

Finding Aid for the Grand Army of the Republic Department of New York Records series.

Finding Aid Publication Date: Feb 5th, 2021

Online Finding Aid Record:

<http://iarchives.nysed.gov/xtf/view?docId=ead/findingaids/B1706.xml>

Overview of Records

Repository:

New York State Archives

Summary:

The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) records in this series pertain only to GAR posts in New York State. The series is comprised of a variety of materials that document the activities and functions of the agency that established policies and procedures governing over 600 local posts across New York State. In particular, these records are concerned with the disbandment of posts from the 1920s to 1940s.

Creator:

Grand Army of the Republic. Department of New York

Title:

Grand Army of the Republic Department of New York records

Inclusive Dates:

1865-1949

Quantity:

50.5 cubic feet (including circa 80 photographs)

Series Number:

B1706

Arrangement:

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)

Administrative History:

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.

Scope and Contact Note:

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. A series of bound volumes concerning the business and financial operations of the state headquarters. Included are minutes of the Administrative Council, accounts of dues receipts from posts; records of annual state encampment, record of post disbandments, and register of Civil War veterans residing in New York State. Also included, special materials on Gettysburg Reunion Club, and other special Civil War veteran's organizations. Correspondence

between the different posts and with the Adjutant General. This is general correspondence arranged by years; beginning in 1925 and ending in 1941. These include pension requests for widows and children, questions about post finances, requests for information on soldier histories. Requests by companies and hotels to do business with the G.A.R., or to house their next encampment, and general requests for a wide variety of information from post members re: pensions; where to buy uniforms and so forth. These files are comprised of correspondence between the department's Adjutant General and members from post that have been disbanded, but wish to remain active in the organization under the special members-at-large status. Arranged chronologically, 1927-1932. These files contain correspondence between post commanders and the assistant Adjutant General, which concern the surrendering of posts because of low enrollment, or in many cases because of the death of most of the members. These are arranged according to post number, and dates of disbandment. These files contain personal recollections and memoirs written by former soldiers relating to the history of the regiment in which they served during the Civil War. There are also historical survey forms sent to all the posts by New York State Historian Hugh Hastings, which sought information concerning the campaigns, battles, and skirmishes in which a particular regiment participated. Occasionally, a regimental file may contain records that also pertain to another unit, usually the unit preceding or succeeding it in numerical order. It is unclear why those records became comingled. The bulk of the material dates from approximately 1895-1898, corresponding to the State Historian's call for information on regimental service and the majority of the responses provided by veterans. Alphabetical listing by name of GAR Post in New York State, December 31, 1881; and listing of posts arranged by county. Documentation, issued by the State of New York, that officially recognized the organization of a post. Charters include date of issue, names of all the members of the post, and the location of the post. Materials submitted to the state by prospective posts seeking official recognition. They are filed in numerical order by post number, and they list the members and location of veterans applying for membership. This subseries consists of reports, submitted annually by post commanders, summarizing organizational, financial, and membership activities of each post. Reports are arranged numerically by post and date from 1922 to 1942. Subseries contains copies of reports submitted by the state office to the national office summarizing the activities of posts in New York as a whole. Reports were compiled annually during the period from 1912 to 1939. Post descriptive books are arranged numerically by post number and contain vital information about each member: name; age; birthplace; current residence; occupation; date of entry into service; rank, company; regiment; final discharge date; length of service; cause of discharge; and date of entrance into the GAR. Post record books were compiled by various posts and include minutes from meetings; ledgers, and registers of death and burial places of members; and other organizational matters. Encampment files document the annual camp and drill exercises of the GAR, 1917-1945. Programs, printed circulars, and orders comprise the bulk of these files. Also included is

the 1945 national encampment; reports on the state of surviving posts from 1941, and a 1920 Civil War Veterans pension list for New York arranged by country. These photographs depict officers, soldiers, drills, and camp scenes. Many of the portraits are named, but there are no post numbers.

Use of Records:

Access Restrictions:

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

Related Information:

Acquisition Information:

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

Access Terms:

Subjects:

- Veterans
- Military history, Modern--19th Century

Corporate Names:

- Grand Army of the Republic. Department of New York
- New York State Archives

Genres:

- Registers (Lists)
- Rosters
- Administrative records
- Black-and-white prints (photographs)
- Application forms
- Membership lists
- Reports
- Charters

Geographic Names:

New York State Archives - <http://www.archives.nysed.gov>

- United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Societies, etc
- New York (State)
- New York (State)--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Regimental histories
- United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Personal narratives

Detailed Description:

Contact repository for copy with container list information.