigham, Des Moines, Vol I, p. 380.

5 Iowa State Register, June 2, 11, 1880.

6 Iowa State Register, January 29, 1881.

7 Jacob Swisher, The Iowa Department of the Grand Army of the Republic, p. 71.

ment of the Grand Army unofficially entered the forbidden garden of politics.⁸

Aware of its ever-increasing position of importance the G.A.R. membership displayed its wants before the eyes of Iowa citizens and lawmakers. When 3,546 comrades, representing ninety-four posts, drew up petitions asking Congress to donate 160 acres of land to every veteran, Department Commander Cooke, a Republican Iowa Legislature, and the Democrat party, resolved that Congress should accede to the "just" demands of the Iowa G.A.R.⁹ Although the desired land laws were never secured, the Grand Army was certain that politicians would respond with rapt attention whenever the G.A.R. murmured.

1884

In 1884, the Grand Army took time out from its fraternal activities to call for the enactment of several political measures. In addition to the request for land legislation, the 1884 encampment asked for a Soldiers' Home; for the repeal of the limitations on the Arrears of Pensions Act; and for a service pension to all honorably discharged veterans.¹⁰

8 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1883, pp. 129-130.

9 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1884, pp. 23-24, 37; Burlington Hawkeye, May 1, 1884; Laws of Iowa, 1884, Laws of Iowa, 1884, pp. 232-233.

10 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1884, pp. 22-23.

Politicians sat up and took notice.

At the State Republican convention of 1885, no less than three prominent G.A.R. men hoped to capture the prize gubernatorial nomination, ostensibly to facilitate the passage of the Grand Army's legislative program. General Josiah Given, later to become Department Commander, found that his support for the nomination was negligible and withdrew from the race at the last minute; Captain Albert Head, G.A.R. spokesman in the legislature, had little support; but Captain J. A. T. Hull, having the support of the Grand Army Advocate, official G.A.R. newspaper,¹¹ made a strong bid for the nomination. Nominated by W. T. Wilkinson, editor of the Grand Army Advocate, Hull was supported by A. A. Anderson, J. N. Rumble, D. B. Henderson, George D. Perkins, Joseph Sweney, and Issac Struble, all G.A.R. men who were or would be Iowa Congressmen.¹²

Although a non-veteran, William Larree, who was supported by the Clarksons, won the nomination, the soldier element was placated when the convention nominated Hull for Lieutenant governor, and John Akers, another member of the Grand Army for state superintendent

11 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1883, p. 129.

12 Iowa State Register, August 2, 28, 1885.

of education. Then, too, the convention adopted a platform exclusively designed for the veteran. The Southern "Rebels" were chastized for depriving the Negro of the ballot; President Cleveland was scolded for removing Union soldiers from public employment; a high tariff was called for so that the veteran might receive a pension, and "...the action of the Grand Army of the Republic...asking that the legislature...make an appropriation for the establishment...of a home for disabled volunteer soldiers and sailors..." was heartily endorsed.¹³

In the following campaign, the Civil War was made the main issue. The sixties returned. Democrats were cast as soldier haters because no veteran was represented on the Democrat ticket. As contrasted with William Larrabee, who had "reluctantly" remained at home during the Civil War because he was blind in one eye, Charles Whiting, the Democrat gubernatorial candidate, was portrayed as a slave owner and Copperhead who was doing his best to destroy the veteran. Even the Grand Army Advocate did grass root work for the patriotic Larrabee, while General James Geddes told assembled comrades that the "bloody shirt" method of

¹³ Iowa State Register, August 28, 29, 1885.

campaigning was necessary to defeat "traitors" and insure material recognition of Grand Army demands.¹⁴

Although the Grand Army, as an organization, never publicly nominated nor officially endorsed a political candidate, there is little doubt that members of the organization were instrumental in defeating the Democrat ticket in 1885. In the October elections Larrabee's majority over Whiting amounted to less than seven thousand votes. It is probably not too much to say that the G.A.R. was the determining factor. The ballots of less than forty percent of the G.A.R. members were enough to account for Larrabee's winning margin.¹⁵

Immediately after the election the editor of the Iowa City State Press pontificated that while the G.A.R. contained many comrades able to think for themselves, the organization, as a whole, was manipulated in the interests of the Republican Party.¹⁶

14 Iowa State Register, August 20, October 1, 1885; Grand Army Advocate, quoted in Iowa State Register, September 6, 1885; Iowa City State Press, October 14, 21, 1885.

15 Iowa Official Register, 1886, p. 89. G.A.R. records show that 17,371 veterans were members of the G.A.R. in 1885. Department of Iowa, Journal, 1948, p. 160.

16 Iowa City State Press, October 21, 1885.

Certainly the political fortunes of the Republican Party were on the wane in 1885. Only two years before, with little, if any, political aid from the newly organized Grand Army of the Republic, the Republicans swept into office by a majority of twenty thousand votes. In 1885, however, farmer discontent with the conservative economic policies of the leaders of the Republicans and the Iowa-German voters disgust with a recently enacted Prohibition law nearly cost the Republicans the election.¹⁷ Only by appealing to the "soldier-vote" through the Grand Army of the Republic was the Republican Party able to stave off defeat. Had not President Cleveland vetoed the Dependent Pension Bill, Iowa Republicans would very probably have met defeat in the gubernatorial election of 1887.

At the Grand Army encampment of 1887 the G.A.R. delegates were in an extremely bitter mood. Although the Rules and Regulations of the organization denied the G.A.R. the pleasure of officially denouncing the President,¹⁸ nothing could prevent the comrades from

17 Benjamin Gue, History of Iowa, Vol III, p. 127, 135; Edgar Harlan, A Narrative History of the People of Iowa, Vol II, pp. 129-130.

18 Rules and Regulations for the Government of the Grand Army of the Republic, p. 31.

airing their views at the department campfires. There Cleveland's record of "egotism, arrogance, cold sympathy and unfeeling pity" was put to the acid test.¹⁹ The members of the Woman's Relief Corps, unhampered by any self-imposed political restrictions, were able to express their views in undiluted fashion. At their encampment, held in conjunction with the Grand Army encampment, the ladies officially thanked "...the Iowa State Register... for the defense of the old soldiers...." So angered was the W.R.C. with President Cleveland that the organization resolved that it uttered its "...deep loathing and contempt for the man who...so prostituted the high offices of President and Commander of the Army and Navy of the United States in deference to the Rebel element that largely controls his administration." And although members of the W.R.C. were unable to vote, they further resolved "that in the coming campaigns of 1887 and 1888," they would use their "...best endeavors to defeat for office all enemies of the old veterans...."²⁰

Shortly after the encampments, Department Commander James A. Tuttle wiped out any doubts that at least the leadership of the G.A.R. was working hand in

19 Iowa State Register, April 20, 1887.

20 Waukon Standard, April 28, 1887.

hand with the Republican Party. In June Commander Tuttle journeyed to St. Louis to prepare accommodations for Iowa delegates who would participate in the G.A.R. National Encampment at that city in September. Much to his surprise and chagrin, Commander Tuttle discovered that arrangements had been made for President Cleveland to review the National Encampment parade in the fall of the year. Charging that the invitation was extended by Democrat members of the G.A.R. for the ornery purpose of insulting the Grand Army Republicans, Tuttle declared that should President Cleveland thrust himself on the National Encampment, the Iowa G.A.R. "...would abandon the encampment sooner than in any way do honor for him."²¹ Explaining that "we have faced the Democracy before in solid ranks when they were behind guns," Tuttle promised that "we can face them now, when they attempt to subvert the purpose of our organization."²²

A few days later Tuttle again had the opportunity to express the Iowa Grand Army's displeasure of the Cleveland administration. When Cleveland proposed that the five hundred Union and Confederate flags stored in the garret of the War Office be returned to the States that

21 Iowa State Register, June 5, 1887.

22 New York Tribune, June 3, 1887, quoted in Marie Rulkotter, op. cit., see chapters VIII and IX.

carried them in battle, Commander Tuttle called on Governor Larrabee to protest against the surrender of any "rebel" flags captured by Iowa soldiers. Governor Larrabee, who was standing for re-election, accordingly wired a vigorous protest to Cleveland announcing that the State of Iowa would use every legal means at hand to prevent the return of the battle flags to the Confederacy.²³

Republican politicians were quick to fan the renewed bitterness and enmity resulting from the G.A.R.'s controversy with the President. Here was an opportunity to redeem political fortunes almost lost two years before. At the Republican convention of 1887, the temporary chairman, struck the theme of the coming election: pensions and a protective tariff.²⁴ Once again the Party indicted the South for denying the suffrage to the Negro. Once again the President was accused of removing old soldiers from the Federal employment rolls; Cleveland - he who had shunned military service - now vetoed pension Bills for those who so valorously had defended the Union. Moreover, the convention devoted two complete sections of its platform to accusing Cleveland of attempting

1887

23 Iowa State Register, June 16, 1887.

24 Iowa State Register, August 25, 26, 1887.

"...to reverse the verdict of the war by the surrender of the rebel battle flags," and praising Governor Larrabee for his protest in behalf of Iowa against such treasonable acts.²⁵ Certainly the Democrats were at a great disadvantage in the approaching election.

Yet apparently not all members of the G.A.R. were willing to follow where Commander Tuttle led. At Des Moines a few members of the G.A.R. convened to express their denunciation of Tuttle; to repudiate the "Republican G.A.R.," and to promise that a new Grand Army of the Republic limited to Democrat veterans would be formed.²⁶ Although the "Democrat G.A.R." did not materialize, there was little doubt that Tuttle's belligerent stand against the Democracy caused a good deal of dissension within the ranks of Iowa comrades. The Grand Army Journal for 1887 showed that over two thousand members of the organization allowed themselves to be suspended from participation in Grand Army functions.²⁷

To make the best of a bad situation, Democrats endeavored to deepen the split in the G.A.R. by unearthing the military record of Commander Tuttle.

25 Iowa City State Press, August 31, 1887.

26 Des Moines Leader, July 16, 1887.

27 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1887, p. 41.

Democrats broadcast that "in the spring of 1864 General Tuttle had resigned from the army under a cloud of complicity in attempts to blackmail a Southern planter." At their convention the Democrats made the supreme effort to appeal to the old soldiers by nominating Thomas Jefferson Anderson, a member of the G.A.R., for governor. During the campaign, Anderson did his best to nullify the Republican arguments. Although the Democrat platform upheld Cleveland's veto of the Pension Bill, Anderson repeatedly told his audiences that "...the time has come when every soldier who honestly served his country...should receive a pension...."²⁹ Even the Iowa City State Press attempted

28 Rulkotter, op. cit., chapters VIII and IX; Nation, XLV, August 4, 1887, p. 82. John Irish, Democrat politician and erstwhile editor of the Iowa City State Press, condemned Tuttle as a vacillating politician who was attempting to win the G.A.R. over to the Republican ticket in the coming election: "Tuttle went into the army from Van Buren county, a democrat. We ran him as a democratic candidate for governor when he was in the service to show our union sentiment. The republicans charged him with using his military position to steal cotton and with selling passes for \$50 each, and we sweated the colors of our undershirts out through our coats defending him. He left the army a democrat and he and I were democratic members of the Iowa legislature together as late as 1872....For him to talk now about the democrats he shot during the war is so rich as to be indigestible...." Iowa City State Press, June 22, 1887.

29 Iowa City State Press, October 5, 12, 1887.

to reverse former Republican campaign procedures by pointing out that T. J. Anderson had been at the front during the Civil War, while William Larrabee remained at home as a bank president.³⁰

But all such Democratic efforts to win the "patriotic vote" were in vain. Governor Larrabee and other Republican candidates were swept into office with a majority of sixteen thousand votes compared with a majority of seven thousand two years before. Although it is impossible to determine with accuracy which way the members of the G.A.R. voted, it is quite probable that they again saved the Republican Party from defeat. Although two thousand Grand Army members, presumed Democrats, had withdrawn from the G.A.R. during 1887, over fifteen thousand members remained in good standing. If the displeasure expressed by the department encampment delegates and Commander Tuttle against the Democrats was shared by those members remaining in the G.A.R., it is not too much to say that the Grand Army re-elected Governor Larrabee.³¹

It was to be expected that in the guber-

³⁰ Iowa City State Press, September 28, 1887.

³¹ Department of Iowa, Journal, 1887, p. 41; Iowa Official Register, 1888, p. 139.

balance of the army had followed his example?" Republicans compared their ticket headed by Captain Hutchison with the "Democratic-Bourbon-Copperhead" ticket "without a soldier on it" and concluded that "all the special fighting the Democrats are doing is against soldier candidates." Even the Grand Army Advocate hoped "...that every soldier in the State in the coming contest..." would be able once more "to get to the front" and support comrade Hutchison.³⁴

Yet the old-time appeals to the soldier vote in 1889 were outmoded. Twenty-four years had slipped by since the Boys in Blue encountered the Boys in Grey. Moreover, the outstanding issue of the campaign was not pensions. The Democrats had pledged themselves to replace the Republican enacted Prohibition Law of 1885 with a local option license law. With election returns in, Iowa found that it had elected its first Democrat governor since 1850. Even a Republican ticket headed by a member of the Grand Army of the Republic was unable to defeat a non-veteran who promised to repeal A Prohibition Act. No longer did the

34 Cedar Rapids Standard, September 12, 1889; Iowa State Register, November 3, 4, 5, 1889; Grand Army Advocate quoted in Iowa State Register, November 5, 1889.

Grand Army hold the balance of political power in Iowa politics.³⁵

After 1889 the G.A.R. became less and less a factor in Iowa politics. The passage of the Dependent Pension Bill of 1890 left the G.A.R. with no major excuse for indulging in political action. Republicans no longer were able to locate a Grand Army canker to soothe; Democrats no longer found it necessary to ostracize themselves from the good graces of the Grand Army by opposing Republicans on pension matters. True, one finds that comrades in elections after 1890 were urged to "vote as you shot"; in the gubernatorial election of 1895 and the presidential election of 1896, Republicans again attempted to "rally the old soldiers around the flag;" such attempts, however, naturally tended to become more and more feeble - by 1900, they had all but vanished.³⁶

In 1892, E. B. Evans, Democrat editor of the Ottumwa Sun, and member of the G.A.R., was ready to announce that the G.A.R. had "...ceased to be a political machine." Indeed, the Ottumwa editor estimated

35 Benjamin Gue, History of Iowa, Vol 4, p. 141.

36 Iowa State Register, July 10, 11; October 23, 1895; October 28, 30, 31, 1896.

that one third of the nineteen thousand G.A.R. members
were Democrats. ³⁷

1892

37 Ottumwa Sun, May 19, 1892.

Chapter V

THE G.A.R.'S FRAME OF MIND

As Iowa history surged into the epoch eighties and nineties, comrades of the Grand Army found themselves entertaining an ever growing common frame of mind. Time was shredding the memories of the ugly realities of the War Between the States; pleasant memories of the fellowship bound to prevail even under conditions of civil strife were conjured up regularly by post meetings, annual encampments, and related social activities. A G.A.R. sense of unity, quite often inconsistent, may be said to have existed during the two decades preceding the turn of the last century.

Politically the Iowa Grand Army could realize the tangible results of uniting behind a common purpose. The Grand Army's legislative program was well under way during the eighties and by 1900 the G.A.R. could congratulate itself for a job successfully completed. Hard-put politicians, hungry for support in the torrid campaigns of the times, constantly reminded the comrades of their patriotic response in holding

the Union together in years gone by; it was the G.A.R. that embodied the virtues of true patriotism, honor, and glory; in the future, implied the politician, should any agency be capable of steering the commonwealth from the dens of national iniquity and treasonable activities, that agency would be the Grand Army of the Republic. The Grand Army agreed.

As a matter of fact, the organization in its very infancy had taken unto itself the extremely difficult watchdog task of "...maintaining true allegiance to the United States of America...and discouraging whatever tends to weaken loyalty, incites to treason or rebellion, or in any manner impairs the efficiency and permanency of our free institutions...."¹

Early in its history the Grand Army took steps to invoke its own spirit of patriotic unity. The memory of comrades now departed, an appreciation of the sacrifices made in behalf of home and country, a guarantee that all had not been in vain, could best be fostered by some visible act of reverence. In 1868, National Commander-in Chief John A. Logan urged Grand Army posts throughout the nation to observe Memorial

¹ Rules and Regulations for the Government of the Grand Army of the Republic, 1881, pp. 3-4.

Day.² Although some citizens, doubting the motives behind such an observance, demurred,³ the Grand Army was to make Memorial Day a time-honored institution in Iowa society. Like its neighbor to the north, Minnesota, Iowa apparently followed a universal pattern in carrying out its memorial ceremonies - prayers and speeches in the halls of the local post or civic center, parades to the church yards, followed by the decoration of Union soldiers' graves.⁴ By 1890 this annual demonstration of the G.A.R.'s sincere devotion to its own was shared to a large degree by other segments of Iowa society. Iowa Grand Army records show that 439 posts and organizations, 12,417 G.A.R. comrades, and 164,218

1895

2 Robert Beath, History of the Grand Army of the Republic, pp. 90-92.

3 Ibid., p. 91. The editor of the Iowa City State Press took the view that Memorial Day was little more than a device in the hands of scheming politicians: "The lesson we may draw from the great memories, to which this day is dedicated, is not one that should ...foster sectional agitation. It is not one that should be dragged from the hearts of wives bereft and children orphaned to make the petty fame of some moosing politician. It is not one that can be blazoned upon a partisan banner and flung to the putrid breeze of a political contest." Rather the memories of the war should serve "...as a lesson of tolerance and humanity, but one of everlasting honor of those whose breasts braved the storm." Iowa City State Press, May 30, 1873.

4 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1883, p. 121; 1885, pp. 57-60; Frank H. Heck, The Civil War Veteran in Minnesota Life and Politics, pp. 44-45.

outsiders assumed some role in honoring the Civil War deed on May 30, 1895.⁵

Certainly the Grand Army took its Memorial Day seriously. The Department Commander in 1892 vigorously opposed the desecration of Memorial Day by a younger and more irreverent generation who insisted on making it a day of recreation. Four years later the Department Encampment passed a resolution deploring the use of Memorial Day by other civic or religious orders to decorate their members' graves because it "...tends to destroy the original intent, and thereby the peculiar sacredness of this, our great holy day." By 1906 the department was ready to petition the State legislature to enact measures that would make the "desecration" of Memorial Day a misdemeanor.⁶

To keep the citizens and organizations of Iowa at the proper patriotic temperature and devoid of all that smacked of latent indications of treason was a task of utmost importance in the minds of many Iowa comrades. When the State Agricultural College at Ames replaced General James L. Geddes by an ex-

5 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1894, p. 133; 1895, pp. 35-36; 1897, pp. 36-37; 1899, pp. 59-62.

6 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1892, p. 17; 1896, p. 67; 1906, pp. 65-66.

1885

Confederate General, J. Rush Lincoln, as Military Instructor of the College, the Grand Army assumed the battle cry. Condemning the removal of Geddes as "anomalous and disgraceful" and abhorring the idea that any institution could select Lincoln, "once a rebel...to teach our sons how to maintain our liberties," the Grand Army appointed George Newman to call on the College trustees and to effect the reinstatement of General Geddes as Military Instructor. But to little avail. Although Newman reminded the trustees - headed by W. T. Rigby, a member of the G.A.R. - that they were newly appointed and wondered "...if they could afford to ignore so important a protest as the soldiers of Iowa had made," the trustees refused to reverse the original decision. Later, when General Geddes was appointed Treasurer of the College, the Grand Army dropped its charges.⁷

The Grand Army forever was alerted to actions and situations, be they in Iowa or elsewhere, that comrades felt were incompatible with their principles. During the Civil War a Union General, Fitz John Porter, had been demoted in grade for "alleged cowardice." When in 1884 a different Congress saw fit to absolve

⁷ Department of Iowa, Journal, 1885, pp. 24-25, 76; 1886, pp. 66-67.

Porter from all stains of guilt by restoring him to his former rank, the G.A.R. accordingly hammered out a resolution of expressive indignation condemning such unbelievable attitudes within the halls of the United States Congress. At the previous encampment of 1883, the delegates had commended their old Commander-in-Chief, John A. Logan, for his "able and exhaustive" arguments in the United States Senate against the restoration of Porter to his old rank.⁸

Upon the death of a prominent ex-Confederate, Jacob Thompson, the Secretary of the Interior lowered the American flag in a gesture of respect. Again members of the Iowa G.A.R. felt that such recognition extended to a former adversary was alien to the best interests of the G.A.R. and nation. Maintaining that "treason against our government is a crime against God and humanity," the 1885 encampment resolved that the Cleveland administration was whitewashing the record of Thompson to make "treason respectable."⁹ At the same time and for good measure, department delegates burned out a second resolution reminding the one time

1885

8 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1883, p. 130; 1884, p. 78.

9 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1885, pp. 69-70.

Confederacy that Jefferson Davis, in the mind of the 1885 Iowa G.A.R. Encampment, was still the "arch conspirator" of all history.¹⁰

In 1889, Department Commander E. A. Consigny, believing that a lapse of twenty-four years since the Civil War had erased some of the hard feelings resulting from the war, recommended that the department send one hundred dollars to the National Confederate Soldiers' Home "...as a token of our fraternal feeling for the men who wore the gray." Although the proposal received a good deal of support from many delegates, it was shelved on the grounds that such action would cause many comrades to withdraw from the G.A.R.¹¹

In its efforts to enhance the quality of the moral fiber in State and Nation, the G.A.R. launched and promoted a program designed to instill correct patriotism in the minds of all citizens, present and future. In 1889 the department encampment delegates resolved that the G.A.R. would do everything in its power to put the National flag over every Iowa school house where the "future legislators" of the country should learn to "...love the institutions whose original

10 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1885, pp. 68-69; Iowa State Register, April 24, 1885.

11 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1889, pp. 19-20, 64-65.

purity the Grand Army...sought to restore."¹² Two years later the Department Commander optimistically reported that the Grand Army's efforts had not been in vain; so general had become the practice of "hoisting the old flag" over Iowa schoolhouses that with a little more effort the comrades might see the "starry old banner" floating over every schoolhouse in the state.¹³ In its campaign in behalf of "true American loyalty," the Grand Army found a worthy helpmate in its auxiliary, the Woman's Relief Corps. In the short period of twelve months, one ambitious W.R.C. member placed a pamphlet containing information for the management and care of flags, and directions for the flag pledge and salute in every public school in the State.¹⁴

By securing the cooperation of the State Superintendent of Education, the Grand Army was able to institute the regular observance of Memorial Day in the public schools.¹⁵ Aided by the Woman's Relief Corps, members of the Grand Army also made a practice

12 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1889, p. 63.

13 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1891, p. 14.

14 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1895, pp. 18-19.

15 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1894, p. 33; 1895, p. 18.

of visiting schools and participating in patriotic ceremonies on Washington's Birthday. By making these annual visits to the school, the Grand Army believed pupils would learn to rever the flag preserved by the Grand Army. Then should war come, and should "...martial strains call for deeds of valor in defense of right and liberty," the army would be ready. "Native and foreign born...would move solidly together," because they would be drilled in the principles of government and in love for America."¹⁶

Nor was the Grand Army merely content with raising flags over schoolhouses and visiting students twice a year. In 1899 the department appointed a Special Aide in Charge of Military Instruction in Public Schools to organize Iowa school boys into military companies where they could learn the arts of war. According to the newly proposed program, Civil War veterans, aided by Spanish American War veterans, would steep Iowa youth in "the manual of arms, marching, squad and company drill, the position of a soldier, and the salute to the flag...." Thus they would "... learn how to comprehend the grandeur of the past."¹⁷

16 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1896, p. 15.

17 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1899, pp. 183-184.

Apparently, however, Grand Army efforts to stimulate martial training in the Iowa school system did not materialize. In the Department Journals for the following years, no mention was made of the Special Aide in Charge of Military Instruction in Public Schools.

One important facet of the Grand Army's self-imposed program of "purifying" the minds of the youth of Iowa was the cleansing of history books that tended to contradict the Grand Army's concept of the "true history of the Rebellion." Although the 1889 encampment drew up a mild resolution against "nefarious and false histories," the Grand Army's full wrath was not released until 1895 when the encampment vigorously condemned Southern historians for indulging in "invidious comparisons...against the Union armies and their officers, in favor of those of the South." Terming such attitudes as "criminal" the encampment delegates urged that all posts "...keep a watchful eye on the books introduced into...Iowa schools and to see to it that no apology for treason, no slight on the cause of the Union or its defenders, no wavering in patriotic devotion" was in any way instilled into the minds of the children.¹⁸ Finally, in 1902, the Grand Army was

¹⁸ Department of Iowa, Journal, 1889, p. 20; 1895, p. 19.

ready to pass judgment on its first book. After "a thoroughly critical examination" of the History of the Army of the Potomac, the Grand Army found it impartial and most noteworthy, and recommended that the educational authorities place it in the schools.¹⁹

By 1907 such a backlog of unfinished patriotic business had piled up that the department found it necessary to add another permanent officer - the Department Patriotic Instructor - to its staff. Even Post Commanders were ordered to appoint Post Patriotic Instructors, whose duty it was to see that no un-American doctrines were propagated in the local schools. Most Posts, however, refused to be troubled with such orders. In 1909, only 45 of the 346 Posts were sufficiently interested to send the required Patriotic Instructor's report to department headquarters.²⁰

On the department level, however, Patriotic Instructor Robert Kissick fell to his duties with "commendable zeal and spirit." The most notable text to come under the scrutiny of Kissick's eagle eye was James Rhodes' History of the United States. At the

19 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1902, p. 65.

20 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1907, pp. 31-32; 1909, p. 32.

hands of Rhodes, Lee had been accredited with motives of an understandable nature in deciding to cast his services with the Confederacy. According to Kissick, such "theories and opinions" expressed by historians cheapened American patriotism; they were unfit for consumption by Iowa pupils.²¹

Even the President of the United States could not escape the righteous wrath of Iowa's Patriotic Instructor. When Theodore Roosevelt, finding that he could not be present at a celebration of Robert E. Lee's one hundredth birthday anniversary, wired his regrets to the Committee on Arrangements at Washington, Kissick categorized Roosevelt with Rhodes, Jacob Thompson, and Jefferson Davis.²² Again, when Colliers Magazine depicted Lee as an American of laudable character a highly indignant Robert Kissicksaw the matter differently. Addressing a circular "To The American People," Kissick received nation wide publicity by comparing Lee with Benedict Arnold, both of whom "...deserted the flag of his country at a critical time, joined the enemy and fought against that flag."²³

21 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1907, p. 35.

22 Ibid., p. 36.

23 Ibid., pp. 37-50.

In view of the fact that G.A.R. membership was confined to Union veterans; because the G.A.R. was dedicated to values and purposes evolving from the Civil War; it is perhaps not surprising that the Grand Army occasionally displayed a militant and intolerant nationalistic spirit. Although the earlier encampments went on record as opposing any weak-kneed policy by federal or state governments, the Grand Army's strong nationalistic sentiments burst forward with the patriotic wave of the nineties. Certainly the G.A.R. helped pave the way for public willingness to go to war with Spain in 1898. Three years before the war, at least one G.A.R. post was demanding that the United States government deliver the Cuban patriots from the hands of a tyrannical Spain.²⁴ By 1896, the department encampment was ready to express the desire that the "patriotic Cubans" should at least be accorded belligerent status by the American government. At the same encampment, the G.A.R. rejoiced at the results of the Venezuelan controversy. At last the civilized world recognized United States supremacy in the

24 At the request of Cloutman Post, the Mayor of Ottumwa called a series of town meetings to extend sympathy to oppressed Cubans. Ottumwa Sun, October 26, November 2, 1895.

Americas.²⁵

When the United States did go to war in 1898, the Grand Army was most gratified. The "... Old Flag representing the highest type of civilized citizenship...and preserved in its purity by the Comrades of the Grand Army of the Republic..." had at last been carried to far-away islands.²⁶ When unexpected complications beset the United States Army in the Philippines, the Grand Army was outraged. Filipino insurrection against the American flag was denounced as treason and deprecating to the honor of the American people who so earnestly desired to "take up the White Man's burden."²⁷ As a matter of fact some members of the Grand Army believed that the G.A.R. was at least indirectly responsible for the American victory over the Spanish. In his valedictory address

25 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1896, pp. 14, 65.

26 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1898, p. 36.

27 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1902, p. 43. James B. Weaver expressed different ideas on American honor in the Philippines. Said Weaver: "I wish to enter an emphatic protest against the resolutions adopted...by the Grand Army Encampment endorsing the policy of the administration in the Philippines and covertly committing us to an indorsement of the atrocities perpetrated upon the Filipino people.... The resolution was passed without discussion. I was not present or they would undoubtedly have heard from me."
Des Moines Leader, May 22, 1902.

Department Commander Charles Bailey claimed that the Civil War veterans had inspired Iowa's youth to repeat the Grand Army's Civil War performance in suppressing "arrogance and slavery." The Grand Army's labors in behalf of American patriotism had not been in vain. So successful had been the G.A.R.'s patriotic campaign, claimed Commander Bailey, that forty-seven percent of the Iowa men who volunteered for service in the Spanish American War were members of the Grand Army's auxiliary, the Sons of Veterans.²⁸

Although citizens of Socialistic and other "radical" tendencies were rather scarce in Iowa around the turn of the century, the G.A.R. appointed itself to discourage any such tendencies that might exist. During the early nineties the Grand Army leaders were sure that much of the nation's economic unrest was inspired by foreigners who had little respect for the "dignity of labor," or for those American civil and

²⁸ Department of Iowa, Journal, 1900, pp. 18, 21. Immediately before the United States entered World War I, the Grand Army was not quite so sure that its patriotic campaign had paid great dividends. Commander John Merry believed that he expressed his comrades' "disgust" when he compared the unwillingness of a later generation to enlist in the Army with the zeal and patriotism that led the "boys in blue" to rally around the colors in 1861. Department of Iowa, Journal, 1916, p. 17.

religious liberties preserved by the Grand Army. In his message to the G.A.R., Commander J. J. Steadman advised his comrades never to permit "anarchy or Communism" to destroy "...our banks and our bonds... that gave us a currency...honored by all nations."²⁹

In the same year, Department Commander Philip Schaller instructed his Adjutant General to permit no "... Anarchists with their Red Bandana to move with the loyal soldiers of the Rebellion" in the Memorial Day parades.³⁰ By the following January the Department had pledged its sympathy and cooperation with the officers of the land to put down any "unlawful assemblages" or "to quell any spirit of disloyalty or resistance to the orderly and faithful administration of the law."³¹

Other than educating public opinion to an unknown degree, however, the Grand Army did little in its crusade against Anarchy, Socialism, or Communism. Only in 1917 did the Grand Army take overt action against such seditious doctrines. When an inmate of the

29 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1893, p. 7.

30 Philip Schaller to M. L. Leonard, May, 1893, G.A.R. Papers.

31 Department of Iowa, Journal, 1894, p. 144.

Iowa Soldiers' Home persisted in reading Socialist newspapers to his comrades and "damned the President" for leading the United States into World War I, the Grand Army felt that there was but one alternative - the offender was discharged from the Soldiers' Home. Even then the Grand Army resolved that such an offense was "lightly treated" because the culprits' "mind was clear as a bell."³²

³² Department of Iowa, Journal, 1918, p. 81.

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