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BADGES, MONUMENTS & CANNONS

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The Grand Army of the Republic owed much to its military roots; the detailed reporting, command structure, patriotic dedication, and strict guidance to rules and regulations. Yet one additional military trait was critical to their outward image—a demonstrable sense of *esprit de corps* and the resulting pageantry. Contrary to many secret fraternal societies of the time, the G.A.R. displayed their pride, devotion, and mission in a very public manner.

Whether by design or evolution, the G.A.R. became a marketing machine. They organized or led countless parades, conducted high-profile encampments, proudly displayed their badges, built dramatic structures, and established a permanent presence in cemeteries across the country with grave markers and memorials. Many cemeteries around the country are noted for large Civil War monuments, usually topped with a soldier statue and sometimes flanked by cannons projecting the Union's power.

Following the G.A.R.'s prominence, commercial ventures began associating themselves with the organization. There was G.A.R. Flour, postcards with patriotic images, unofficial souvenir medals, entertainment guides at national encampments which listed the local sporting houses, and a myriad of other trinkets, hats, and adornments. Too bad printed T-shirts were not invented yet, as they would have sold wildly.



White bronze 1904 monument flanked by two 32-pounder cannons. The G.A.R. emblem is cast in the monument above "United We Stand". Kingman, KS.



Memorial with carved G.A.R. badge. Soldiers and Sailors Monument, Wichita KS. Photograph by Gary W. Clark

BADGES AND RIBBONS

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From the early G.A.R. days, badges identified members at public events and created a sense of pride. While the awarding of badges by the military at the time was not as common as it is now, the practice did gain momentum with the Medal of Honor. On July 14, 1862, President Lincoln signed legislation for the Medal of Honor, the highest U.S. recognition for *Valor Above and Beyond the Call of Duty*.

Soon after the Grand Army was organized, a G.A.R. badge was introduced. First it was basically a shield, but shortly took on a look which lasted through its lifetime. It went through minor iterations, some because it resembled the Medal of Honor too much.

The design was not limited to bronze and cloth badges worn by the members. It became a symbol that graced buildings, monuments, and grave markers.

The eagle symbolizes the country. Its talons grasp crossed cannons and a drawn sword. The cannons represent defense, and the sword is ready to protect the flag.



G.A.R. Member Badge, c. 1880
Gary W. Clark Collection

Symbolism

The medal was spared no detail; it was designed for maximum imagery. One attempt at symbolism was the medals were to be cast from the brass of captured Confederate cannons. However, this gesture was not scalable, as available Confederate cannons were scarce by 1886.¹ Other symbols were cast in the medal, both front and back. These included a tribute to Fraternity, Charity, and Loyalty (FCL) which are the *Three Guiding Principles* of the G.A.R.

Front

The center was full of meaning. A soldier and a sailor with clasped hands, representing *Fraternity*. Minerva, the goddess of wisdom and warfare, stands tall representing *Loyalty*. A woman and child in the foreground represent *Charity*.

On each side is a flag and an eagle.

The surrounding circle is inscribed “Grand Army of the Republic on top, the bottom “1861 - Veteran - 1866.”

Outside the center ring, each of the five points include a military arms emblem:

- Crossed Swords: Cavalry
- Crossed Muskets: Marines
- Crossed Cannons: Artillery
- Bugle: Infantry
- Anchor: Navy



Back

Frequent changes were made to the reverse, yet usually minor. This is a c. 1880 version.

Circle of 34 stars represents the states at the beginning of the Civil War.

Inside this ring are the badges or emblems of the Army Corps and Navy.

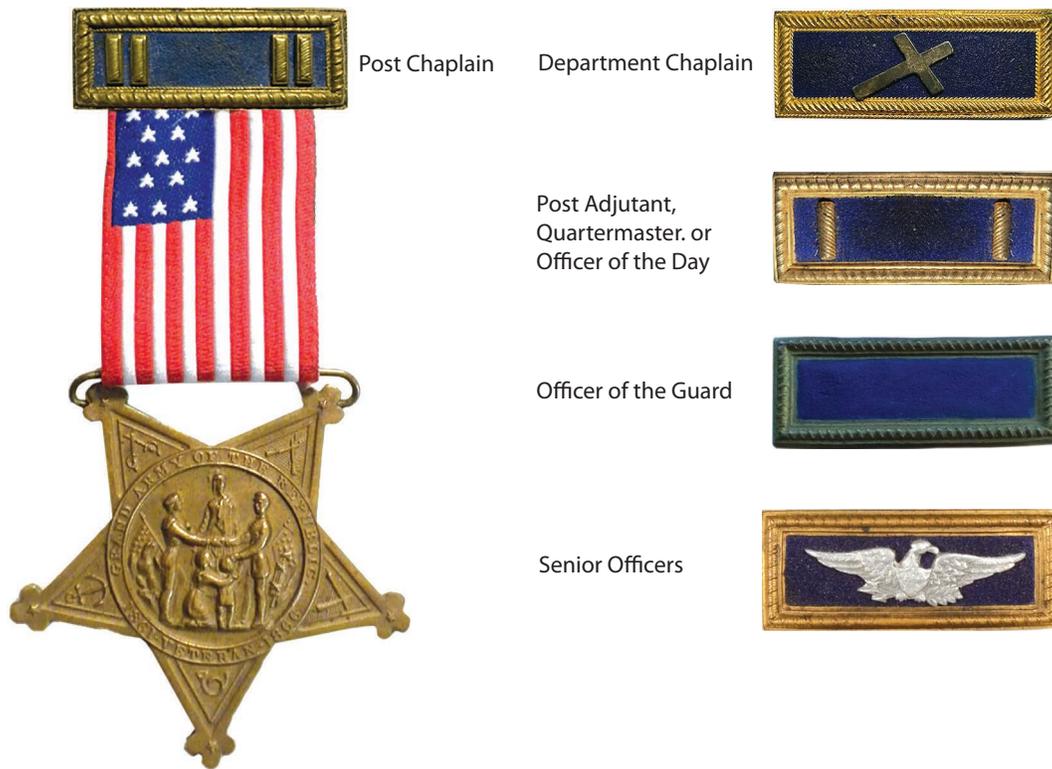
Outside the center ring, each of the five points varied over time. Early versions had laurels in each place. This one has laurels in the top two positions, then rosettes on the side points, and a campfire in the bottom point.



Officer and Position Badges

Variations of the standard member badge denoted officers of the post, department, or National Headquarters. These included *Straps* which replaced the eagle or was placed on the flag between the eagle and the star. Like some military insignia, these variations represented rank or an office, calling attention to the wearer's importance.

If one of these was found among an ancestor's possessions, it was probably a cherished item from his past and an indication of his G.A.R. involvement.



Authorized Officer Straps

Commander in Chief	Four silver stars	Sr. Vice Post Commander	Silver leaf
Sr Vice Commander-in-Chief	Three silver stars	Asst. Inspector General	Silver leaf
Jr. Vice Commander-in-Chief	Two silver stars	Aide to Dept Commander	Silver leaf
Department Commander	Two silver stars	Jr. Vice Post Commander	Gilt leaf
Staff of Commander-in-Chief	One silver star	Assistant Inspector	Gilt leaf
Surgeon General	One silver star	Post Surgeon	Gilt leaf
Provision Dept. Commander	One silver star	Council of Administration	Silver "C"
Senior Vice Commander	One silver star	Chaplain-in-Chief	Silver star & cross
Jr. Vice Dept. Commander	One gilt star	Post Chaplain	Two gilt bars
Staff of Dept. Commander	Silver eagle	Post Officer of the Day	One gilt bar
Medical Directors	Silver eagle	Post Quartermaster	One gilt bar
Aides-De-Camp	Silver eagle	Officer of the Guard	Vacant field
Asst Adjutant General to		Quartermaster Sergeant	Chevrons
Command-in-Chief	Silver eagle		
Post Commander	Silver eagle		

Encampment Badges

Encampments were the G.A.R.'s annual conventions. They were held at the post, department, and national levels. Similar to business conventions, these events wrapped business meetings with social functions and revelry. And like today's conventions, there were promotions, souvenirs, and badges which are highly collectible today, along with the member badges.

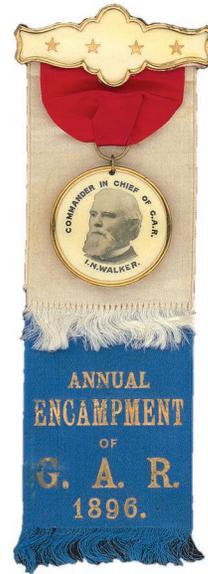
Some badges included castings related to the area, photo buttons, or simple silk ribbons. If you find one of these among an ancestor's heirlooms, you can be sure he attended the event. These are samples of the thousands of badges over the years, including national badges, department delegate badges to national encampments, and department encampment badges.



1932 - Springfield, IL
(Dean Palmer collection)



1897 - Buffalo, NY



1896 - St. Paul, MN



1915 - Hutchinson, KS
(Dean Palmer collection)



1914 - Los Angeles, CA



1917 - Salina, KS