



The Journal of America's Military Past

Formerly *PERIODICAL*



"Where Duty Leads: Lt. Colonel William Eyre," by Michael Laramie, discusses one of the least known contributors to the success of the British during the French and Indian War, Lt. Colonel William Eyre, who was the premier cartographer and engineer in the British Army prior to the American Revolution. Fort William Henry, discussed in the article, is pictured above.

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***Grand Army of the Republic and Union Veteran Research: The Essential Guide for Genealogists and Family Historians*, by Gary Clark. Wichita: PhotoTree.com, 2021. 131 pp., \$22.95 softcover.**

Two former Civil War veterans who served together in the 14th Illinois Infantry, Maj. B.F. Stephenson, and Chaplain W.J. Rutledge, were the first to envision an organization where men who served together over the course of the war could reflect on memories of their past experiences and preserve their friendships. In Decatur, Illinois, through their efforts the first Grand Army of the Republic post was formally chartered in 1866, at the same time as the constitution of the association was still being revised and agreed upon. Membership was open to persons who met two basic eligibility rules: 1) they must have been honorably discharged veterans who served during the Civil War, and 2) could not have borne arms against the United States. In 1884, the G.A.R. guide on regulations stated precisely that veterans of the United States Army, Navy, and Marine Corps who served between 12 April 1861 and 9 April 1865 who met the aforesaid two eligibility requirements could be mustered in as members of the Grand Army of the Republic.

Gary W. Clark has authored a dozen books including this latest work on subjects that cover America in the nineteenth and twentieth century from the vantage point of researching family history. His knowledge covers cemetery and gravestone research to several published books on understanding vintage photography and dating historical images. This latest work on the G.A.R. takes a closer look at the lives of the former soldiers after the end of hostilities.

The book is organized into specific topics, starting with the history of the Grand Army of the Republic. Clark explains in detail the birth, rise in membership, its near collapse, and after interventions of pension laws for the old soldiers, eventually bringing a close to the organization. The reader learns exactly what records were left behind at the national, state, and local post level, including understanding the language and jargon familiar to the original members. This included where researchers should look to find the textual records, and online sources.

Clark covers the lineages of affiliate groups borne out of the Grand Army of the Republic. These organizations grew to include the Woman's Relief Corps, Ladies of the G.A.R., and the Sons and Daughters of the Union Veterans of the Civil War and auxiliaries. Clark takes a thorough look at the histories, and records each group created and where to find evidence long after some ceased to exist. The history of the G.A.R. that Clark presents continues by looking at

the history and records of posts and groups of African American descent, including the birth of the United States Colored Troops and how their veterans tied into the post-war experience.

Sometimes all that remains in public memory are items of ephemera from members handed down from one generation to the next. Badges and ribbons worn by members of the G.A.R. offer us another glimpse into the personal life of the veterans. No doubt the men proudly displayed these items in public. Clark examines these relicts of the past in the pages of his text, including larger objects of monuments, statues, and cannons all left as silent reminders of the Civil War.

The question most authors ask after their work has been published is what more could have been added when writing on their subject. This is often tough to determine and is not always easy to answer. In the final chapters, Clark spent time establishing connections between members of the G.A.R. and the record sets exploring military service. This included documents found at the national, state, and local level, including an entire chapter devoted to online resources. Clark expounded in detail how to obtain primary source documents that included service records, pensions, and muster rolls from the National Archives and extended this to include older pension files now in the custody of the National Personnel Record Center in St. Louis, Missouri, for older veterans who lived well into the twentieth century.

The sources and examples from the archives shared by Clark were restricted to men who served in the United States Army including the regular and volunteer soldiers, with no accounting on how to research a veteran who served in the United States Navy, Marine Corps, or the Revenue Cutter Service. This reviewer would have benefited from knowing what records and finding aids exist for the other military branches during the Civil War.

The Grand Army of the Republic and their auxiliaries left a permanent mark on the living memory of the veteran members, and their descendants. From acts of Congress passing pension legislation used to aid the old soldiers financially to the background of our Memorial Day remembrances, we today see tangible evidence of the organization in countless cemeteries and town squares inscribed on monuments and headstones. Readers who are interested in the years following the Civil War and exploring the lives of veterans and their immediate families in social, economic, and political circles will find this work an invaluable addition to any historical reference collection.

Michael L. Strauss, AG