



GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC



The Grand Army of the Republic was founded on 6 April 1866, in Decatur, Illinois, by Benjamin Franklin Stephenson, M.D. and Reverend William J Rutledge. Stephenson was a regimental surgeon for the 14th Illinois Infantry and Rutledge was the regimental Chaplain of the regiment.

After the Civil War, the two remained in touch and together founded the organization that was intended to preserve the friendships and the memories of the men who fought for the Union.

To become a member of the Grand Army, a man must have served honorably in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps or Revenue Cutter Service between 12 April 1861 and 9 April 1865. He had to have been honorably discharged from the service and have never taken up arms against the United States.

On 5 May 1868, the Commander in Chief of the National G.A.R., General John L Logan proclaimed 30 May of that year as a day of Memorial to their fallen colleagues, thus establishing Memorial Day.

The organization gained immediate popularity and soon there were chapters in all of the northern states. Following the military designations of the day, each state was labelled a Department and individual towns and cities formed Posts.

At its zenith in 1880, the G.A.R. had over 410,000 members in over 6,000 Posts, mostly in the north.

The Mattoon Grand Army of the Republic Post was established on 15 February 1884.

There were about 50 members in the original contingent and T R Weaver was elected the first Post Commander.

By 1880, Mattoon Post 404 of the Grand Army of the Republic boasted over 300 members.

The members regularly met and appeared in uniform at the succession of Memorial Day Parades Mattoon held in the post-war years.

Mattoon Post G. A. R., No. 404.
The veterans of Mattoon met at the K. of P. hall last Friday evening, and organized the Mattoon Post of the Grand Army of the Republic, No. 404. About fifty members were mustered in, and the following officers were elected: Commander, T. R. Weaver; senior commander, J. R. Tobey; junior commander, G. W. Sullivan; quartermaster, L. L. Lehman; quartermaster-sergeant, F. A. Novell; officer of the day, Frank Garthwait; chaplain, W. D. Matlock; surgeon, Dr. C. B. Fry; adjutant, J. S. Goodyear; sergeant-major, Joe Withington; guards, Porte Keller, O. L. Nichols, Samuel Tison, Ben Hays; officer of the guard, W. J. Stotts.

The highlight of the Mattoon Post 404 came in 1914, when the Post and Mattoon hosted the State Encampment. This was an annual event, hosted by cities across the state. Mattoon had the distinction of being the smallest city in Illinois to host an annual Encampment.

More than 10,000 G.A.R. members, spouses and family members descended on Mattoon June 3-5, 1914, for the event. Both the Big Four and Illinois Central railroads ran special trains from all points in the state to Mattoon.

There were four stages set up, two at each end of town, where band concerts and vaudeville acts were presented. Several churches held special services and each night a 'campfire' was held. A festive air permeated Mattoon for those three days.

A special mounted police contingent was dispatched from Chicago to help in crowd control, and the City of Chicago also sent plainclothes detectives to mingle in the crowd and guard against pickpockets and con artists.

The First Christian Church was designated as a hospital, with medical staff on hand to tend to injuries or those who succumbed to the 98-degree heat.

The major event of the Encampment was a Parade on the June 4th. Contrary to today's straight line parades, the parade started at 17th and Charleston Avenue, went East and then turned North to Broadway, West on Broadway and Western, then looped back around to conclude where it started. It passed a reviewing stand in front of the Methodist Church.

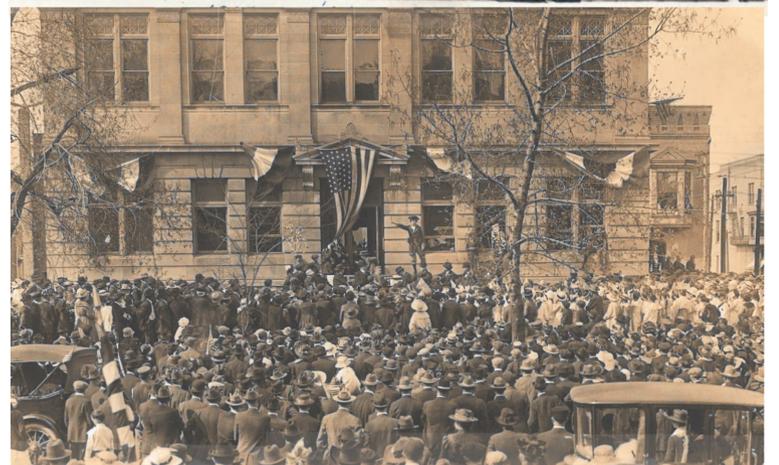
Edward F Dunne, Governor of Illinois came to Mattoon for the parade, and after riding in the lead element, ascended the reviewing stand to view the rest of the parade.

The keynote address of the Encampment was delivered by Louis L Lehman, of the Mattoon Post 404. Lehman served in the 86th Illinois Infantry and was captured at the battle of Chickamauga. He was held in the notorious Andersonville Prison until March of 1865. In 1875, Lehman came to Mattoon and among other accomplishments, was an Illinois State Senator, President of the National Bank of Mattoon and President of the Mattoon Public Library Board and the driving force in obtaining the grant for the Carnegie Library. Lehman was an early member and strong supporter of the Mattoon G.A.R. Post, being elected Quartermaster Sergeant at the organizational meeting of the Post on 15 February 1884.

Lehman concluded his remarks by saying: 'Farewell, comrades, and if forever, still farewell, fare you well.'



In 1906 the Mattoon Post erected a monument to the memory of those who served from 1861-1865 in Dodge Grove Cemetery. The statue and memorial was dedicated on Memorial Day, 1906 and Lt. Governor L Y Sherman, of Illinois gave the dedication address.



By nature of the bylaws of the G.A.R., only those who had actively served in the service of the Union were allowed membership, and thus membership numbers began to fall off as the old soldiers died.

In 1932 Mattoon Post 404 had only 11 living members. The Grand Army of the Republic organization officially disbanded in 1956.