



SUVCW Member Badge

# Introducing THE SONS OF UNION VETERANS OF THE CIVIL WAR



G.A.R. Member Badge

The Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW) is a volunteer, non-profit, charitable, fraternal, patriotic and educational organization similar to the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), which was the largest Union Civil War veterans' organization. The SUVCW is officially recognized as the GAR's legal successor, receiving its Congressional Charter in 1954 (Public Law 605).

## MISSIONS

### Honoring Union Veterans

The SUVCW cooperates in doing honor to all who have patriotically served our country in any war. The Order participates with other organizations in the proper observance of Memorial Day (May 30th), which was established by the GAR in 1868, seeks out and marks the graves of Civil War veterans; observes the care and upkeep of Civil War Memorials and brings any failure to do so to the attention of the proper authorities.

### Preserving & Perpetuating the GAR

The SUVCW assists in the preservation and making available for research, the documents and records pertaining to the Grand Army of the Republic and its members. The Order ensures that the condition of signage along U.S. Route 6, the GAR highway, is properly maintained. The SUVCW supplies scholarships, funding to the annual Lincoln Memorial and Tomb Ceremonies, and to the Gettysburg Remembrance Day Ceremony, which includes the country's largest Civil War parade, held on the third Saturday in November. Grants for Civil War Memorial preservation are also provided. Meetings and Encampments (conventions) are still conducted according to the tradition and rituals of the GAR.

### Patriotic Education

The SUVCW's patriotic education includes teaching patriotism and the duties of citizenship, the true history of our country, and the love and respect for our Flag. Each year, the Order conducts presentations to schools and communities.

The SUVCW encourages the proper teaching of American history in our schools. It keeps the public informed of activities and measures that violate or may weaken the spirit and purposes of our country's Constitution and institutions. It promotes and broadly sustains the American principles of representative government, of equal rights and impartial justice for all.

## ORGANIZATION

The SUVCW has 26 state-level organizations (Departments), representing 36 states and over 200 local chapters (Camps) across the country. A National Membership-at-Large is also available for those who live in states that are not yet served by a local Camp.

The highest governing body of the SUVCW is the National Encampment, chaired by an officer of the corporation, whose title is Commander-in-Chief. Officers and Departmental representatives convene annually at the National Encampment to conduct corporate business and to elect officers. Officers at the Camp and Department level are also elected annually to carry out SUVCW plans and programs.

The National Organization publishes the quarterly *Banner*, containing news of activities in the various Departments, at the National level, and other items of interest to the membership. Many Camps and Departments also publish newsletters, keeping their members informed of local meetings, programs and events.

## ACTIVITIES

Camp and Department activities vary, but all work in support of the organization's missions.

Patriotic presentations during regular Camp meetings and historical outings increase the knowledge of the Camp and make for a more informed membership. Presentations are given to schools, historical and genealogical organizations.

SUVCW members participate in a variety of ceremonies, designed to honor Union veterans of the Civil War and veterans of all U.S. conflicts. The most important of these is Memorial Day. Other local ceremonies may be held on Lincoln's Birthday, Flag Day, Independence Day, and Veterans Day. Many camps hold a grave re-dedication ceremony when a Union soldier's worn headstone has been replaced with a new one. Union soldiers' grave registration efforts are part of a National program. They also participate in similar events when historical plaques and monuments are introduced or restored in their community and when requested to assist local veterans' groups.

Many Camps and Departments promote the ideals of good citizenship and patriotism that the GAR advanced by presenting awards to deserving Eagle Scouts and ROTC cadets, recognizing their achievements. In addition, the SUVCW's talents have augmented local and national historical preservation groups' efforts for decades. Members actively work to assess

and preserve Civil War battlefields and artifacts, Grand Army monuments, facilities and records in their communities. Much pleasure is to be gained by associating with dedicated people and realizing preservation accomplishments. Annually, many Camps also contribute money to Civil War battlefield preservation.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Membership in the SUVCW is open to male descendents (sons, grandsons, great grandsons, nephews, grand nephews, great grand nephews, etc.) of soldiers, sailors, or marines who were mustered into Federal service and served honorably in, were honorably discharged from, or died in the service of the Union Army or Navy during the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865. *Member* applicants must be at least 14 years of age and must not have been convicted of any heinous or notorious crime (felony). In addition, the applicant and his ancestor(s), through which eligibility is claimed, must not have ever borne arms against the U.S. Government. Male descendants, ages 6- 14, may join as *Juniors* with the same stipulations stated above.

The application fee and annual dues rate will vary from one Camp to another. Please note that applicants must also submit photocopies of records that substantiate their ancestor's honorable service to the Union. This may be in the form of the ancestor's military discharge certificate, muster-out report, or pension papers (available from the National Archives). The 1890 Federal Census of Veterans and State Adjutant General's records may also support service.

Those who do not have a Union ancestor, but who still wish to support the Order, may join as an *Associate*. The *Associate* has the same privileges as a *Member*, in that he can vote at camp elections and hold Camp office. Up to 33% of a Camp's total membership may consist of Associates. Associates must be at least 14 years of age and have never borne arms against the U.S. Government. Not all Camps accept Associates.

SUVCW officers and members at formal gatherings, on parade, or other duty of the Order, wear the organization's membership badge on the left breast of their clothing. Those who have held or currently hold command positions at the Camp, Department and National level are also recognized by a unique badge. Badges are also awarded for military service and longevity. Badges are available for sale from the National Quartermaster.

## **BACKGROUND**

The SUVCW was founded on November 12, 1881, as the Sons of Veterans, U.S.A. by GAR member Maj. August P. Davis of Pittsburgh. The new cadet corps expanded rapidly, training in military drill and tactics. As the GAR's male auxiliary, it also added support to the GAR's efforts for veteran preference in public service hiring and pension benefits. It petitioned Congress to protect the Flag against disrespectful practices.

In 1898, during the Spanish American War, several companies of Sons of Veterans were raised for service. However, a Congressional bill to make the Order a trained military reserve never got out of committee. The Order then elected to become a patriotic education society and changed its name to "Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War."

The *Sons of Veterans Reserve (SVR)* was created within the organization, keeping the uniformed, military aspect of the Order alive. SVR units served with the U.S. Army during World War I. In recent years, the SVR mission has been historic, ceremonial and commemorative. While some re-enactors belong to the SUVCW and the SVR, these are not re-enactor organizations.

Prior to disbanding and before the death of its last member, the GAR officially designated the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War as its successor and heir to its remaining property.

## **AUXILIARY**

Many of the SUVCW's objectives could not be attained without the support of its Auxiliary. Originally organized as the Ladies Aid Society in 1883, the *Auxiliary to the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (ASUVCW)* is composed of likeminded women, who share the interests and goals of the Sons. They work alongside the SUVCW during special events, ceremonies, and presentations. Many Camps have Auxiliaries affiliated with them. The ASUVCW's structure and meetings are similar to the SUVCW's. Membership is open to both those with and without ancestry. Wives, daughters, mothers and adopted daughters of SUVCW members are invited to join. A *Junior* membership has been established for girls 8 to 12 years old.

Together with the *Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War (DUVCW)*, *Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic (LGAR)*, and the *Woman's Relief Corps (WRC)*, the Sons and Auxiliary form the "Allied Orders" to the G.A.R.

**Visit us on the web at <http://www.suvcw.org>**