“We Have Shared the Incommunicable Experience of War”:
Recognizing Seattle’s Involvement in the Civil War and Honoring the city’s Civil War Cemetery

Photography by author, April 10, 2012.

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History 498 B
May 14, 2012
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Situated on a small side street in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Seattle, Washington, the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) Cemetery and park serve as a reminder to local citizens the history of their nation and the widespread effects of the Civil War. Today, the cemetery is well-groomed and thoughtfully ordered, but time and geography distanced the people of Seattle from their history, leaving the cemetery in a state of disuse. Without ongoing maintenance, the GAR Cemetery grew neglected, and the people of Seattle could not recognize and appreciate their history without understanding the relevance of the Civil War to the modern world. While the cemetery is now regularly maintained, its story is a continuous struggle for acknowledgement.

People study history to learn from past mistakes, understand how it has shaped them as individuals and communities, and use the knowledge of the past to look towards the future. The American Civil War separated the country in terms of location and ideology—North or South, abolitionist or slavery supporter, states’ rights or the power of the federal government. The Civil War involved the entire country. Regardless of distance or the number of soldiers sent, Washington Territory and, more specifically, Seattle participated in the Civil War. In his Presidential Proclamation declaring April 12, 2011 as the first day of the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, President Barack Obama said, “On this milestone in American history, we remember the great cost of the unity and liberty we now enjoy, causes for which so many have laid down their lives.”

Instead of allowing American history to be fragmented by considering only the role

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1 President Barack H. Obama, “Presidential Proclamation--Civil War Sesquicentennial,” April 12, 2011,
of the state or individual, the Civil War acts as a common thread that the nation experienced together. Ignoring regions that were not battlefields, or were not even states at the time, is an injustice to all who fought in the war.

Seattle’s early reactions to the beginnings of the American Civil War reflect how most people currently view the city’s involvement for the duration of the war. When the Civil War broke out in 1861, the people of Washington Territory were ill-prepared and uninterested in participating. Exhaustion from a war on the home front and remoteness from the battlefields kept many Washingtonians at home. Two years prior, Washington Territory was primarily concerned with the “Pig War,” an issue of American versus British boundary lines in the San Juan Islands. Furthermore, the Democrats held the majority in Washington Territory and were likely opposed to interference with slaveholders. Distance, once again, ensured that most people preferred to remain at home and uninvolved. Low pay was also an important factor. Historian Alvin Josephy noted that, “The military pay of $16 a month in wartime greenbacks—which depreciated in value and became unpopular as currency everywhere in the West—could not compete with the pay of private employers or the mines, where wages were as high as $6.00 a day in hard money.” It was no surprise when Henry McGill, the acting governor of Washington Territory, issued a proclamation in addition to President Lincoln’s call for volunteers, and the


response was minimal.\textsuperscript{5} When soldiers withdrew from the forts in the Northwest in 1861, the greatest trouble was finding replacement volunteers. Eventually the territory did send soldiers to the war to aid the Union effort, but due to low pay and geographical distance, “the 1\textsuperscript{st} Washington Infantry Regiment was made up of eight California and only two Washington companies.”\textsuperscript{6} The most well-known soldier was Major-General Isaac Ingalls Stevens (see Figure 1.1), former Washington Territory delegate and governor. Remembered positively for his conviction of beliefs for the Union cause and for leading the survey party across North America through the Puget Sound to the Pacific Ocean, his party also documented Native American tribes, flora and fauna, and a potential railroad route.\textsuperscript{7} Later, Stevens’ knowledge of Native American tribes would cause controversy as he used aggressive tactics to coerce the tribes into signing the “Indian Treaties” which effectively gave the land they inhabited in exchange for small reservations.\textsuperscript{8} A man with presidential aspirations, Stevens died at 44 years of age during a roaring thunderstorm at the Battle of Chantilly on September 1, 1862, but his contribution to the Union cause and legacy in what would become Washington State long surpassed his death.\textsuperscript{9}

Even though Washington was still only a territory during the war, Seattle was already becoming a major city. While it may seem that the Pacific Northwest did not contribute much to the Civil War, Seattle became a destination for veterans after the war especially as the city grew

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{5} Clifton Snowden and C. H. Hanford, \textit{History of Washington}, 104.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{6} Alvin Josephy, \textit{Civil War}, 266.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{7} David Brewster and David M. Buerge, “Big Little Man: Isaac Stevens (1818-1861),” \textit{Washingtonians: A Biographical Portrait of the State}, (Seattle, WA: Sasquatch, 1988), 87-88.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{8} Ibid, 82.}

and matured. Between the California Gold Rush and the Klondike Gold Rush, 1849 and 1896 respectively, and travels out West after the war to begin new lives, Seattle became a place for adventurous veterans to settle down after the war.¹⁰

Many of these veterans also sought to maintain the fraternal ties they had made with comrades during the war. While veteran’s organizations sprung up North and South, one of the most well-known was the Grand Army of the Republic. One year after the end of the Civil War, Dr. Benjamin Stephenson founded the Grand Army of the Republic in Decatur, Illinois on April 6, 1866 on the “three cardinal principles of Fraternity, Charity, and Loyalty.”¹¹ An organization for Union veterans of the Civil War, the GAR grew to be one of the largest nationwide organizations by the 1890s.

Each Department of the GAR was divided into local Posts, and members must have “served in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or Revenue Cutter Service (today’s United States Coast Guard).”¹² In May of 1868, General John A. Logan, Commander-in-Chief of the GAR, issued the General Order calling for the commemoration of fallen soldiers on May 30th.¹³ While the GAR may be best known for establishing Memorial Day, the organization served as an advocacy group securing legislation to increase veterans’ pensions, provide assistance and education for families of deceased soldiers, and shelter homeless veterans. The

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¹³ Beath, 90.
GAR was not specifically a political organization, but they did support Republican political candidates. At the peak of the organization in the 1890s, the GAR wielded enough political power to help elect six presidents, starting with Ulysses S. Grant and ending with William McKinley in 1897.

A decade after the first Memorial Day celebration, Stevens Post 1, was established on June 27, 1878, and it grew to be one of the most prominent Posts in the entire organization. Post names either honored a deceased veteran or referred to the location of the Post, and Stevens Post 1 honored Isaac Ingalls Stevens. In addition to Stevens Post 1, the other four original Seattle GAR Posts were: Green Lake Post 112, James A. Sexton Post 103, John F. Miller Post 31, and Lieut. Cushing Post 56. The GAR eventually endorsed the Sons of Veterans of the United States of America (later Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War).

By 1872, a plot was reserved for the men of the GAR and their families in Seattle’s Lake View Cemetery, and in the early 1890s, Stevens Post 1 and John F. Miller Post 31 began searching for land for a separate GAR cemetery. In 1895, David and Huldah Kaufman (see Figure 2.1), two of the earliest Jewish settlers in Seattle arriving from Victoria, British Columbia in 1868, deeded land to the GAR for its own cemetery. The land was across from the North side of the Lake View Cemetery. The GAR Cemetery was platted in 1896, and the first burial (of William Baskett, a Missouri militia veteran) took place on May 14 of that year. Historian

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14 Beath, 30-31.


and former journalist, Denise Ottoson, wrote, “Between June and December of 1896 all ‘some 40’ of the GAR remains, most of whom had been marked only by wooden headboards, were moved from Lake View to the new cemetery site.”18 After the remains had been moved and seven other veterans were buried during the interim year, chronological burials began with William Pike on February 27, 1897.19

Prior to the new cemetery, on the national level, the Women’s Relief Corps became the official auxiliary to the GAR in 1883.20 Thus local Corps names corresponded to local Post names, and Seattle’s four original Women’s Relief Corps were: James A. Sexton Corps 35, John F. Miller Corps 51, Lieut. Cushing Corps 23, and Stevens Corps 1.21 A 1901 National Roster of the WRC describes Eligibility to Membership: “Women of good moral character and correct deportment, who have not given aid and comfort to the enemies of the Union, who would perpetuate the principles to which this associations stands pledged…,” and the women must have been at least sixteen years of age.22 The primary object of the WRC was preserving the memory of the GAR, but the women’s organization also assisted the GAR in providing support to veterans and their families and commemorating veterans through erecting monuments and promoting patriotism. Many of the women involved were likely married or related to veterans, but it was not a requirement for membership. Both the GAR and WRC were instrumental in

18 Denise Ottoson, “Grand Army of the Republic Cemetery.”

19 Ibid.


21 Helen Chase Keliehor, Grand Army of the Republic Cemetery. (Seattle, WA: Elizabeth Bixby Chapter, 1989). B.

orchestrating Memorial Day ceremonies and festivities in Seattle, including processions across
town and laying wreaths at veteran gravesites.

On November 6, 1910 the Women’s Relief Corps erected a Vermont granite monument,
an obelisk, to honor the fallen soldiers and deceased veterans. The monument’s unveiling and
dedication ceremony began with a rendition of “America.” Several members of the Women’s
Relief Corps presented the monument, with H.W. Brown, Commander of the Sexton Post 103
giving the acceptance speech. Lyman Banks, a Full Captain in the Civil War and former
Washington Department commander of GAR, provided an oration. At 21 feet tall and valued
over $1000 in 1910, the face of the monument marks the years of the Civil War (1861-1865)
with an engraving of the Civil War era Medal of Honor (see Figure 3.1). The primary print on
the monument reads, “In Memory of Our Heroes,” and the three other sides of the obelisk depict
three branches of combat arms: Cavalry, Infantry, and Artillery (see Figures 3.2-3.4). The
monument was erected in the center of the cemetery with the graves encircling the monument. A
flagpole was originally placed next to the monument, but a beautification project of the park later
separated the flagpole from the gravesites. A clear path allows visitors to approach the
monument without walking near headstones. The monument is the focal point of the cemetery
because it is the tallest object, surrounded by flat headstones. The monument is a symbol of how
the GAR and the WRC wanted to recognize the sacrifices of every veteran even if only a few

24 “Relief Corps Unveil Monument to Veterans,” Seattle Times, November 6, 1910.
25 Ray Banks, “RootsWeb's WorldConnect Project: RootsWeb's WorldConnect Project Global Search,”
26 “Relief Corps Unveil Monument to Veterans.”
veterans are buried in this specific cemetery.

Because of Seattle’s physical distance from famed battlefields such as Fort Sumter, Bull Run, and Gettysburg, the WRC monument did not create much, if any, controversy. In fact, the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) also erected a monument sixteen years after WRC monument, but it recognized Confederate veterans buried in Lake View Cemetery. While the UDC monument has been vandalized, it is believed that the vandalism occurred because the stolen bronze, that was originally part of the monument as a cross and as a portrait of Robert E. Lee, was potentially valuable. It was most likely not an anti-slavery comment or a reaction against the Confederacy. The UDC monument’s placement within Lake View Cemetery illustrates how Confederate veterans have also been forgotten. The monument is significantly larger than the WRC monument, but amidst the abundant and grandiose memorials for many notable Seattle figures, the UDC monument is not unique within the Lake View Cemetery.

As years went on, veterans passed away, and the influence and power of the GAR diminished greatly. Because its membership was dwindling, the organization also lacked the funds to maintain the cemetery. In 1922, they hired Lake View Cemetery Association to maintain the GAR Cemetery. Kathryn Miracle, one of the first two women on Seattle’s City Council, petitioned for the condemnation of Lot 372 of the GAR Cemetery because the financial burden was too heavy for the GAR to maintain. Author Jacqueline B. Williams describes ownership confusion and how, through Ordinance 45415, “the Seattle Parks


29 Seattle City Archives, Ordinance 45415, Record Series 2608-02, Box 1 Folder 551.
Department assumed the responsibility of financing and caring for the cemetery, even though the Stevens Post trustees retained ownership. Continued confusion over whether the cemetery belonged to the GAR, Lake View Cemetery, or the city of Seattle led to poor maintenance which persisted through the next several decades. Perceived as an abandoned site, the cemetery and park served as temporary shelter for the homeless and drug addicts; the cemetery became derelict.

Problems with maintenance remained because the GAR had relied upon its membership for support in its heyday, but its membership had severely declined. Then Albert Woolson died at 107 years old in 1956 in Duluth, Minnesota, effectively ending the GAR as the last member to pass away. Woolson’s father, a musician, originally enlisted in 1861, but his family did not hear from him for over a year. Tracking him down from New York to a Minnesota hospital, he passed away shortly. With the consent of his mother, Woolson joined the First Minnesota Volunteer Heavy Artillery beginning October 10, 1864, and he was later assigned as a drummer and bugler. He received his discharge on September 7, 1865. His passing created a greater problem for the maintenance of the GAR Cemetery because its namesake organization no longer existed, and it would require support from a new external source.

In 1960, Senator Warren Magnuson submitted a request for funding from the federal government for maintenance assistance, but the request was rejected. The Veterans’


32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.
Administration maintained only the cemeteries it had installed. However, the Parks and Recreation Department also lacked the funds to maintain the cemetery because the issue remained that there was not a line item for the cemetery or park in the department’s budget. A City of Seattle Memorandum dated 1976 stated that part of the cemetery was still owned by Stevens Post 1 trustees, but the trustees were unknown so the responsibility of maintenance fell to the city of Seattle. Several Seattle Times articles, especially during the 1980s, described local groups that acted as provisional caretakers. Reporter Elizabeth Pulliam wrote of a federally-funded “work-experience program for low-income and developmentally disabled youth” that spent the summer of 1985 caring for the cemetery. Other organizations, including the Capitol Hill Community Council, Girl Scout troops, and Boy Scout troops, inconsistently tended to the cemetery for community service projects. Many people wondered why the Lake View Cemetery, which had maintained the GAR Cemetery in the past, could not maintain it again. The possibility had been repeatedly publicized, but in 1989, Lake View Cemetery manager, Daniel Morgan, stated that they would want all the land, including the surrounding park, deeded to Lake View Cemetery Association so the city would have to leave East Howe Street. Because the cemetery is surrounded by a park, the land had been treated as such with neighbors


37 Ibid.

taking their dogs to the park and children playing sports on the surrounding grass. There was a strong opposition within the neighborhood against Lake View Cemetery residing on the entire block and transforming the outer park space into part of the cemetery as well.

The auxiliary to the GAR, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW), would have been trustees to the Stevens Post 1 and therefore entitled to ownership, but they eventually negotiated a deal with the city. The city would own and maintain the land, but they could not make changes without the approval of the SUVCW. The gravesites, which had been deeded to Stevens Post 1, were turned over to Seattle’s Parks Department. In the 1990s, a proposal to transform the cemetery to an off-leash dog park reinserted the cemetery into the public eye. The city needed both funds and time to support the GAR Cemetery, but the hours spent on the cemetery came from staff resources intended for Volunteer Park. In addition to the time spent on maintenance, other costs had increased, such as replenishing the gravel in the parking area. Another significant problem was that Parks Department’s mowers chipped the headstones. An analysis of maintenance reports of the park from 1991-2001 illustrate the park’s lack of funds for maintenance and the necessity for outside resources.

Neighbors of the cemetery formed the Friends of the GAR (FGAR), a group to maintain the cemetery and build awareness, in 1997. The FGAR did adopt the cemetery, but they do not technically own the land. Archivist for the FGAR, Tom Easthope explained that their primary influence is in “driving maintenance and awareness within the city.” From 1991-1997 the park

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39 Tom Easthope, interview by author on Capitol Hill, April 29, 2012.
40 “Grand Army of the Republic Cemetery Park Concept Plan.”
41 Friends of the Grand Army of the Republic.
42 Tom Easthope, interview by author.
staff averaged about 200 hours per year on maintenance. The average increased to 300 hours per year and reached a record high of 651 hours in 1999 due to park staff working with the volunteers.\textsuperscript{43} Receiving three grants from the Seattle’s Department of Neighborhoods (see Figure 4.1) over the course of three years allowed the FGAR to hire an arborist and implement plans to beautify the cemetery and park.\textsuperscript{44} The flagpole, long since rusted and which had originally been positioned next to the monument, was relocated to the edge of the cemetery and replaced by a new flagpole which had been part of the Seattle World’s Fair (also known as the Century 21 Exposition) in 1962. An Eagle Scout troop created a project to lay stones around the flagpole so that raising and lowering the flag would be easier on a flat surface, and mud would not be an issue if it rained. With the assistance of an arborist, the FGAR removed hedge portions and supplied a replacement planting, where necessary, around the cemetery, enclosing the graves and separating it from the park.\textsuperscript{45} Over the course of several years, the organization replaced headstones with government markers, introduced a kiosk with cemetery history at the entrance, and created a secondary monument outside of the cemetery and park.\textsuperscript{46} There is a crescent-shaped parking lot for the cemetery and park. In the center portion where cars could not drive, the FGAR, with the St. John’s Lodge No. 9 and F. & A.M. of Washington, built another granite monument, engraved with quotations from Oliver Wendell Holmes: “In our youth our hearts were touched with fire… We have shared the incommunicable experience of war. We have felt,

\textsuperscript{43} “Grand Army of the Republic Cemetery Park Concept Plan.”
\textsuperscript{44} Tom Easthope, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{45} Tom Easthope, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{46} “Seattle GAR Cemetery Update,” Camp Notes: The Newsletter of Gov. Isaac Stevens Camp No, Page 3.
we still feel, the passion of life to the top” (see Figure 5.1). Holmes’ quotations signify for these veterans’ organizations the importance and necessity of recognizing the Civil War. His famous remarks, both first stated in Memorial Day speeches, reflect how the country, once divided, was able to work towards reunion through the shared experiences of war. The soldiers who served together found camaraderie and brotherhood in one another thus prompting the birth of the GAR and many other organizations.

Once the cemetery had been restored, the FGAR, too, has become smaller, with its goals mostly fulfilled. The members are primarily park neighbors who raise and lower the flag each day and assist in ongoing maintenance when needed. Currently, the GAR Cemetery is in beautiful condition, but little is known by the public about the history of the cemetery and the members of Seattle’s GAR posts. Overshadowed by the larger Lake View Cemetery, the GAR Cemetery and park are easily overlooked, except by a few neighbors dedicated to honoring Civil War veterans and their memory. Without easy accessibility to historical information, the citizens of Seattle are not able to recognize the sacrifices of the veterans during a tumultuous period in their nation’s history and appreciate the rich history of Seattle and Washington Territory. Even in visiting the cemetery, the kiosk provides little information beyond a brief history of the GAR and a list of veterans and their families who are buried in the cemetery. A monument must serve both the people whom it was erected for and the population who visits it so that nearby citizens are able to acknowledge and appreciate their history. The Women’s Relief Corps monument states that its intention is to honor veterans, and it lists the years of the Civil War, but it does not provide further details. If a passerby does not know who the GAR or the WRC were, then they would not even realize that the cemetery and the monument were supported by Union
organizations. The cemetery is crucial to local Seattle history as it illustrates the city’s role in a war which was fought to reunite the country, and the Civil War is a shared experience and shared history for all Americans.
Appendix

Figure 1.1
Isaac Ingalls Stevens, circa 1855.

Figure 2.1
David and Huldah Kaufman, in Seattle circa 1864-1875

47 "Stevens, Isaac Ingalls (1818-1862),"
The years of the Civil War with an image of the Medal of Honor.

Crossed swords represent Cavalry.

Crossed guns represent Infantry.

49 Photography for Figures 3.1-3.4 by author.
Figure 3.4
Crossed cannons represent Artillery.

Figure 4.1
An image of one of the Neighborhood Grants received by the FGAR.

Figure 5.1
Photography by author.
Bibliography


Easthope, Tom. Interview by author via telephone and in person on Capitol Hill. April 29, 2012.


“Relief Corps Unveil Monument to Veterans.” *Seattle Times*. November 6, 1910.


