

Members of the Confederate Relief and Historical Association of Memphis

Buried within a large United Daughters of the Confederacy Collection at TSLA is a volume entitled *Record of Ex-Confederate Soldiers and Sailors, Members of the Confederate Relief and Historical Association of Memphis* (Original TSLA holding - Manuscript Microfilm #1276, Reel 5, Oversize Volume 8). Research shows that this book springs from one of the first ex-Confederate societies to arise in the South. The Confederate Relief and Historical Association of Memphis (CRHA) is thought to have formed as early as 1866. The volume provides insight into not only the efforts to insure the “perpetuation” of Confederate history and legacy that were made following the Civil War but also into the roots of the West Tennessee Historical Society (WTHS)

W.D. Pickett, W.B. Wiggs, R.W. Mitchell, John H. Erskine, and their associates incorporated the organization in 1869. The charter appears in the *Public Acts of Tennessee, 1869-70*, Chapter 59, Page 393. Therein, the text states the objective of the group is “to engage in works of charity and benevolence, and to render succor and protection to the unfortunate and destitute.” At the time of charter, the Association sustained a membership of 225 ex-Confederate Army and Navy soldiers said to have served honorably. Although the “relief” aspect of the society took center stage in the charter description, and the desire to aid disabled Confederate soldiers, widows, and orphans appeared heartfelt (the word “relief” would be removed from the name of the society in an 1884-85 reorganization, as the need was said to have dissipated.), it was the “historical” aspect that would propel the Association forward. This early emphasis is evidenced by a letter in the Brown-Ewell Papers (Manuscript Microfilm #819, Reel 3; Box 7, Folder 4). Isham G. Harris, the Association’s first elected president, writes to Lt. General Richard Stoddert Ewell in October 1869, reminding him that Harris appointed Ewell, General Pillow, and Colonel William H. Stephens to the “Historical Committee.” Having had no report from the committee, he gently chides Ewell and expresses his hope that “you will take hold of the historical branch of the Association.”

Indeed, when J.P. Young wrote *The Standard History of Memphis* in 1912, he described the group foremost as “an association for the perpetuation of Southern history.” Succeeding presidents were John C. Fizer, Charles W. Fraser (also spelled Frazer), and George W. Gordon. The Association would later merit a room in the Shelby County Courthouse.

Early years would find the organization working hand in hand with the Ladies Confederate Memorial Association to erect a monument in Confederate Soldiers' Rest in Historic Elmwood Cemetery honoring the Confederate dead of the city. The inscription that the monument carries echoes the importance of Confederate memory to the vanquished. The translation of the Latin is "The Fates Which Refused Them Victory Did Not Deny Them Immortality."

The ex-Confederates of the organization, and later their male descendants, placed a premium on gathering together historical records. They would come to secure a hall for an armory to house their war relics. Thus, we begin to see the link to the heritage of the West Tennessee Historical Society. A succession of four historical societies comprise the lineage of the WTHS. The Old Folks of Shelby County was made up of individuals who had been residents of Shelby County for at least twenty years; the group was founded in 1857. They published a monthly journal known as the *Old Folks' Historical Record* between 1874 and 1875 (TSLA Call Number– F 443.S504), which was edited at one point by James D. Davis, author of the first history of Memphis. The Confederate Relief and Historical Association, at first, overlapped with the Old Folks Society, but would eventually succeed it and absorb its functions. The later Memphis Historical Society, founded by Judge John Preston Young (a principal in the CRHA) followed. The name changed in 1935 to the West Tennessee Historical Society. The WTHS would incorporate in 1950.

Subsequent to the 1884-85 reorganization of the Confederate Relief and Historical Association that removed "relief" from the name, the Association fell in step with a movement sweeping across the South. As the number of local ex-Confederate societies increased, there grew a desire to have a national organization. All Confederate entities were invited to send delegates to New Orleans in the spring of 1889. The result was the formation of the United Confederate Veterans Association (UCV). It is telling that the designated structure of the UCV would mirror the organizational lines of the army of the Confederacy; this seems to indicate at least a subconscious notion to revisit and resurrect the Confederacy. Along the same lines, the huge 1901 UCV Reunion in Memphis was heralded by one author as "Memphis Recaptured by Confederate Army." The Confederate Historical Association would choose to maintain its identity and exist simultaneously as Camp No. 28, United Confederate Veterans. Along with the drive for formal organization came the

formalization of membership records. The reorganization which occurred in 1884-85 resulted in a new charter which outlined a stricter adherence to membership and application conditions. This is clearly evidenced in the bivouac records for Memphis's CHA, contained within the UCV Bivouac Records (Manuscript Microfilm #1548, Reel 4). Articles from the Constitution and By-laws of the Association printed on the jackets of many applications reveal that applications for membership were to be presented at regular meetings in written form and endorsed by two Association members, or accompanied by satisfactory vouchers, and submitted with initiation fees. A five-member "Committee of Credentials" was appointed by the President to evaluate the documentation. A letter contained within the camp's entries issued by President Charles W. Fraser in 1895 reveals the new emphasis placed on these records, as he tried to get the fifty-six members with no records on file in line with the State Association of Confederate Soldiers. Captain J. Harvey Mathes originally attempted to formulate "a complete and reliable list of all members of the Confederate Historical Association of Memphis." His initial idea evolved into the valuable work *The Old Guard in Gray* (TSLA Call Number -- E 483.1 .T2M3), published in 1897. The volume contains biographical sketches and pictures of Association members, as well as history of the organization. Mathes notes the membership at the time of publication as 245.

Mathes's writing divulges that some of the "books" of the CHA had been lost or mislaid. According to the author, minutes and documentation for the Association began with 1869. Because initial minutes were lost, the year of formation can only be "estimated" as 1866.

This brings us to the "discovery" of one of these "lost" volumes, the *Record of Ex-Confederate Soldiers, Sailors, Members of the Confederate Relief and Historical Association of Memphis*, located within UDC Collection (Manuscript Microfilm #1276) and indexed on this website. The Confederate Historical Association officially gained a women's auxiliary in 1889. The Southern Mothers was a relief organization existing in Confederate Memphis under the leadership of Mrs. Sallie Chapman Gordon-Law. While it officially dissolved upon Federal occupation, in reality, it remained covertly organized. The former Southern Mothers aligned themselves under the charter of the CHA in 1889 and became the Ladies Confederate Historical Association. Preliminary research suggests that the LCHA's identity may be shared as, or simply intertwined with, the Ladies Confederate Memorial Association. This connection to a Confederate

women's organization may explain how this volume fell into the UDC holdings. TSLA's early accession records fail to shed light on this mystery.

The volume itself carries with it the encompassing date range of 1865-1923. This suggests that the estimated date of formation for the CRHA might need to be pushed back a bit. This register contains categories for the following information: Name, Rank, Company, Regiment, Brigade, Division, Army, Enlisted (date), Commissioned (date), Discharged (date), Paroled (date), and Remarks. Pages are numbered, as are individual entries. In quite a few instances, there exists a thumbnail photograph or printed image of the veteran. These images are uniform in nature and picture the veterans in later life. We can speculate that these may have been group submissions to the *Confederate Veteran* or were somehow related to Confederate reunions. In some cases, the word "Dead" is written beside a name, and a number of obituaries are pasted into this book. The "Remarks" section can yield additional details, such as birth dates and locations, wounds received, battles fought, and prison stays. Some members submitted a biographical sketch, replete with educational accomplishments and choice of profession. There are a number of instances where there is a notation to see a "Folio" for further records on a particular individual, hinting at the wealth of documentation the organization once possessed regarding its members. The location of these folios and the additional records of the Confederate Relief and Historical Association remains a mystery worth solving.

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