



Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic Department of Pennsylvania A Brief History

On November 30, 1881, an Executive Committee of five ladies met in Trenton, New Jersey for the purpose of organizing a State Department of Aid Societies. This meeting was in compliance with General Order No. 14 issued by Department of New Jersey Commander C. H. Houghton of the Grand Army of the Republic. The plan of the meeting was to formulate for the society such rules and regulations necessary for a perfect and uniform code in all work tending to benefit the Grand Army of the Republic.

A second meeting was held December 15, 1881, in Trenton, New Jersey. At which time a department was formed adopting the name *Loyal Ladies' League, Auxiliary to the Grand Army of the Republic, Department of New Jersey*. A charter, recommended and endorsed by Department Commander Houghton, was issued. The officers were elected, and the new society at once began its work.

Each subordinate body of the State Department was designated as a League, and the membership restricted to mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters of honorably discharged soldiers, sailors, and marines of the late Rebellion, and ex-army nurses.

The first Convention was held on January 25, 1883 in Camden, New Jersey. This newly organized society had sixteen League's present, reporting a total membership of 776 ladies.

At this time there were various societies of women connected with Post of the Grand Army of the Republic throughout the United States, who differed from each other in ideas of a membership eligibility, form of discipline, etc., but who were all of one accord in their aim to assist the G. A. R. in its charitable work, as well as having the desire to share in the pleasures of social functions.

With a view of consolidating these several societies, Commander-in-Chief Paul Van Devoort of Nebraska issued a call, requesting that a meeting be held in Denver, Colorado, July 25, 1883, for the purpose of effecting a national organization of ladies, an Auxiliary to the Grand Army of the Republic.

The meeting brought together a large group of women and various sessions were held. After the first day's deliberation of the variously opinioned representatives, it was found that all differences as to how the new Society should be formed had narrowed down to a question of eligibility of membership.

The Women's Relief Corps of Massachusetts and the East contended that all women ought to have the privilege of joining. The Loyal Ladies League of New Jersey asked that membership be restricted to mothers, wives, sisters and daughters. A vote was taken and the new society would be formed on the basis of the Women's Relief Corps.

New Jersey, loyal to her convictions returned home, entrenched in the thought that her convictions were right. New Jersey was not a large department, but they progressed slowly and published a monthly newsletter disseminating the principals and objects of the order. It was during this period of struggle that Pennsylvania came to the help of the cause. It was then, in 1884, that Pennsylvania, the keystone of the arch, with its large opportunities, its enthusiasm, its great clasp filled the mother Department with renewed vigor and a stronger spirit for conquest.

Two other states, California and Kansas, joined together with New Jersey and Pennsylvania to work in harmony, issuing charters and orders, and generally supervising the work of the entire membership.

A National body was soon proposed in order to more successfully further the work of the order, which was met with a generous and unanimous response. To that end, a Convention was held in Chicago, Illinois in November 1886. A name change was decided upon from *Loyal Ladies League* to *Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic*. Comrade Joseph K. Davison of Philadelphia assured the National President of his willingness to lend a helping hand to the new administration. Pictured to the right is the present day Ohio Veterans Home in Sandusky, Ohio which houses the National Headquarters of the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic.



In Pennsylvania two Homes for wives and widows of the veterans were established, each a property of the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic. One, at Hawkins' Station, near Pittsburgh. This was a valuable property, had from its inception been a quiet and inviting refuge for the helpless, bereft or decrepit woman; whose claim for admittance had been the relationship she held to the veteran of the Civil War. This home has since been sold, although, a new home now stands in Turtle Creek.

A second home, for Veterans and their wives, was located in Philadelphia. It, also, was a testament of what could be accomplished by a few ardent and devoted women. The Home required not separation of the aged couples, but permits them to live in the routine of their own home life.

The foregoing does not show the limitations of work done in the early years of this Order. This band of women knew no limitations in their line of service. One example, is the days and nights of strenuous activity the ladies of the Department of Pennsylvania provide during the dire disaster of the awful calamity of the Johnstown Flood.

Among the aims and objects of the order planted at its birth – “To uphold the honor of the Grand Army of the Republic and to perpetuate its memory,” still remains. To uphold this honor has been, and is now, one of the most sacred duties imposed upon members of the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic.

Report by Ellen M. Higgins based on article written in 1910 by Laura McNeir, PNP from New Jersey.