

**Grand Army of the Republic, Department of Vermont  
Records, 1883-1942 (bulk: 1902-1942)  
MSC 28**

## **Introduction**

This collection contains the partial records of the Grand Army of the Republic, Department of Vermont, for the period 1883-1942, although the bulk of the records cover the period 1902 to 1942 with many gaps. To some extent the collection documents the decline of the Department of Vermont as members, all Civil War veterans, grew old and died. Based on internal evidence, the records may have come from William W. Holden of Northfield, Vermont. The collection is housed in one records center box and consumes 1 linear foot of shelf space.

## **Organizational Notes**

The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) was founded in Springfield, Illinois, and first post was chartered on April 6, 1866. At its peak in 1890, the organization had nearly 500,000 members including 8,000 posts nationwide. The group had three objectives: fraternity, charity, and loyalty. They achieved the first through their regularly scheduled meetings, joint gatherings with other posts, and national encampments. The veterans set up funds for the relief of needy veterans, widows, and orphans and could be used for medical, burial, housing, and the purchase of food. The organization also promoted many soldiers' homes and orphanages. They fostered loyalty through the creation of monuments and memorials and the preservation of Civil War sites. The GAR became a powerful political organization as well, working for the benefit of all veterans. Through their efforts, the GAR began the tradition of Decoration Day, now known as Memorial Day, when the graves of veterans are decorated with flags and flowers.

GAR members were required to have served honorably in the US Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or Reserve Cutter Service between April 1861 and December 1865. Members had to be voted into a local post after making the proper application. The methods for voting, meeting rituals, and induction of members strongly resembled those of the Masons. The order had its own rules, regulations, and ceremonies adopted by a national organization and the group pioneered veterans' burial rituals. A state-based department oversaw the local posts. A post needed at least 15 members and was usually named for a deceased soldier or other important player in the Civil War. Posts within a state received their number sequentially and no state could have two posts with the same name. As the Civil War veterans passed on, their organization came to an end. The last member died in 1956 at age 109 years.

The Department of Vermont organized on October 23, 1868, and ultimately had 116 posts around the state from Post 1, Chamberlain, in St. Johnsbury to Post 116, A. P. Noyes, in Chittenden. The GAR also had many auxiliaries including Woman's Relief Corps, Ladies of the GAR, and Sons of Union Veterans. These organizations along with their own auxiliaries, carried on the work begun by the GAR.

The only individual specifically identified in the collection is William Wales Holden of Northfield. The collection includes a post card addressed to Holden concerning a reunion of

Vermont's 13th Regiment. He served as a corporal in Company I of that regiment. Holden, the son of Ira and Abigail Wales Holden and born on August 28, 1843, is descended from some of the original settlers of Barre, Vermont, his place of birth. He enlisted there in August of 1862 as the youngest person in the regiment. His conduct at the Battle of Gettysburg has been described as heroic and he mustered out of the service on July 21, 1863. Holden became an active member of the GAR in the William Boynton Post 94 in Northfield. At the time of his death in 1936, he had served the organization as an assistant adjutant general and an assistant quartermaster general. He made his living as a farmer and sat on the board of directors at the Northfield Savings Bank and served in several Northfield town and school offices. Holden married twice and had four children; he died May 7, 1936, of old age and is buried in the Mount Hope Cemetery in Northfield.

### **Scope and Content**

This collection contains the partial records of the Grand Army of the Republic, Department of Vermont, for the period 1883-1942, although the bulk of the records cover the period 1902 to 1942 with many gaps.

The most complete set of records are in the first three folders, which contain standard forms (Consolidated Form A & B) from many posts throughout the state for 1914 and 1918. This form shows the number of members of each post, gains and losses in membership, and the fiscal activities of each post. These forms were received by the Department of Vermont.

The fourth folder contains several copies of Consolidated Form A & B from other years from a scattering of posts. The last form in the collection is from 1937 and showed the St. Johnsbury post had one death and four remaining members.

Folders 5 and 6 contain forms of consolidated statistics (Forms C and D) that were sent by the Vermont Department to the national organization. There are a few Forms C used to report membership from the state to the national level during the period 1916-1942. The report dated 21 Feb 1916 shows 86 posts and 1,802 members, and the report of 5 Feb 1942 shows just one remaining post and three members.

Folders 7 and 8 contain forms documenting the credentials of delegates to the Department of Vermont encampment in 1916 and Folder 9 contains the same for national encampments in 1930-1940.

Folder 10 includes some blank sample forms and Folder 11 contains miscellaneous items including a few letters regarding a reunion of the 13th Vermont Regiment and the closing of some posts in the state.

Folder 12 contains copies of the "Services" booklet that describes the proper rituals for various ceremonies carried out by the GAR post members. There are six booklets in this collection published between the years 1883 and 1904.

Finally, the collection includes two ledgers. One is a register of participants at the 38<sup>th</sup> through 66<sup>th</sup> National Encampments held in the years 1904-1932. This book contains signatures of men from around the country who attended these encampments and signed the Vermont Department's book. The second ledger contains financial information from posts from around the state, arranged by post number, for the years 1902-1922.

### Related Collections

The Leahy Library of the Vermont Historical Society contains many records related to the Grand Army of the Republic, Department of Vermont, in its printed, manuscript, and museum collections. Among them are

- \*MS 369.151 G762p, GAR, Department of Vermont, Post Roster, 1882-1884
- 369.151 G762re, GAR, Department of VT, Reports of Dept. Officers, 1891, 94, 98, 1907, 18
- \*X MS 369.151 G762rec, GAR, Department of VT, Quartermaster Records 1869-1885
- \*X 369.151 G762reg, GAR, Department of VT, Register of National Encampment June 1885
- 369.151 G762riL, GAR, Ritual of the Grand Army of the Republic (published book)
- Folio 369.151 G762ro, GAR Roster of the Department of Vermont, no date (published book)
- MSA 741, William W. Holden speeches 1889 – 1932

Additional records and published material may be found through the Online Public Access Catalog and manuscript index.

### Inventory

- MSC 28: 01 Reports from individual posts, Consolidated Form A and B, 30 Jun 1914  
 : 02 \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, 31 Dec 1914  
 : 03 \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, 31 Dec 1918  
 : 04 \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, 1930-1940  
 : 05 Department of Vermont, Assistant Adjutant-General Report, Form C, 1916-1942  
 : 06 \_\_\_\_\_, Assistant Quartermaster General Report, Form D, 1916-1937  
 : 07 Reports from individual posts, Department Encampment Credentials, 1916  
 : 08 Department of Vermont, National Encampment Member Credentials 1916-1929  
 : 09 \_\_\_\_\_, National Encampment Member Credentials 1930-1940  
 : 10 Sample blank forms  
 : 11 Miscellaneous  
 : 12 Handbook: "Services," 1883, 1890, 1894, 1897, 1901, and 1904  
 : 13 Register of participants, National Encampments, 1904-1932  
 : 14 Ledger: Receipts, Disbursements, Relief Fund, and Property of posts by post number, 1902-1922

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