



*New York State Archives*

**Grand Army of the Republic Department of New York  
Records B1706**

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## Overview of the Records

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<b>Repository:</b>	New York State Archives
<b>Summary:</b>	The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) records in this series (with numerous sub-series) include state-level records of the Department of New York and records of most of the over 600 local posts, which were sent to department headquarters in Albany as posts disbanded.
<b>Creator:</b>	Grand Army of the Republic. Department of New York
<b>Title:</b>	Grand Army of the Republic Department of New York records
<b>Quantity:</b>	50.5 cubic feet
<b>Quantity:</b>	including circa 80 photographs
<b>Inclusive Date:</b>	1865-1949
<b>Series:</b>	B1706

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## Arrangement

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This series is organized into 14 subseries:

1. Administrative Record Books (Boxes 1-13)
2. Administrative Correspondence Files (Boxes 14-18)
3. Members-at-large Files (Box 100)
4. Post Disbandment Files (Boxes 19-20)
5. Regimental History Survey Files (Boxes 21-30)
6. Rosters of Posts (Box 31)
7. Post Charters (Boxes 32-40)
8. Post Charter Applications (Boxes 41-48)
9. Reports of Officers, Delegates, and Alternates (Boxes 49-66)

10. Reports to the Assistant Adjutant General (Box 67)
11. Post Descriptive Books (Boxes 68-90)
12. Post Record Books (Boxes 91-94)
13. Encampment Files (Boxes 95-96)
14. Photographs and Medals (Boxes 97-99)

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## Administrative History

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The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) was a large multi-faceted organization (fraternal lodge, charitable society, special interest lobby, patriotic group, and political club) founded in 1866 by Union Army Surgeon Benjamin Franklin Stephenson. The organization was originally envisioned as a brotherhood of veterans who were dedicated to helping other veterans.

The first post was established at Decatur, Illinois in April 1866. Soon after a second post was organized in Springfield, Illinois, and others began to emerge throughout the northeastern states. By September of 1866, following a mass meeting of Civil War veterans in Pittsburgh, the movement began to spread east with the establishment of GAR posts by ex-union soldiers.

Each post, which presided over the area of one city, town, county, etc. was set up similar to a Union Army encampment. Every post had "sentries" at the door, in order to go to another post you needed a "transfer;" members could be "court-martialed" as well as "dishonorably discharged." The post-commander would act as general officer, and would report to the departmental commander (assistant-adjutant general), who was in charge of all the posts in one state. He in turn would report to the national-commander (adjutant general). Every post in America was to adopt the same rituals and constitution.

This military system only lasted until 1869, at which time it was replaced by a fraternal order fashioned after the Masonic lodges. This form of organization, with its grading system and strict rules, did not appeal to the vast majority of veterans, and therefore, membership plummeted. This was to change during the late 1870's because of changes in the organizational structure and the demise of the grading system. As a result of these changes, the GAR's membership rose sharply in the 1880's.

The GAR was a powerful political organization with ties to the Republican Party. It was through the GAR, and the pension lobby, that many soldiers and their families received pensions. The Grand Army of the Republic also promoted patriotism through parades, national encampments, placement of war memorials, and the establishment of Memorial Day as a national holiday.

The first GAR post in New York was organized in Rochester in 1866. Eventually 672 local posts were chartered, each county having several posts. The headquarters of the Grand Army of the Republic, Department of New York was located in the State Capitol in Albany. Department officers supervised and corresponded with local posts, received annual reports from them, organized annual encampments, and compiled historical information on New York's volunteer regiments that served during the Civil War. The final encampment of the GAR Department of New York was held in Rochester in August 1948; the last state commander died in 1953.

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## Scope and Content Note

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B1706-16: This accretion contains addition records missing from the earlier accession. Accretion also includes oversize and panoramic photographs. Few members depicted in the photographs are identified.

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## Use of Records

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### Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions regarding access to or use of this material.

### Alternate Formats Available

### Items Online

High resolution images of selected original documents in this series are available in State Archives Digital Collections.

Portions of the series are digitized and are available to New York State residents for free on Ancestry.com New York. You must sign up for a free account to access these records without a paid subscription. To learn more, go to [How to Use Ancestry.com New York](#)

[Grand Army of the Republic Records, 1866-1931 on Ancestry.com](#)

[Grand Army of the Republic Department of New York records, 1865-1949 in Digital Collections](#)

## Administrative Information

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### Acquisition Information

B1706-00: Records of the Grand Army of the Republic, Department of New York, including records of disbanded local posts, were transferred by that organization to the New York State Library in 1948. The records were accessioned by the State Library as collection HH12074. The State Library transferred the collection of GAR records to the State Archives in 2000.

B1706-16: This accretion was transferred to the New York State Archives as a gift of Sons of Union Veterans, Department of New York.

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## Access Terms

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- Registers (Lists)
- Rosters
- Administrative records
- Black-and-white prints (photographs)
- United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Societies, etc
- New York (State)
- Veterans
- New York (State)--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Regimental histories
- Application forms
- United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Personal narratives
- Membership lists
- Reports
- Military history, Modern--19th Century
- Charters