

## The Oak Bluffs Civil War Monument: History – Memory – Controversy

A. Bowdoin Van Riper  
Research Librarian, Martha's Vineyard Museum

The Vineyard has many markers erected to commemorate historical events, but only two of them are statues. One, at the edge of the State Forest, memorializes the heath hen that the forest – first set aside as a reserve for the endangered bird – failed to save. The other, standing guard over the Oak Bluffs ferry wharf, commemorates a Civil War soldier.

This is a story about that statue. It's also – necessarily and inseparably – a story about a man, a town, and a war. It's also, again necessarily, a story about people's memories of that war. This is a complicated story about an (apparently) simple object, but it's interesting – and important, today more than ever – precisely *because* it's complicated.

### I. The Statue

First things first: It is *not* a Confederate soldier.

Despite what Gale Huntington – who should have known better – wrote in *An Introduction to Martha's Vineyard* back in 1969 . . . despite what passing tour bus operators may proclaim . . . despite what your houseguests explained at tedious length last weekend . . . it's a *Union* soldier. The belt buckle, the cartridge box, the cap badge, and the uniform buttons are all Federal issue.

The statue is not, therefore, a direct analog of those at the center of recent controversies in Charlottesville, Baltimore, and Richmond. It was not erected, as so many of them were, as a marker of white power and an implicit warning to blacks to “know their place” in a society that refused to acknowledge their humanity. It is not, as so many Civil War monuments in the South are, a celebration of a romantic “Lost Cause” or a symbol of resistance to the Civil Rights Movement . . . but it *is* problematic.

The man depicted in the statue is a member of the Union army, but the man behind it was a veteran of the Confederate one.

### II. The Man

Charles Strahan was born in Baltimore – one of five sons of English-immigrant parents – in November 1840. Maryland was a slave state (the famous Mason-Dixon line, dividing slavery from freedom, defined its border with Pennsylvania), but unlike its southern neighbor Virginia it remained in the Union. Southern supporters needed only to cross the border into Virginia to join the Confederate ranks, and Strahan did so, enlisting in the “Maryland Guards” in 1862.

The Guards became Company B of the 21<sup>st</sup> Virginia regiment, and were duly sent to the battle that the South called Seven Pines and the North called Fair Oaks. Private Strahan was wounded, and after his convalescence returned to the war with a lieutenant's commission and an assignment as aide-de-camp to General Isaac Trimble, serving under him at Gettysburg and emerging unscathed (unlike Trimble, who lost a leg).

Strahan finished out the war, married, and moved to New Orleans, where he became a coffee merchant . . . but health problems led him to retire, and move north, in 1884. Everything about the move is shrouded in mystery: Why the North? Why the Vineyard? Why Cottage City (as Oak Bluffs was then known)? We don't know . . . all we know is that he came.

Came, and, the following year, bought the *Cottage City Star*, a four-page weekly broadsheet that had been established, in 1879, as the town's first year-round newspaper. Strahan transformed it from an Oak Bluffs paper to an Island-wide one and renamed the *Martha's Vineyard Herald* – a competitor to the already venerable *Gazette* that lasted into the 1920s. The *Herald* became, in time, both the impetus and the vehicle for Strahan's campaign to erect a Civil War statue.

### III. The Campaign

The campaign began with a highly public snub. It was 1887, three years after Strahan had moved to Cottage City, and the *Herald* ran an announcement for a Memorial Day celebration. The reaction was immediate: Former Union soldiers made it known that, if a "former rebel" was going to be involved, they wanted no part of the event.

Strahan, not wanting to alienate his fellow citizens, stayed away . . . but he sent a reporter who covered the event in a long and fulsome story – headlined "The Boys in Blue" – for the next issue of the *Herald*. It ran alongside a letter from a Union veteran named Sidney Hicks, who called Strahan "a certain long-ago Confederate army officer (now a worthy, law-abiding resident of our Island city)." Citing the tale of a Union corporal (not from the Island) who had lost both feet in the war, yet proclaimed forgiveness for his former enemies, Hicks charged the Union veterans of Oak Bluffs with a meanness of spirit.

Four years pass. It is now 1891, and Cottage City is at the peak of its Victorian splendor: a wonderland of elaborate cottages and towering resort hotels. The biggest of them, the four-story Sea View, towers over the steamer wharf; an immense roller rink stands across the street; the Flying Horses are settled into their new home at the foot of Circuit Avenue; bathers flock to the bath houses along the waterfront, and "wheelmen" whistle over recently paved roads on the new "safety" bicycles that have begun to replace high-wheeled "ordinaries."

Cottage City is, however, still raw and new. Little more than a decade old, it lacks a sense of history, and presence; when the "Boys in Blue" sailed away to war, Cottage City was still an outpost of Edgartown. Independence would not come until fifteen years after Appomattox. A monument, prominently placed, would lend the town *gravitas*, and Strahan decides to give it one. It will, he announces in the *Herald* that spring, honor the Grand Army of the Republic, and the proceeds of every new *Herald* subscription sold that summer will go to fund it. A subscription

was \$2 for the year. The monument cost \$2,000. When the campaign fell \$500 short, Strahan made up the difference out of his own pocket.

#### IV. The Organization

Let's pause here, just for a moment, lest one of the stranger elements in the story slip by unnoticed: Most war memorials are erected by organizations to honor individuals . . . either specific (Robert E. Lee) or generic (Union soldiers). This one was erected by an *individual* (Strahan) to honor an *organization* (the GAR).

This is more than semantics: All three of the plaques around the base of the memorial when it was erected explicitly reference the GAR. The first, at the time of the statue's unveiling, read: "Erected in Honor of the Grand Army of the Republic." The second named the local Cottage City branch of the organization—"Henry Clay Wade Post GAR No. 201"—and the third, the cryptic initials "F C & L," referred to the three guiding principles of the GAR: Fraternity, Charity & Loyalty.

Why?

Nationally, the GAR was *the* premier Union Army veterans' organization. It was, in 1891, at the height of its power and influence: 400,000 members strong. Voting as a bloc, its members helped to elect five Republican presidents, from Grant to McKinley, and lobbied Congress to push through legislation guaranteeing financial support to any Union veteran with a medical disability—*regardless* of whether it was related to military service. Given that their constituents were then men in middle age, the GAR thus achieved what amounted to universal, government funded health care for its members.

More to the point, from Strahan's perspective, Union veterans whose status as Union veterans was central to their identity—the kind who'd publicly declare that they wouldn't attend a Memorial Day celebration if their ex-Confederate neighbor was going to be there—were virtually guaranteed to be members of their local chapter. Dedicating the statue to the GAR was Strahan's way of speaking directly to them, and the words he spoke revealed a deep, almost desperate, need for acceptance.

#### V. The Sentiment

Offering to put up a \$2,000 statue in honor of those who'd snubbed you is calculated to get their attention, and Strahan's gesture did just that. He was invited, by the head of the Cottage City chapter of the GAR, not just to attend the 1891 Memorial Day observances, but to be the featured speaker.

His speech, a plea for the reconciliation he craved, began with his personal experience: “The mists of prejudice which have hung like a cloud over me, in this, my adopted home, are fast disappearing under the warm sunlight of your affectionate and brotherly hearts.” It continued with Strahan’s hope that such feelings would become universal, and the gap between North and South closed. “It would be to me a higher honor than to be President,” he proclaimed, “if I could be the man to throw the last shovelful of earth over the bloody chasm.”

Three months later, at the statue’s dedication in August 1891, he struck a similar note: “We are once more a union of Americans; a union which endears with equal honor the citizen of Georgia with the citizen of Maine; that Massachusetts and South Carolina are again brothers; and that there is no North nor South, no East nor West, but one undivided, indivisible Union.”

A few weeks after that, he expressed himself a final time. Noting in a *Herald* editorial that the tablet on the fourth side of the pedestal was blank, he declared his hope that someday, “when the passions of war are lost in forgetfulness,” the dwindling ranks of Union veterans might inscribe on it “a token of respect to their old foes in the field.”

Strahan was not alone: Similar sentiments were being expressed by Union and Confederate veterans alike, and – as the 19C gave way to the 20C – they were dramatized in ceremonies of public reconciliation. The most grandiose took place at Gettysburg in July 1913, on the 50th anniversary of the battle: Old soldiers, some in blue and others in gray, shaking hands and declaring that the war was over at last.

## VI. The Response

The problem with this high-minded sentiment was that—even if the *war* was over—the tensions that had caused it (and sundered the country for a generation prior to its outbreak) had not eased.

The states that seceded to form the Confederacy in 1861 did so – as their leaders repeatedly and explicitly stated at the time – to protect their right to practice chattel slavery and, by extension, their citizens’ right engage in state-sanctioned murder, rape, kidnapping and terrorism directed at members of a purportedly “inferior” race. The war crushed the Southern rebellion, and was slavery abolished by the Thirteenth Amendment, but sharecropping became slavery in all but name, the tools of racial subjugation remained in vigorous and widespread use, and the loathsome ideology that justified them continued to flourish.

The decades bracketing 1900, during which Union and Confederate veterans staged their well-intentioned ceremonies of reconciliation, brought Jim Crow laws and “sundown towns,” the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan and the Supreme Court’s affirmation of the “separate but equal” doctrine in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. They also brought a wave of weepy Southern nostalgia for the Confederacy’s noble, doomed “Lost Cause” . . . and scores of statues commemorating its champions, like Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee, erected to celebrate white rule and intimidate any blacks who might challenge it.

The changes made to the Oak Bluffs monument in 1925, fulfilling the wish Strahan had expressed more than 30 years earlier, were of a piece with those ceremonies, and—in retrospect—as problematic in their erasure of the politics of race and slavery from the public memory of the war:

The first plaque was altered to read “Erected in Honor of the Grand Army of the Republic by Charles Strahan, Co. B, 21st Virginia Regt.” and a fourth was added: “The Chasm is Closed,” it began, deliberately echoing the language from Strahan’s Memorial Day address. “In memory of the restored Union this tablet is dedicated by Union veterans of the Civil War and patriotic citizens of Martha’s Vineyard in honor of the Confederate soldiers.”

“Love your enemies” is a sentiment with a long and noble pedigree . . . but so, in the midst of an unfinished struggle for the soul of a nation, is “too soon.”

## VII. Memorials and Memory

Charles Strahan died in March 1931, aged 91. Harry Castello, the last Union Army veteran on the Island, outlasted him by only a few years. We are left with the monument . . . and questions.

- Can a representational statue, raised in a public space, carry a message *other than* one of officially sanctioned celebration? (The three soldiers added, by Congressional fiat, to the Vietnam Memorial surely are celebratory . . . but is the bronze heath hen in the State Forest a celebration of anything but the idea that we must do better?)
- Can honor paid to Confederate soldiers be separated from honor paid to the cause they served? (We do not praise the martial skill of Santa Ana at the Alamo or Yamamoto at Pearl Harbor, but on Memorial Day and Veteran’s Day we honor the American soldiers of just and unjust wars with equal reverence.)
- Can the moment when it is no longer “too soon,” and reconciliation becomes imaginable, be established by declaring it so? (Ask the question in West Belfast, but also in Miami’s Little Havana. Put it to Nelson Mandela, but also to Elie Wiesel, and perhaps Simon Wiesenthal.)

These are not the kind of questions that have once-and-for-all answers. Like all the questions that matter most, they have answers that change as we change, and that we are thus destined to revisit, again and again . . . seeing them anew each time, and noticing things that we hadn’t noticed before.

“The past is not dead,” wrote William Faulkner (who, as a man living in Mississippi in the first half of the twentieth century, had reason to know), “it’s not even past.”

That, I submit, is the best of all reasons to keep talking about it.

## Dedication Ceremonies

by Vineyard Gazette Friday, August 14, 1891 - 10:18am

As we go to press the exercises attending the dedication of the Soldiers' Memorial at Cottage City are in full progress. The fine weather, accompanied by a cool breeze from the northward, together with the noble aim of the events of the day, has brought together the largest body of people Cottage City has seen for years.

At 1 o'clock the several posts assembled at Grand Army Hall, Lake avenue. The line

formed for parade on Siloam and Kedron avenues, right resting on Lake avenue, in the following order:

### DEDICATION CEREMONIES.

As we go to press the exercises attending the dedication of the Soldiers' Memorial at Cottage City are in full progress. The fine weather, accompanied by a cool breeze from the northward, together with the noble aim of the events of the day, has brought together the largest body of people Cottage City has seen for years.

Platoon of Police.

Marshal and Aids.

Hill's Band, Ned Bedford City Guards as Escort.

Battalion of Veteran Soldiers and Sailors.

Detachment Post 2, South Boston.

Post 3, Taunton.

Post 6, Holliston.

Band.

Post 55, Provincetown.

Post 78, Whitman.

Post 91, Foxboro.

Post 132, Sandwich.

Post 192, North Attleboro.

Post 203, Bourne.

Post 206, Falmouth.

Fitchburg Band.

Post 201, Cottage City.

Carriages for Disabled Veterans, Speakers and Distinguished Guests.

At about 2 p.m. the procession started, with Maj. Wm. Brodhead as chief marshal; Wm. H. Dutcher, chief of staff; Chas. M. Stafford, aid; F. S. Amidon, drum major. The column moved over the following route, amid cheers all along the line:

Through Commonwealth and Pawtucket Aves., around Trinity Park to Siloam avenue, through Siloam avenue to Lake, up Lake, Circuit and Narragansett avenues to Sea View avenue, down Sea View avenue to Oak Bluff, up Oak Bluff to the Memorial. Many cottages and business places all over the town are handsomely decorated.

## **Programme at Monument**

Unveiling of statue by Clara Louise Strahan.

Music by Fitchburg band.

Presentation of Memorial by Charles Strahan.

Dedication, ritual of the Grand Army of the Republic.

Address by Gen. Horatio C. King.

Music by Fitchburg band.

Remarks by Bishop Andrews.

Benediction.

After breaking ranks the veterans will gather at the Casino for lunch, and a campfire will be held in the evening.

---

---

Civil War

# Confederate Soldier Honors the Blue

by Vineyard Gazette Friday, June 5, 1925 - 4:24pm

Last Saturday at Edgartown marked the beginning of a new paragraph in a chapter of Vineyard history which was begun 30 years ago. At the close of the public exercises, patriotic orders including the G. A. R., W. R. C. and the American Legion met in the town hall for refreshments and friendly discussion.

During this meeting attention was called by Mrs. George Eldridge of the Woman's Relief Corps of Oak Bluffs to the fact that the Soldiers' Monument at Oak Bluffs was acquired and presented to the Henry Clay Wade Post by a Confederate soldier. Few young people know this or that this soldier is still living, and in his presentation speech 30 years ago he stated that it was his hope that "the day might soon come when the name of a Confederate soldier might be placed on a face of the monument which he had left blank for that purpose."

**CONFEDERATE SOLDIER  
HONORS THE BLUE**

Last Saturday at Edgartown marked the beginning of a new paragraph in a chapter of Vineyard history which was begun 30 years ago. At the close of the public exercises, patriotic orders including the G. A. R., W. R. C. and the American Legion met in the town hall for refreshments and friendly discussion.

During this meeting attention was called by Mrs. George Eldridge of the Woman's Relief Corps of Oak Bluffs to the fact that the Soldiers' Monument at Oak Bluffs was acquired and presented to the Henry Clay Wade Post by a Confederate soldier. Few young people know this or that this soldier is still living, and in his presentation speech 30 years ago he stated that it was his hope that "the day might soon come when the name of a Confederate soldier might be placed on a face of the monument which he had left blank for that purpose."

The donor, Charles Strahan, who was a lieutenant in the regular army of the Confederacy during the Civil War, was at that time the editor of the Martha's Vineyard Herald. Being a close friend of Henry W. Coye, Post Commander of the G. A. R. in Oak Bluffs, the two held many consultations on the best methods of bringing about a feeling of good will between the people of the north and south. Lecturers had been sent south to carry a message of friendship, but at that time there was no southerner located in this section other than Mr. Strahan.

It seemed to him, therefore, to be his duty to do whatever lay in his power toward cementing the breach the war had made in the relations of the two sections of the country, and which still refused to heal. Through his paper he gave notice that all money received for subscriptions would be devoted to erecting a soldiers' monument, to be presented to the Henry Clay Wade Post.

The response was overwhelming, and in August, 189[1], Mr. Strahan's five year old daughter unveiled the noble monument which stands in the public square at Oak Bluffs today. Mr. Strahan, himself, gave an address which merits a place in our country's history.

Such was the story of the monument as told by Mrs. Eldridge last Saturday, and at its close, when the question was put as to whether the name of a Confederate soldier should be placed on the shaft, the vote was unanimously in favor of its being done. A committee is to be appointed to attend to this work, and there is little doubt but that the name of Liet. Charles Strahan, C. S. A., will be placed on the monument in the near future, if the proud old gentleman will given his consent.

## Address at Dedication of the Monument

### MEMBERSHIP DUES

Student	\$20
Individual	\$30
Family	\$50
Sustaining	\$75
Patron	\$150
Benefactor	\$250

Dues are tax deductible, except for \$8, which is the cost of the *Intelligencer*.

### CORRECTION

Due to the Editor's error, in the table headed "Original Investors and Incorporators in the Railroad" on page 107 of the November 1995 *Intelligencer*, the name W.R. Wing, New Bedford, was mistakenly listed under the heading: "Non-Edgartown incorporators without shares." Mr. Wing owned two shares, as is shown elsewhere in the table. David K. Tripp, New Bedford, should have been listed instead of Mr. Wing as an incorporator who owned no shares. We regret the error and urge members to correct their November issues in the interest of historical accuracy.

# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

Vol.37, No.3

© 1996 D.C.H.S.

February 1996

**The Civil War Monument  
And the Soldier Behind It** 115

by Judith Shively

**The American Revolution**

**Just How Revolting  
Were the Vineyarders?** 128

by Arthur R. Railton

**Documents: A Running Account  
Of Matters & Things** 161

by Henry Baylies

**Editor: Arthur R. Railton**

**Founding Editor: Gale Huntington (1902-1993)**

The Dukes County *Intelligencer* is published quarterly by the Dukes County Historical Society, Inc., Cooke and School Streets, Edgartown, Massachusetts. Subscription is by membership in the Society. Back issues are available at the Society.

Memberships are solicited. Send applications to the Society at Box 827, Edgartown, MA, 02539. Telephone: 508 527-4441. Manuscripts and authors' queries should be addressed there.

Articles published in *The Intelligencer* do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Society or its officers. Every effort is made to confirm dates, names and events in published articles, but we cannot guarantee total authenticity.

ISSN 0418 1379

## DUKES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

David Victor, *President*  
Hugh Knipmeyer, *1st Vice President*  
Charlotte I. Hall, *2nd Vice President*  
Catherine Merwin Mayhew, *Secretary*  
Anthony K. Van Riper, *Assistant Secretary*  
Frederick W. Kingsley, *Treasurer*  
Edward W. Vincent, Jr., *President Emeritus*

### COUNCIL

Judith Ann Bruguiera, Thomas Hale, S. Bailey Norton,  
Earle A. Ray, Tweed Roosevelt, Robert Tankard, 1996  
William Marks, Christopher J. Morse, James H. K. Norton,  
Marcella Provost, Joseph E. Sollitto, Jr.,  
Peter B. Van Tassel, 1997

Wade Knowles, James B. Richardson III, Barbara B. Rowe,  
Randall F. Vega, Donald Vose, Gladys Widdiss, 1998

### ADVISORY COUNCIL

John A. Howland  
Kenneth A. Southworth III

Lane Lovell  
Frederick Williams

Bruce Andrews, *Acting Director*  
Jill Bouck, *Curator*  
Joanne Coffin Clark, *Secretary/Receptionist*  
Peter B. Van Tassel, *Archivist/Librarian*  
Catherine Merwin Mayhew, *Genealogist*  
Dorothea R. Looney, *Registrar*  
Arthur R. Railton, *Editor*

The Dukes County Historical Society was founded in 1922 to preserve and publish the history of Dukes County for the public benefit. It is a non-profit institution, supported by membership dues, contributions and bequests, which are tax deductible. Its annual meeting is held in August in Edgartown.

The Society operates The Vineyard Museum on its grounds at School and Cooke Street, Edgartown. The Museum includes the Thomas Cooke House, circa 1765, a house museum of island history, open from mid-June to mid-September. Also on the grounds are the Francis Foster Gallery, the Capt. Francis Fense House and the Gale Huntington Library of History, open all year, as are the Gay Head Light exhibit with its 1854 Fresnel lens and the Carriage Shed containing boats, wagons, an 1854 Burton hand-pumper fire engine and many other examples of Vineyard memorabilia, including the gravestones of Nancy Luce's favorite hens, circa 1860.

All buildings are open free to members. Non-members are charged a nominal entrance fee. Research assistance is provided in the Huntington Library.

You are invited to join the Society. You will receive this journal four times a year with your membership.

## The Civil War Monument And the Soldier Behind It

by JUDITH SHIVELY

ON HOT summer nights my parents would pack us in the car for a ride to cool off from the heavy Kentucky heat. For me, the treat came from lighted windows. Catching glimpses of others' lives, I would wonder what life was like in there. Years have passed, yet I'm still fascinated by lighted windows that provide a fleeting look into other lives.

The Civil War monument in Oak Bluffs represents such a window to me. When I first saw it, I was surprised. A Confederate soldier, a "boy in gray," standing as a Civil War memorial in Yankee land!

A tourist guide I picked up on the ferry explained: Civil War Memorial Statue (1892), gift of Charles Strahan, who served under Robert E. Lee and was editor of the now defunct *Martha's Vineyard Herald* which was printed in Oak Bluffs. In 1980, the town repainted the statue with life-like colors.<sup>1</sup>

That brief paragraph was a lighted window. I wanted to look into it to learn more. I visited the Historical Society to inquire and the helpful librarian produced a large envelope about the statue and about Charles Strahan, the man behind it.

Newspaper clippings and other items in the envelope revealed the story of a southern gentleman who lived on the Vineyard for many years, dying there in 1931. I began to bond with this man, who was dedicated to mending the

<sup>1</sup> The guide has the date wrong, the statue was erected in 1891. It doesn't mention that adding "life-like colors" included making the uniform gray. The original statue was unpainted.

JUDITH SHIVELY lives in Harwinton, Connecticut, and is language arts consultant in the Torrington public schools. Previously, she taught at the university level. Past president of the Connecticut Reading Association, she has degrees from Vanderbilt, the University of Connecticut and Northeastern University. Her Vineyard interest goes back a number of years, having attended Summer Workshops in Writing here since 1988.

## 116 INTELLIGENCER

wounds of a war that had torn our nation apart. That mending, he was convinced, could begin with him. As he said in an address to Civil War veterans in 1891:

If aught I may say today could assuage or blot out the lingering prejudices engendered by the war, I would be more than repaid. It would be to me a higher honor than to be President if I could be the man to throw the last shovelful of earth over the bloody chasm. . .

I was impressed with his dedication and commitment. My curiosity led me to look more closely into that "lighted window."

Charles Strahan was born in Baltimore, November 10, 1840, one of five boys. His father, Ebenezer, and his mother, Sarah, had come from England.<sup>2</sup> In 1862, a year after the Civil War began, he enlisted in the Maryland Guards at Richmond, Virginia. Maryland, a slave state, did not secede from the Union. Apparently Southern supporters, like Strahan, went to Virginia to sign up. His unit, known as the Maryland Guards, became Company B of the 21st Virginia Regiment.

Private Strahan, "dressed in gray," was wounded in the battle of Seven Pines (called Fair Oaks by northerners) during his first year of service. "I carry the mark of a Federal bullet on my body," he told those attending the Veterans' Camp-Fire of the Grand Army of the Republic in 1891. After recovering from his wound, he was reassigned and commissioned a lieutenant, in which grade he served as aide-de-camp to Gen. Isaac Trimble, taking part in the Battle of Gettysburg.

After the war ended, he went into business in New Orleans as a coffee importer until ill health forced an early retirement in 1884 at 44 years of age. He and his family moved to Martha's Vineyard. It isn't known why he chose this Island after having lived all his life in the south.<sup>3</sup> The change in climate obviously agreed with him as he lived on

<sup>2</sup> Federal Census of 1850.

<sup>3</sup> Like hundreds more, he may have vacationed in Cottage City and decided to retire there. Or, he might have heard that the newspaper was for sale and that brought him here. Both suggestions are purely speculative.

the Vineyard longer than any place else, dying at the age of 91.

He was twice married. His first wife was from Virginia. His second wife, Emma Sheldon, was from Troy, New York. They had four children: Robert, Charles, Jennie and Louise. Only the daughters became life-long residents of the Island.

It was very shortly after moving here that Strahan bought the *Cottage City Star*, a weekly newspaper, the first in Cottage City to publish all year.<sup>4</sup> He intended it to be an all-Island paper and changed the name to *Martha's Vineyard Herald*.

Under his editing, the paper prospered. It became, in fact, a better newspaper than the long-established *Vineyard Gazette*. But despite his success, all was not comfortable for him. Memories of the Civil War remained and some residents resented the fact that he had served in the Confederate army. In 1887, three years after he moved here, he ran an announcement of a proposed Memorial Day celebration in Cottage City. Some Civil War veterans objected loud and long. If "former rebel" Strahan took part in the celebration, they would not. Strahan, not eager to stir up trouble, did not attend.

He sent a reporter to cover the event and published a long and flattering account headlined, "The Boys in Blue." Probably his associate editor, Rev. C.P. Sheldon (who had been editor of the old *Star*), was the reporter. But there was another item, shorter and less pleasant in an adjacent column. It was a letter from Sidney S. Hicks, himself a Civil War veteran. Its headline read: "Why I Did Not Turn Out." words obviously written by Editor Strahan. The Hicks letter tells of a Union corporal who had lost both feet in the war and yet bore no hatred of the Confederates. He is quoted as saying: "I belong to that class that can hold forth the hand to the man who fired the gun that did me harm." Surely, Hicks wrote, if that wounded man could forgive

It strikes me that some of our so-called Grand Army men (?)

<sup>4</sup> Cottage City had various newspapers before this, but all published only in the summer, some only during Camp Meetings.

who certainly have no visible scars to parade, exhibited but a meager part of the brave corporal's praiseworthy magnanimity when they threatened to leave the ranks if a certain long-ago Confederate officer (now a worthy, law-abiding resident of our Island city) was invited or presumed to participate in the soldiers' memorial service.<sup>5</sup>

Four years after this unpleasantness, Editor Strahan announced that his newspaper would begin a campaign to raise money for a monument honoring the Grand Army of the Republic. All money that the paper received for new subscriptions "this season will be turned over to the purchase fund for the monument." Subscriptions were \$2 a year.

Members of the Grand Army of the Republic post in Cottage City unanimously approved "the generous offer of our local paper, the *Martha's Vineyard Herald*, to erect a Soldiers' Memorial in Cottage City." Strahan became a friend of Henry W. Coye, commander of that newly formed Henry Clay Wade Post, who invited him to speak at its first Veterans' Camp-Fire on Memorial Day, 1891. The grip of prejudice was beginning to loosen.

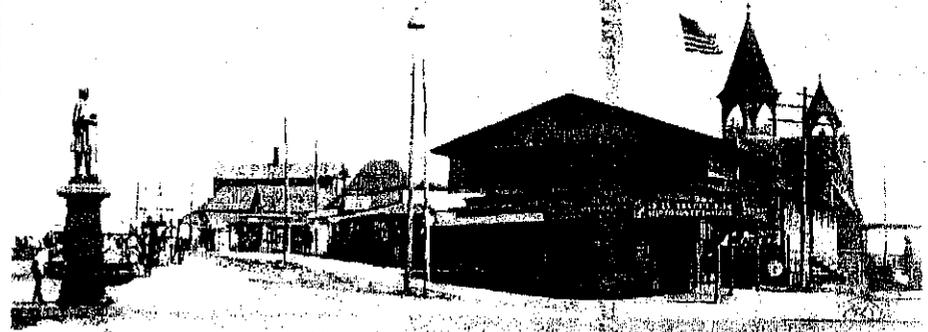
Commander Coye introduced the speaker at the event: Ladies and Gentlemen, we have with us today an ex-Confederate soldier, one who wore the gray. He has made his home and cast his lot with us; has proven his loyalty to Martha's Vineyard, and especially his loyalty to our Post, to which every member can testify. I have the pleasure of introducing my friend, Mr. Charles Strahan.

After a few customary sentences of praise for the food and the "hospitable ladies" who prepared it, Strahan got down to substance:

Let me express my appreciation of the kindness by which I am permitted to speak to you as an ex-Confederate soldier, and I beg the fullest faith from you to believe that what I utter is from the heart of a Southron [sic] imbued with the highest patriotism and who speaks as an American. . . . The mists of prejudice which have hung like a cloud over me, in this, my adopted home, are fast disappearing under the warm sunlight of your affectionate and brotherly hearts. . . . My thoughts go back thirty

<sup>5</sup> *Martha's Vineyard Herald*, June 2, 1887. The question mark after "Grand Army men" was in the published letter. What was insinuated is uncertain.

William Conklin Postcard Collection. DCHS.



At left, the Civil War statue about 1892 as a boy drinks from the spigot at the rear trough.

years when, dressed in gray, I stood as your foe. I do not believe you expect me to stand here today confessing myself a criminal and acknowledge I was then wrong. I should lose my self-respect and not gain yours if I were to say aught to dim the glory that belongs to the Confederate soldier. . . . If aught I may say today could assuage or blot out the lingering prejudices engendered by the war, I would be more than repaid. It would be to me a higher honor than to be President if I could be the man to throw the last shovelful of earth over the bloody chasm.

It was an eloquent address, describing his personal experiences, telling of how opposing soldiers would walk unharmed across the lines during a lull in the battle, Union men exchanging "coffee wrapped in the latest *New York Tribune*, for plugs of [Confederate] tobacco wrapped in the *Richmond Despatch*, . . . our greeting was 'How d'ye, Yank,' [theirs was] 'Hello, Johnny.' We were for the time Americans, brothers and friends, as we are today." He described the generosity of the North in victory, of Grant "giving the Confederates their horses and mules to enable them to make a crop."

He, a Southerner, would say nothing "to dim the glory that belongs to the Confederate soldier" and he reminded his audience that three of the pallbearers at Grant's funeral had been former Confederate generals, the other three were

Union generals. He pleaded, as mentioned above, for a similar understanding among Vineyarders.

"A New South was rising from the ashes, he said, and vividly described how nature was covering the scars of war on the battlefields with new growth. "Let us imitate nature and cover its horrors," he pleaded. "There does not exist a man in the South today that does not, with me, thank God that human slavery is forever abolished."

It was powerful. The men in blue were moved, so moved that at their next meeting they voted to send a Letter to the Editor:

At the regular meeting of Henry Clay Wade Post 201, G.A.R. at Grand Army hall, Cottage City, June 4th, 1891, it was unanimously voted to request you [the Editor] to publish the speech of Mr. Charles Strahan, delivered at the camp-fire of the Post on Memorial Day at Vineyard Haven. [Signed] Geo. W. Mason, Adjutant

When he published the letter, Editor Strahan noted:

In compliance with the above, we publish the speech on the first page of today's Herald. - [Ed.]

Strahan may have felt it would have been immodest for him to publish his address without a request. Whether the letter had been proposed to his friend Coxe or not, we don't know. But the entire speech was printed, running three full columns on the front page. Its headline: "An Ex-Confederate's Speech."

In the same issue, Strahan printed the regular report on the fund-raising campaign for the monument, now nearly two months old. The total raised was almost \$700 of the \$2000 needed. In every issue, Strahan would insert at intervals within the news columns pleas such as:

TWO DOLLARS GIVEN TO THE SOLDIERS' MEMORIAL SECURES THE MARTHA'S VINEYARD HERALD FOR ONE YEAR. TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS SECURES ONE HUNDRED COPIES FOR ONE YEAR.

And another:

HAVE YOU SUBSCRIBED FOR THE SOLDIERS' MEMORIAL FOUNTAIN? IF SO, SOLICIT SOME ONE WHO HAS NOT, BUT IS WAITING TO BE ASKED.

Gift of Everett Maplen.

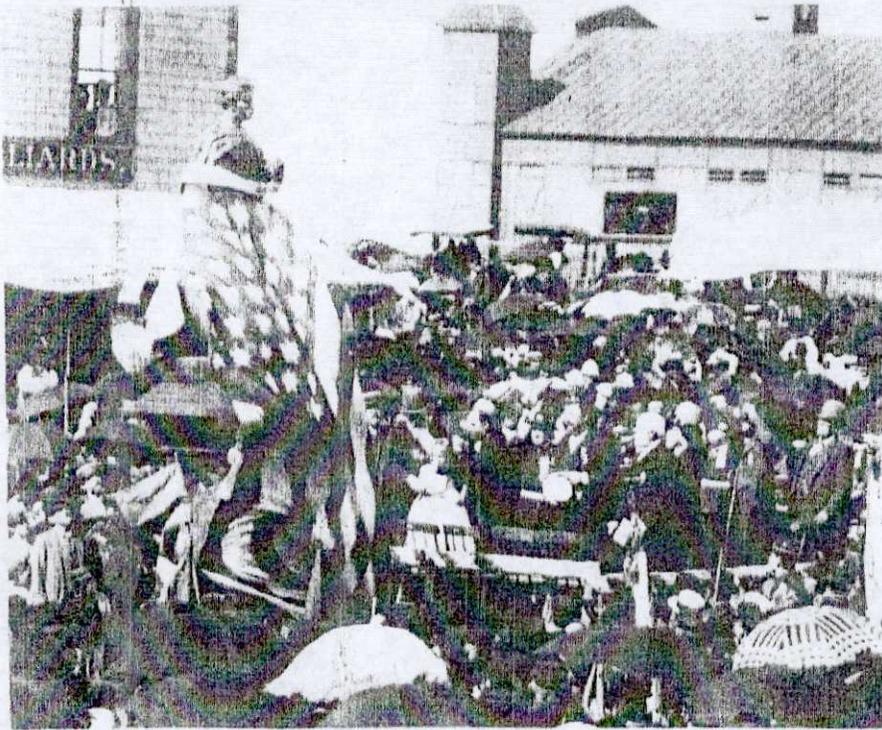


*With Lake Anthony behind him, a bronze Union soldier stands at ease.*

By mid-summer his campaign had raised \$1500 of the \$2000 needed. The balance was contributed, it must be assumed, by Strahan. On July 29, he was granted permission to erect the monument.

Permission is hereby given Chas. Strahan to erect and place an ornamental fountain and monument, as proposed by him, upon the junction of Circuit, Lake and Oak Bluffs Avenues, as located by the Selectmen of this town. The expense of erecting said fountain and monument to be paid by him. <sup>6</sup>

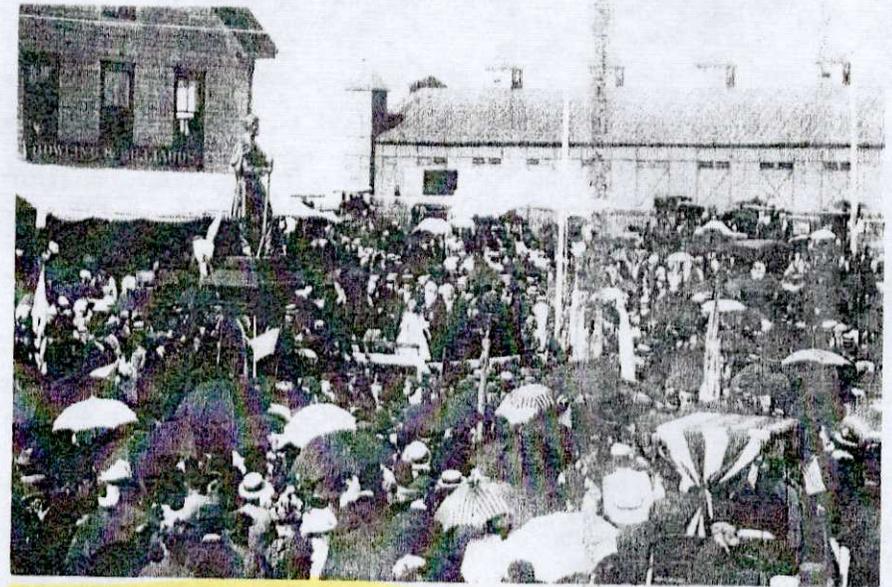
<sup>6</sup> The base had four "fountains" shaped like lion's heads. One filled a trough for horses, another included a spigot for humans and two lower troughs were for dogs.



*In her white dress, Louise Strahan, 5, is helped by Dad as she tugs rope to unveil statue.*

Strahan wasted no time. Early in August, most of the town assembled at the foot of Circuit Avenue to witness the dedication of the Soldiers' Memorial. The editor's five-year-old daughter, Louise, tugged on a cord and the covering dropped, unveiling the Island's most impressive statue. Placed on an island in the village's busiest square, the tall bronze statue depicts a Union soldier standing at ease, the butt of his rifle resting on the ground. After the unveiling, on that beautiful summer day, Strahan spoke briefly, repeating his fervent wish that now, 25 years after the war, the North and the South could come together, united in America's cause of freedom:

Soldiers and Sailors of the Grand Army of the Republic, I bring you today a message of peace and fraternity; a message in



*Slightly built Charles Strahan, former Confederate, listens to a tall man in derby introduce him as the man who raised the money for the bronze memorial to Union soldiers.*

bronze, that speaks more eloquently than words.

Mark where he stands, the embodiment of patriotism, his arms at rest, emblem of peace, the symbol of the Grand Army of the Republic. Not the star-decorated general whose genius could marshal 100,000 men and lead them to victory. Not the sea-bronzed admiral of a navy, the peer of Nelson on the sea; but the private soldier and sailor, through whose patriotism, through whose sturdy endurance of the sufferings and trials incident to war, it was made possible to preserve this Union a holy heritage to us and our children forever.

That this comes from one who once wore gray, I trust will add significance to the fact that we are once more a union of Americans; a union which endears with equal honor the citizen of Georgia with the citizen of Maine; that Massachusetts and South Carolina are again brothers; and that there is no North nor South, no East nor West, but one undivided, indivisible Union. That, as your fathers and mine stood shoulder to shoulder at Valley Forge and Yorktown, and stood by their guns on the decks of the Constitution and Chesapeake, so the sons of the Gray will stand with the sons of the Blue, should any foe, domestic or foreign, dare attack that flag.



A 1910 view from Boston House cupola; statue is visible in front of long white building.

On each of the four sides of the base of the statue was a tablet. One was inscribed:

Erected  
In Honor of  
The Grand Army of  
the Republic

Another:

Henry Clay Wade  
Post GSR No. 201

The third plaque, apparently the initials of the foundry, read simply:

FG & L

But Editor Strahan had something more to say. It was something he had left unsaid at the unveiling. It was a message that doubtless had motivated him to make this statue a reality. Shortly after the unveiling, he wrote an editorial describing his heartfelt wish:

It will be remarked that the tablets on three sides are filled and one left blank. Who knows but that, as the Grand Army of the Republic becomes smaller, and the passions of war are lost in forgetfulness, these few remaining veterans may yet inscribe on the blank tablet a token of respect to their old foes in the field, who have passed over to the other side of the river and are

resting under the trees, thus lifting up and keeping the American name and nation the brightest and most magnanimous in the galaxy of nations.<sup>7</sup>

Hostility is a long time dying. It took 30 years, but in 1925 that blank tablet was filled. Strahan, once a boy in gray was now an old man, but he got his wish. Inspired by Sydna Eldridge, the community decided it was time to re-dedicate the memorial and it make its sponsor known for all time. To do so, one of the original tablets was changed to read:

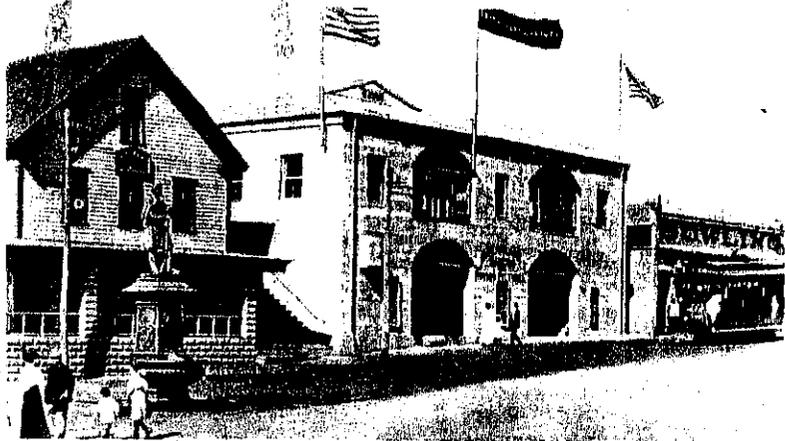
Erected  
In Honor of  
The Grand Army of the Republic  
by  
Charles Strahan  
Co. B., 21st Virginia Regt.

The fourth tablet, originally blank, was replaced with a new one, memorializing the Confederate soldiers, Strahan's "boys in gray." The text drew on the Editor's figure of speech:

"The Chasm Is Closed"  
In memory  
Of the Restored Union  
This Tablet is Dedicated  
By Veterans of  
Henry Clay Wade Post 201  
And Relief Corps  
In Honor of the  
Confederate Soldiers

Strahan, now 86 and failing, was too infirm to attend, he said. But the addition of "the Confederate Soldiers" to the tablet must have pleased him. His dream had been realized. Sydna Eldridge, who had proposed the changes, wrote shortly before the re-dedication: "I consider Mr. Strahan's act one of the finest in all my experience on the Vineyard. . . Strange as it may seem, that [1891 unveiling] was the last time he assisted at Memorial Day exercises. . . Our ex-Confederate soldier. . . who was so great-hearted. . . was not

<sup>7</sup> In February 1892, continuing his campaign to soften the prejudice, Editor Strahan announced he would give to any Civil War veteran bringing in 10 new subscribers a round trip railroad ticket to the National Encampment in Washington, D.C.



Statue on postcards: Top, 1910, traffic is light; center, 1920, more traffic plus a movie theater; bottom, 1915, the dance hall, Dreamland, a street car and new bowling alley.

honored as he should have been. But the time has now come."<sup>8</sup>

Charles Strahan died in Vineyard Haven, March 24, 1931, at the age of 91 years, 4 months and 14 days. He was buried in Oak Grove Cemetery. Nearby graves identify his wife, Emma, a son, Robert Shelton, and two others, Anna May Strahan and Vida Cozzens Strahan. His obituary lists as survivors; two sons, Robert and Charles, two daughters, Jennie and Louise, and two sisters, Mrs. Prince Hogston and Mrs. Robert Hogston of Athens, Georgia.<sup>9</sup>

*The Confederate Veteran*, a newsletter published in Tennessee, noted his death, calling him a "Confederate veteran who served during the War Between the States with Company B, Maryland Guards. . . His son, Prof. Charles M. Strahan, is connected with the University of Georgia." No mention was made of his other children. Perhaps, Charles was mentioned because he had become a southerner. Hostility is a long time dying.

In 1930, when the automobile began to take over in Oak Bluffs, the statue was moved from the square where it had stood for 40 years to a plot overlooking Nantucket Sound. There, at the head of the Oak Bluffs wharf, it welcomes thousands of visitors every summer.

It is clearly a Union soldier, his uniform and cap identify him, as does the "U.S." visible on his belt buckle and cartridge box. It is one of many identical statues erected in honor of Union soldiers at the turn of the century (a name on the base, J.W. Fiske, N.Y., may be the sculptor's). But this one in Oak Bluffs is unique in more than its memorial tablet. In 1980, the town decided to paint the uniform the color of the Confederacy. The soldier, sculptured with the uniform of the North, was turned into "a young boy in gray," honoring the Southrons, as Strahan called them.<sup>9</sup>

Lieutenant Charles Strahan of the Confederate Army would be pleased.

<sup>8</sup> *The Vineyard Magazine*, August 1925.

<sup>9</sup> Today, his rifle is not the original, which was broken off some years ago. The replacement is not a casting, but an old rifle "doctored" to look like the original.

ISLAND LIFE FOOD HOME + GARDEN BEST OF THE VINEYARD IN THE MAGAZINE

Vineyard Gazette | Calendar | Visit Martha's Vineyard | Island Weddings | Time

Machine

VINEYARD



GAZETTE

## Uniting the Divided

8.1.13

**A Civil War monument in Oak Bluffs honors both Confederate and Union soldiers.**

Tom Dunlop

In its day, it was one of scores of statues exactly like it, selected from a foundry catalogue. The soldier, a Union infantryman, stands at parade rest, his hands loosely holding a Springfield musket, the initials "U.S." plainly inscribed on his belt buckle and cartridge sack. Originally the statue stood at the head of Circuit Avenue in Oak Bluffs, erected there in the summer of 1891 to honor the Grand Army of the Republic, a fraternal organization of Civil War veterans.

All plain enough. How then, over the succeeding decades and all across the Vineyard, did this statue come to be thought of as a Confederate soldier?

The story begins with Charles Strahan, born in Baltimore on November 10, 1840. A Southerner frustrated that his native state had remained in the Union as others seceded, in 1862 he joined the Maryland Guards, a segment of the Confederate army that was later incorporated into the 21st Virginia Regiment. He was wounded by a Union bullet early on, but later served at Gettysburg. Strahan was twenty-five miles away when General Robert E. Lee surrendered in Appomattox Court House, Virginia on April 9, 1865, and he recalled with gratitude the mercy that General Grant had shown the Army of Northern Virginia.

Strahan moved his family to the Vineyard in 1884 and took over the *Cottage City Star*, an Oak Bluffs newspaper, renaming it the *Martha's Vineyard Herald*. Seven years later, he offered to erect a monument to the Grand Army of the Republic in his new hometown, paying for it with every dollar earned from new subscriptions that year. His goal was to help heal the division between North and South, and when the \$1,500 raised fell \$500 short, he apparently made up the difference out of his own pocket.

Cast in zinc by J.W. Fiske and Company of New York and standing seven feet tall atop a base of cast iron, mounted on Quincy granite, the Soldiers' Memorial Fountain, as it was formally known, was dedicated before a crowd of hundreds on August 13, 1891. "That this comes from one who once wore gray," said Strahan, "I trust will add significance to the fact that we are once more a union of Americans, a union which endears with equal honor the citizen of Georgia with the citizen of Maine; that Massachusetts and South Carolina are again brothers; that there is no North nor South, no East nor West, but one undivided, indivisible Union." Through the crucible of civil war, Strahan had emerged a stronger patriot.

Inscriptions on three sides honored the Grand Army of the Republic as a whole and its Island chapter in particular. After the ceremony, Strahan wrote of his hope that the monument would at last dissipate the "mists of prejudice," and that veterans of the Union Army might, in turn, offer a tribute to their old foes on the un-inscribed side of the monument.

**WORKING EARTH**  
 508-627-7094  
 Organic Gardening  
 Landscape Design • Construction • Maintenance

**Martha's Vineyard Magazine**  
 Click here to Subscribe!  
 www.mvmagazine.com

It took several decades, but on September 4, 1925, the remaining few members of the Vineyard post of the Grand Army of the Republic came through. Strahan was eighty-six and frail, but able to attend the unveiling of an inscription on the fourth plaque. "The chasm is closed," it read. "In memory of the restored Union this tablet is dedicated by Union veterans of the Civil War and patriotic citizens of Martha's Vineyard in honor of the Confederate soldiers."

The statue and fountain were moved to their current location across from the Oak Bluffs ferry terminal in 1930. Over succeeding generations, the soldier lost his rifle, scabbard, and a hand, and decay began to eat away at the statue and pedestal. In 1974, while preparing for the American bicentennial, the Oak Bluffs Parks Commission decided to paint the statue gray to emphasize its tie to the former Confederate soldier. Instead, the paint change left behind the Island-wide impression that the statue was a representation - however weirdly out of place - of Johnny Reb himself.

A group of Vineyard volunteers began raising money to restore the memorial in 1998. The statue was sent to Mark Rabinowitz, a conservator who was then based in Brooklyn, who removed twenty-two layers of paint, reconstructed the statue with a new scabbard and rifle cast from authentic pieces owned by the late Bill Nicholson of Oak Bluffs, and recast a hand. At a cost of nearly \$80,000, most of it privately raised, the Soldiers' Memorial Fountain was rededicated on August 17, 2001.

In 1925, Charles Strahan had stood before an assembly of Islanders to thank the few remaining Union Army veterans for finally paying tribute to those who had fought for the South: "I was the first Confederate soldier to honor the Northern people, and the people of Martha's Vineyard are the first to honor the Confederate soldier," he said. At the close of his speech, the band played "Dixie," and it was reported that "a few rebel yells were heard among the general applause."

The statue remains the only memorial north of the Mason-Dixon Line to soldiers on both sides. Charles Strahan died March 24, 1931, at the age of ninety-one. With members of his family, he is buried in the Oak Grove cemetery in Vineyard Haven.

Sources include the libraries of the Martha's Vineyard Museum and the Vineyard Gazette; David Wilson of the Soldiers' Memorial Fountain Restoration Committee; and Dr. William T. Strahan of Silver Spring, Maryland.

WIKIPEDIA

# Grand Army of the Republic

The **Grand Army of the Republic** (**GAR**) was a fraternal organization composed of veterans of the Union Army (United States Army), Union Navy (U.S. Navy), Marines and the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service who served in the American Civil War. Founded in 1866 in Springfield, Illinois, and growing to include hundreds of posts (local community units) across the nation (predominately in the North, but also a few in the South and West), it was dissolved in 1956 at the death of its last member, Albert Woolson (1850–1956) of Duluth, Minnesota. Linking men through their experience of the war, the G.A.R. became among the first organized advocacy groups in American politics, supporting voting rights for black veterans, promoting patriotic education, helping to make Memorial Day a national holiday, lobbying the United States Congress to establish regular veterans' pensions, and supporting Republican political candidates. Its peak membership, at more than 490,000, was in 1890, a high point of various Civil War commemorative and monument dedication ceremonies. It was succeeded by the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW), composed of male descendants of Union Army and Union Navy veterans.

## Contents

### History

- Women members

- Later years

### Memorials, honors and commemorations

### State posts

### In popular culture

### Notable commanders-in-chief

### See also

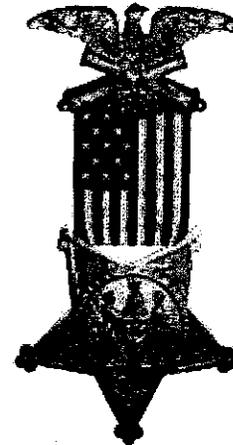
### References

### Further reading

### External links

## History

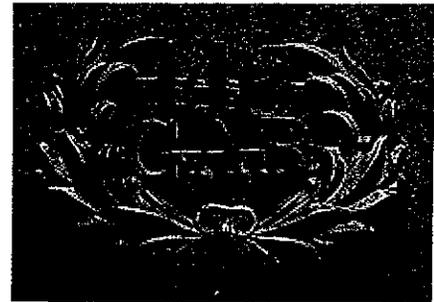
### Grand Army of the Republic



<b>Abbreviation</b>	G.A.R.
<b>Successor</b>	Woman's Relief Corps and Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War
<b>Formation</b>	April 6, 1866
<b>Founder</b>	Benjamin F. Stephenson
<b>Extinction</b>	August 2, 1956
<b>Type</b>	Veterans' organization
<b>Purpose</b>	Social, literary, historical, benevolent

After the end of American Civil War, various state and local organizations were formed for veterans to network and maintain connections with each other. Many of the veterans used their shared experiences as a basis for fellowship. Groups of men began joining together, first for camaraderie and later for political power. Emerging as most influential among the various organizations during the first post-war years was the Grand Army of the Republic, founded on April 6, 1866, on the principles of "Fraternity, Charity and Loyalty," in Springfield, Illinois, by Dr. Benjamin F. Stephenson and the first GAR Post was established in Decatur, Illinois.

The GAR initially grew and prospered as a *de facto* political arm of the Republican Party during the heated political contests of the Reconstruction Era. The commemoration of Union Army and Navy veterans, black and white, immediately became entwined with partisan politics. The GAR promoted voting rights for Negro veterans, as many white veterans recognized their demonstrated patriotism and sacrifices, providing one of the first racially integrated social/fraternal organizations in America. Black veterans, who enthusiastically embraced the message of equality, shunned black veterans' organizations in preference for racially inclusive and integrated groups. But when the Republican Party's commitment to reform in the South gradually decreased, the GAR's mission became ill-defined and the organization floundered. The GAR almost disappeared in the early 1870s, and many state-centered divisions, named "departments", and local posts ceased to exist.<sup>[1]</sup>



Original G.A.R. Uniform Hat Badge from Post No. 146, "RG Shaw Post", established by surviving members of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment in 1871. In the R. Andre Stevens Civil War Collection.

In his General Order No. 11, dated May 5, 1868, first GAR Commander-in-Chief, General John A. Logan declared May 30 to be Memorial Day (also referred to for many years as "Decoration Day"), calling upon the GAR membership to make the May 30 observance an annual occurrence. Although not the first time war graves had been decorated, Logan's order effectively established "Memorial Day" as the day upon which Americans now pay tribute to all their war casualties, missing-in-action, and deceased veterans. As decades passed, similarly inspired commemorations also spread across the South as "Confederate Memorial Day" or "Confederate Decoration Day", usually in April, led by organizations of Southern soldiers in the parallel United Confederate Veterans.<sup>[2]</sup>

In the 1880s, the Union veterans' organization revived under new leadership that provided a platform for renewed growth, by advocating Federal pensions for veterans. As the organization revived, black veterans joined in significant numbers and organized local posts. The national organization, however, failed to press the case for similar pensions for black soldiers. Most black troops never received any pension or remuneration for wounds incurred during their Civil War service.<sup>[3]</sup>

The GAR was organized into "Departments" at the state level and "Posts" at the community level, and military-style uniforms were worn by its members. There were posts in every state in the U.S., and several posts overseas.<sup>[3]</sup>

The pattern of establishing departments and local posts was later used by other American military veterans' organizations, such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars (organized originally for veterans of the Spanish–American War and the Philippine Insurrection) and the later American Legion (for the First World War and later expanded to include subsequent World War II, Korean, Vietnam and Middle Eastern wars).

The G.A.R.'s political power grew during the latter part of the 19th century, and it helped elect several United States presidents, beginning with the 18th, Ulysses S. Grant, and ending with the 25th, William McKinley. Five Civil War veterans and members (Grant, Rutherford B. Hayes, James A. Garfield, Benjamin Harrison, and McKinley) were elected President of the United States; all were Republicans. (The sole post-war Democratic president was Grover Cleveland, the 22nd and 24th chief executive.) For a time, candidates could not get Republican presidential or congressional nominations without the endorsement of the GAR veterans voting bloc.

With membership strictly limited to "veterans of the late unpleasantness," the GAR encouraged the formation of Allied Orders to aid them in various works. Numerous male organizations jostled for the backing of the GAR, and the political battles became quite severe until the GAR finally endorsed the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War as its heir.

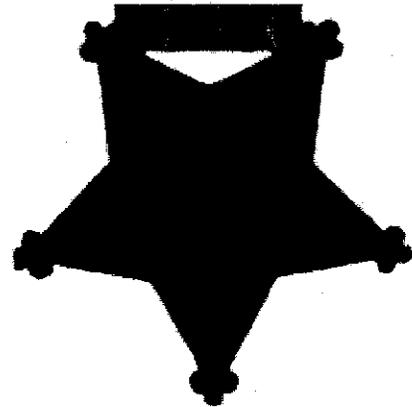
### Women members

Although an overwhelmingly male organization, the GAR is known to have had at least two women who were members.

The first female known to be admitted to the GAR was Kady Brownell, who served in the Union Army with her husband Robert, a private in the 1st Rhode Island Infantry at the First Battle of Bull Run in Virginia and with the 5th Rhode Island Infantry at the Battle of New Berne in North Carolina. Kady was admitted as a member in 1870 to Elias Howe Jr. Post #3, in Bridgeport, Connecticut. The GAR insignia is engraved on her gravestone in the North Burial Ground in Providence, Rhode Island.<sup>[4]</sup>

In 1897 the GAR admitted Sarah Emma Edmonds, who served in the 2nd Michigan Infantry as a disguised man named *Franklin Thompson* from May 1861 until April 1863. In 1882, she collected affidavits from former comrades in an effort to petition for a veteran's pension which she received in July 1884. Edmonds was only a member for a brief period as she died September 5, 1898; however she was given a funeral with military honors when she was reburied in Houston in 1901.<sup>[5]</sup>

It is possible that other women were members of the GAR as well.



Reverse of the Grand Army of the Republic Badge.



Kady Brownwell



Sarah Emma Edmonds

## Later years

The GAR reached its largest enrollment in 1890, with 490,000 members. It held an annual "National Encampment" every year from 1866 to 1949. At that final encampment in Indianapolis, Indiana, the few surviving members voted to retain the existing officers in place until the organization's dissolution; Theodore Penland of Oregon, the GAR's Commander at the time, was therefore its last. In 1956, after the death of the last member, Albert Woolson, the GAR was formally dissolved.<sup>[1]</sup>



GAR parade during the 1914 Encampment in Detroit, Michigan

## Memorials, honors and commemorations

There are physical memorials to the Grand Army of the Republic in numerous communities throughout the United States.

U.S. Route 6 is known as the Grand Army of the Republic Highway for its entire length.<sup>[6]</sup>

The Commemoration of the American Civil War on postage stamps began during the conflict by both sides. In 1948, the Grand Army of the Republic was commemorated on a stamp.<sup>[7]</sup> In 1951, the U.S. Postal Service printed a virtually identical stamp for the final reunion of the United Confederate Veterans.<sup>[8]</sup>



The Stephenson Grand Army of the Republic Memorial in Washington, D.C.

## State posts

Every state (even those of the former Confederacy) fell within a GAR "Department," and within these Departments were the "Posts" (forerunners of modern American Legion Halls or VFW Halls). The posts were made up of local veterans, many of whom participated in local civic events. As the posts were formed, they were assign to the home Department of the National Commander-in-chief of the year that they were chartered. There was no GAR post in London, but there was a Civil War Veterans Association Group that had many GAR members belonging to it.

As Civil War veterans died or were no longer able to participate in GAR activities, posts consolidated or were disbanded.<sup>[9]</sup> Posts were assigned a sequential number based on their admission into the state's GAR organization, and most posts held informal names which honored comrades, battles, or commanders; it was not uncommon to have more than one post in a state honoring the same individual (such as Abraham Lincoln) and posts often changed their informal designation by vote of the local membership. See:

- [List of Grand Army of the Republic Posts in Kansas](#)
- [List of Grand Army of the Republic Posts in Kentucky](#)

## In popular culture

John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* features several references to the Grand Army of the Republic. Despite having very little actual battle experience during his brief military career, cut short by the loss of his leg, Adam Trask's father Cyrus joins the GAR and assumes the stature of "a great man" through his involvement with the organization. At the height of the GAR's influence in Washington, he brags to his son:

I wonder if you know how much influence I really have. I can throw the Grand Army at any candidate like a sock. Even the President likes to know what I think about public matters. I can get senators defeated and I can pick appointments like apples. I can make men and I can destroy men. Do you know that?

— Cyrus Trask (character), *East of Eden*



A replica of the USS *Kearsarge* displayed at the 1893 GAR National Convention in Indianapolis, Indiana

Later in the book, references are made to the graves of GAR members in California in order to emphasize the passage of time.<sup>[10]</sup>

Sinclair Lewis also refers to the GAR in his acclaimed novel *Main Street*<sup>[11]</sup> and in his novel *It Can't Happen Here*,<sup>[12]</sup> as does Charles Portis's classic novel, *True Grit*,<sup>[13]</sup> the GAR is briefly mentioned in William Faulkner's novel, *The Sound and the Fury*,<sup>[14]</sup> and Willa Cather's short story *The Sculptor's Funeral* briefly references the GAR.<sup>[15]</sup>

The GAR is mentioned in the seldom-sung second verse of the patriotic song *You're a Grand Old Flag*.<sup>[16]</sup>

The GAR is referenced in John McCrae's poem *He Is There!* which was set to music in 1917 by Charles Ives as part of his cycle *Three Songs of the War*.<sup>[17]</sup>

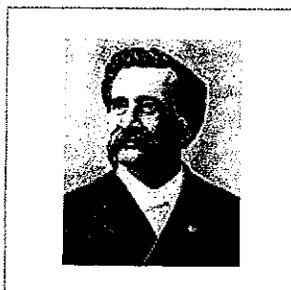
In Ward Moore's 1953 alternate history novel *Bring the Jubilee*, the Confederates won the Civil War and became a major world power while the rump United States was reduced to an impoverished dependence. The Grand Army of the Republic is the name of a nationalistic organization working to restore the United States to its former glory through acts of sabotage and terrorism.<sup>[18]</sup>

## Notable commanders-in-chief

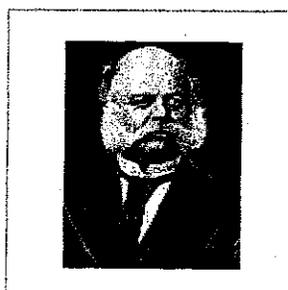
---



Benjamin Stephenson, 1866



F. John Alexander Logan, 1868



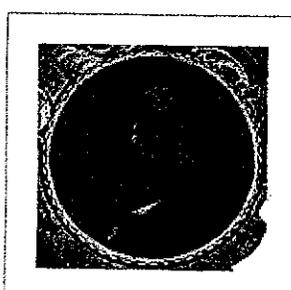
Ambrose Burnside, 1871



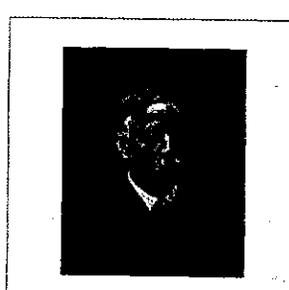
John Frederick Hartranft, 1877



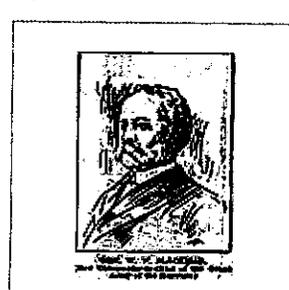
Paul Vandervoort, 1882



John S. Kountz, 1884



John Peter Shindel Gobin, 1897



Wilmon W. Blackmar, 1904

## See also

---

- Austin Conrad Shafer, California Department official, with Department commander (photo)
- Charles Sumner Post No. 25, Grand Army of the Republic
- Grand Army of the Republic Hall (disambiguation), list of halls across multiple states
- G. A. R. Memorial Junior/Senior High School, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania
- Hamilton County Memorial Building, (Cincinnati, Ohio)
- Joel Minnick Longenecker
- List of Grand Army of the Republic Commanders-in-Chief
- National Association of Army Nurses of the Civil War
- Russell A. Alger
- Sons of Confederate Veterans

## References

---

1. Knight, Glenn B. "Brief History of the Grand Army of the Republic" (<http://suvcw.org/gar.htm>). suvcw.org.

# *Rededication Celebration of the*

*J.W. Fiske*

## SOLDIERS' MEMORIAL FOUNTAIN *Restoration*

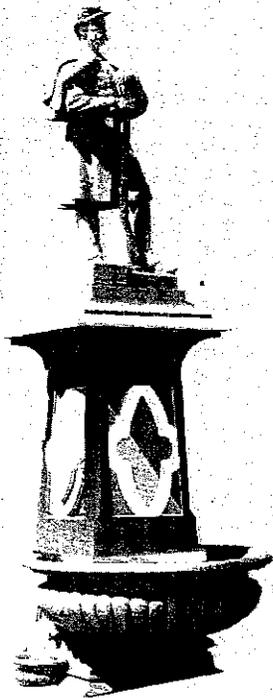
August 17, 2001 - 5:30 p.m.

Ocean Park  
Oak Bluffs

### A Brief History of the Monument

The Soldiers' Memorial Fountain was erected in honor of Union Civil War veterans in 1891 by Charles Strahan, an "ex-Confederate" and publisher of the *Martha's Vineyard Herald*. Its \$2,000 cost was raised through the sale of subscriptions to his newspaper. It was said in early accounts to be "modeled by one Elliott" and was sold from the catalogue of the J. W. Fiske and Co., a maker of garden and stable ornaments. The base was cast in York, Pennsylvania and arrived on the steamer Manhattan on July 21st. The zinc figure came a few days later. It was unveiled in August 1891, 110 years ago this week, in a ceremony that the *Vineyard Gazette* called "one of the most impressive of its kind ever held on the Vineyard." The memorial was originally located at the bottom of Circuit Ave., providing water for both animals and humans. In 1930 it was relocated to its present site, perhaps due to the rise in automobile traffic. A few weeks later, in early September, the statue toppled to the ground, an event partly blamed on the stress of relocation. The figure's head, hand, and rifle broke off, and part of the torso was crushed. Disposal of the statue was considered, but Benjamin Amaral, a local plumber, was able to repair it in the family shop, and it was reattached to the pedestal. The current restoration was performed by Mark Rabinowitz of Conservation and Sculpture Co. of Brooklyn, N. Y.

*To whom it...*



## Soldiers' Memorial Fountain

*Preserving an Island Treasure*

Mrs. Jo Ann Murphy  
American Legion Post 257  
P. O. Box 257  
Vineyard Haven, MA 02568

September 4, 2001

*"The Civil War memorial in Oak Bluffs is a treasure. It deserves the support of every one of us who loves the Vineyard and who cares about our country's history. It is both the most important statue on the Island and one with a story unlike any other."*

— David G. McCullough

Dear Jo Ann:

On behalf of all of us at The Soldiers' Memorial Fountain Restoration, thanks for your participation in the rededication ceremony. It was great to have such a good turnout of Legion veterans in the middle of the busiest summer week!

Thanks again for all your help.

Sincerely yours,

S. David Wilson

**Soldier  
Re**

### COMMITTEE

S. David Wilson  
Chairman

James N.C. Brown

Della Brown Hardman, PhD

William J. Nicholson

Richard J. Walton, Esq.

Soldiers' Memorial Fountain  
a non-profit corporation

Post Office Box 1003  
Oak Bluffs, MA 02557  
Phone/Fax (508) 693-8934  
email: db@massed.net

### The Soldiers' Memorial Fountain Restoration Committee

*cordially invites you to  
the rededication of*

## **The Soldiers' Memorial Fountain**

*at 5:30 p.m. on August 17th*

*Ocean Park  
Oak Bluffs*

**MARTHA'S VINEYARD**