A Summary of Research Proving the Existence of a GAR Hall in Genoa, OH

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An Alternative To Demolition

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The Grand Army.—Major D. S. Smith, Commander of the Post of the Grand Army at this place, has lately established posts at Elmore and Genoa, both of which promise to be flourishing. The post at Genoa numbers twenty charter members and on organization elected the following officers:

Wm. S. Joles, P. O.,
F. C. Wyman, S. V. C.,
L. D. Gregg, P. A.

Charles E. Warriner, Q. M.

The charter members are "true blue" and the soldiers of Genoa and vicinity will give the order a cordial support.
Necessity is the mother of invention. When the possibility arose that the village may demolish the historically significant GAR Hall, I went to work finding a use for the building that would allow the council to determine that demolition is not in the best long-term interest of the village. I assumed the following parameters:

- The village does not have large sums of money to spare for pet projects, and certainly nowhere near the $180,000+ suggested for a total rehab of the building.
- Projects going forward would rely primarily on private fundraising.
- Long-term maintenance costs must be minimal, and preferrably nonexistent.
- Its use must focus on being a clearly beneficial asset for the promotion of Genoa.
- Relying on civic organizations to use the building is an ill-fated requirement.
- The rails-to-trails line will be coming through Veterans Park between the Big Dipper and the GAR Hall, similar to what is shown here:
The project is simple: build a ~1500 sqft courtyard to utilize the 33 feet between the building and coming bike trail. We can avoid $180,000+ in frivolous spending and instead have a use for the building that has essentially zero maintenance costs.

Line the courtyard with all-weather informational boards, historical plaques, and a few artifacts to tell the stories of the Genoans who tamed the Black Swamp, fought in the Civil War, and founded this town soon after their return. This is the perfect building to be a backdrop for a historical stop on the trail: it was built from virgin Black Swamp timber in 1856, it housed the GAR, WRC, Legion, and even the VFW, and was parked next to a rail line (twice).

Its diverse uses allow us to tell not just the history of veterans (although it would be fitting for Veterans Park), but the founders of the town and men who literally laid the foundations for Genoa through the second half of the nineteenth century.

By being placed along the bike trail, it will give visitors a reason to stop, buy an ice cream cone or get a drink of water, and be charmed by the small town history that separates us from any other suburban development--Oregon is going to great lengths to preserve and utilize their log cabin--our hall is more than a decade older.
In the days of the Civil War, when neighbors enlisted to join the army they were not dispersed among various units. Instead they were grouped in the same regiment and even company. They “used the same water cup,” in the words of Jeff Eversman. The end result is that we can track where groups of Genoans fought together in the Civil War, and we can tell their story. For instance we know the 100th OVI (Ohio Volunteer Infantry) and 177th OVI had companies of more than a half-dozen Genoans each. We have a complete diary from the 14th OVI that provides numerous updates on “the Genoa boys.”

Genoans were present at some of the most important points of the Civil War: Antietam, Gettysburg, Chancellorsville, Appomattox Courthouse, Sherman’s March to the Sea, etc. F.O. Wyman and his 14th OVI saw action in the first 100 days of the war and served throughout the war, his diary is priceless to the history of Genoa. Amos Hassan was one of just four NW Ohioans to be with Grant when Lee finally surrendered. Frank Rundell rose to Lt. Colonel and was in command of the 100th OVI at the end of the war.

Telling their story is not expensive. The research is a labor of love for the half-dozen members I have already gathered for this hypothetical committee. The research made available online by other Civil War gurus is staggering. The research databases at the Library of Congress, myriad libraries, ancestry.com, newspapers.com, etc is immense. We will find the historical nuggets to compliment our pictures, maps, and artifacts already available.

We continue to find new bits that astound us--did you know that on Sept 2, 1885 the Elliott Wyman GAR post hosted President Hayes and five Civil War generals for the 100th OVI’s reunion? What other buildings in Genoa attracted the presence of a former President?
This is an affordable project, and can be done primarily with private fundraising.

- Excavation, compaction, general site prep (I know a guy who knows a guy!)
- Paver brick: ~1000 in a pile from digging up Main Street in 2016, will need more
- We have 1000s of brick leftover from building the foundation in ~2007
- 4-6 all-weather boards
- Some benches, preferably one that wraps the sycamore.
- ~120 feet of metal fencing
- Ohio Historical Society historical marker
- (If fundraising goes well, a classic Civil War statue (Elliot Wyman?))

I have trouble seeing this exceed $30,000 (not including a statue, which likely runs $30,000 by itself). **I already have verbal commitments for $10,300.** The Preserve Our Post has $5,300 in its account from 2007 and I have two verbal donations of $2,500 each. There are people in this community who care about our history and have deep pockets. The Preserve Our Post committee raised more than $15,000 and that project was not going to specifically highlight the contributions and work of dozens of great-great-great grandfathers of numerous current Genoa area families--I am very optimistic that fundraising would be successful. If it only takes $20,000, we're more than half-way there.
**What is the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR)?**

The Grand Army of the Republic was a fraternal organization of veterans of the Civil War who fought for the Union. It was founded in 1866 and was one of the largest and most powerful civic organizations in the United States in its day.

Given that only Civil War veterans were eligible for membership, the organization faded in the 20th century until it ceased to exist in 1956 with the passing of the last Civil War veteran. Congress gave legal successorship to the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War.

The Women's Relief Corp (WRC) was founded in 1883 and functioned as the female counterpart to the GAR. Their membership was not tied to veteran status, and their organization did not end with the death of its Civil War-era members. Genoa held WRC events at the "WRC Hall" into at least the late 1960s.

The American Legion (and their auxiliary) is the obvious natural descendent, and we have reason to believe that the first Legion meetings in Genoa were held in the GAR/WRC Hall.

![Image of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) Hall](image)

Pictured: US Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur (front and center). I am on the far right, Henry Bergman is behind me, Jeff Eversman is next to him. Russell Buffington is back right.
The following brief is based on hundreds of hours of research previously done by Jeff Eversman, Ellen Bergman, et al from approximately 2003-2007. Jeff Eversman is the former President of the East Toledo Historical Society, co-author of *The Civil War and East Toledo*, and former Vice Commander of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (OSUVC), Department of Ohio. I have added my own small contribution but the bulk of the work is theirs.

I will show the following: the previous existence of a functioning Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) post in Genoa, that this GAR post was named for Elliott Wyman, that this GAR post had its own hall, and that this hall is the building currently in question.

I will then elaborate on the entirety of the building's history and its historical significance.

I think it is best to start with a Memorial Day message in the Genoa Gazette from May 27, 1932. By 1932 only a few Civil War veterans in the Genoa area were still living. Its message to veterans of our nation's most important war is succinct: "We have not forgotten."

**MEMORIAL DAY**

The spring season, with its opening of all natural beauties, flowers in bloom under sunny skies, ushers in the one day in each year when we pause to commemorate our soldier dead. Memorial day, contrary to the belief of many, was not conceived to glorify war and carnage. Neither was it founded nor has it been observed to eulogize unduly the fallen warrior. We like to think of the men of the G. A. R., whom we knew as a boy, the human side of their lives and when we do, we know that Memorial Day was their day, founded by them for their comrades just to show that they had not forgotten.

Genoa's representatives of the Grand Army will be represented by two veterans this year Mr. G. H. Utroff and Mr. D. T. Livengood. On the wall of the W. R. C. hall hang the muskets and nearby is a framed photograph of the Post when its strength was great. To these men we send out the message, "We have not forgotten."

To the men of '98 and '18 who have answered taps, goes the same message. May we further assure them that we will carry on, striving to do our best to keep the faith.
Proving the Existence of a Genoa GAR Post, Named for Elliott Wyman

The following Genoans' obituaries claim membership to a GAR or WRC post in Genoa (having a WRC without a GAR would be bizarre). These are a few of the dozens of obituaries found.

John Hossman's obituary from 1901 speaks to his membership in "the G.A.R. of Genoa."

John Hossman, janitor of the Woodville public schools, died very suddenly in the basement of that building last Tuesday afternoon. The funeral took place Thursday morning under the auspices of the G. A. R. of Genoa, of which order he was a member. The services were conducted by Rev. Mitter.

Lt. Michael Dunke's obituary mentions the GAR post and its dwindling membership, from a height of more than 200 Civil War veterans.

Genoa War Veteran Passes At 93 Years

Genoa News Items

Genoa, May 6.—Lieut. Michael Dunke, aged 93, died at the family home, Friday evening. Funeral services were held on Monday afternoon, Genoa Legion Post assisting with burial in Michigan, Tuesday. Mr. Dunke was the oldest Civil war veteran in Ottawa county and his death leaves the local G. A. R. post with three remaining veterans, the Post at one time being composed of more than two hundred Civil war veterans. He had also served in the regular army, being in several Indian engagements. Up until a few short months ago Mr. Dunke had been active, but since the death of Mrs. Dunke his health gradually declined. The three living members of the G. A. R. are Henry Uthoff, Geo. Wight and D. Livengood.
George Frent's obituary specifically mentions Elliott Wyman. "He became a member of Elliott Wyman Post G.A.R., July 20, 1881."

Sarah Green's obituary states that she was a member of "Elliott Wyman W.R.C."

There are also a few newspaper clips mentioning it as Post #39, and various GAR/OSUVCW websites have it listed as such in their databases. Some cite a Fremont newspaper claiming it was formed in 1867 and officially chartered in 1880.
Proving the Existence of a Genoa GAR Hall, and its Location

The Genoa High School Class of 1928 wrote the History of Genoa and did a fine job describing the GAR Hall and its location. Dr. Dufendock was a member of this class project and provided a copy for the GAR research team.

The old Grand Army Hall was used as the next school house and it was located on the site of the present school ground. Later, this hall was moved to the location on the bank of the quarry, and used for its present purpose.

The "bank of the quarry" may be misleading. Unknown to younger generations, the Wyman & Gregg quarry came right up to Washington Street, as shown here in this undated Toledo Blade picture. The GAR building is visible in the bottom right, standing next to what is today the Big Dipper.
The 1992 application for the National Register of Historic Places application for downtown Genoa described the building as being built in 1856, moved by the village to its location in 1869, and once being used as the WRC Hall. The application is wrong on the move in 1869, which I will show later.

There are Genoans old enough to remember WRC events from the 1960s. We only have written material for the GAR, so it is important to show that they were using the same building.

IOOF Lodge notes tie the WRC and GAR together in one building, on Washington Street.
Discovery of Civil War Artifacts in the Hall

The research team had its most dramatic moment when Henry Bergman crawled into the attic of the building and discovered Civil War artifacts that had been forgotten: a GAR grave marker, banners from various Ohio regiments (the hall hosted national reunions of the 14th, 100th, and 67th Ohio regiments), flags, WRC accounting books (further tying them together), thousands of receipts from Wyman & Gregg and local businessmen like Bowland, Habbler, etc dating to the 1860s.

Was it just storage? It is undeniable that the hall was used as municipal storage for decades after the memories of the GAR and even the WRC had faded. But this was not GAR/WRC storage. On the first floor of the building is a nondescript rack. The 1932 Genoa Gazette clip at the beginning of this brief mentions “on the walls of the W.R.C. hall hang the muskets,” this nondescript rack holds Springfield rifles. They fit like a glove. The village reportedly sold off these guns in the 1960s or so to a collector, but Henry and Jeff have their own and they fit.

In review, we know there was a Genoa GAR community, we know they had a hall, we know it was on Washington Street on the bank of the quarry in the old school house, we know they shared it with the WRC, and we know Henry Bergman pulled civil war artifacts out of the attic.

This is a GAR post. Out of 705 GAR posts in Ohio, only seven remain.
A History of the GAR Hall

The building was built in 1856, on the site of the Camper school. It is often mistaken among Genoans for having been built near Dr. Dufendock’s home on Main Street and being a school building which was also moved. That building was moved to a parcel on the corner of Main and Seventh. Seventh Street once ran from Main to Washington, confirmed by looking at a Henry W Bergman Inc map from 1929.

The 1928 yearbook refers to this as the first school building, although it is the third. Perhaps they are referring to it as the first proper Genoa school, or the first on Genoa school property. At any rate it was used as a school and a host of civic activities. Given that the GAR was founded in 1867, and the village in 1868, it could have housed both. The research team found school board minutes from 1868 declaring that all civic organizations could no longer use the building. In 1869 the school board sold the building to construct the first brick school, the village bought the schoolhouse for civic use. One must wonder if this building became the first town hall, having purchased the building merely a year after our founding.

The research team believes that the building was not initially moved to Washington Street, but to Sixth Street across the alley from what is today the administration building. The Gregg family owned the property. It was used there from 1869-1908. Mrs. Gregg sold part of the property to Mr. Burman in 1905 (the Burman building is still there), and then sold the rest of the parcel to Mr. Burman in 1908. The building was moved down the street onto quarry property on Washington Street. Clearly it had importance, given that it was not demolished at that point.
Historical Significance for Genoans

In 2018 Genoa will be celebrating 150 years of existence. The GAR/WRC Hall is the only publicly owned building that has been around for all 150 years. That alone makes it one of the most historically significant buildings in our village.

The hall will be 162 years old in 2018, having been built as settlers forged a community out of the Black Swamp. Not only does it predate our incorporation as Genoa in 1868, it predates the name change to Genoa in 1857--this is a building from the days of being Stony Station. What other buildings do we have that can claim that? Having been purchased by the village in 1869, it is not unreasonable to suggest that this may have been the first town hall. And given that the Town Hall was the township hall too, it could also have been both. Perhaps further research will show that.

What we do know is that around two hundred veterans of the Civil War used this building as a GAR post. A decade ago, only 7 of the 705 original GAR halls in Ohio remained, less than one percent. It was a rare discovery in 2004, one that brought Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur to town to offer her support for its restoration. The first step was to put a new roof on the building, then move the building back at the village’s direction, and to restore the interior from water damage. This was all done with approximately $15,000 of private funds. The next step was to put new siding on the building, but support came to a screeching halt in 2007 with the onset of the Global Financial Crisis.

With this rare building we can celebrate the history of their commitment to the Union and their pride in fighting in our nation’s most important war. We have excerpts from the Toledo Blade on August 1, 1862 commenting that “Few towns have done as well as Genoa in furnishing soldiers for the Union army.” That should be a point of pride for all of us, and reason to have the building preserved and utilized in such a way that it can tell the various stories of these veterans.

These are veterans who not only fought in the Civil War, but returned home and founded this village. When the village purchased the building in 1869, no doubt our first mayor T.P. Taylor (177th OVI) and first clerk F.O. Wyman (14th OVI) made that happen. The overwhelming majority of accomplished names in this town for the second half the 19th century were Civil War veterans who utilized the GAR Hall for social and political purposes, among which were three regimental reunions. We have newspapers stating that Rutherford B Hayes was going to make the trip from Fremont to visit Genoa in 1885 for the 100th OVI’s reunion.

These men are Founding Fathers of this town and ancestors of many who live here today, we know the following families can trace their lineage to these men: Widmer, Plantz, Chambers, Hennen, Huss, Bergman, Werner, Bowland, etc--surely more will be found with research.

I will be writing a second work to propose a cost effective, low maintenance alternative to demolition for the council’s ad hoc meeting on December 11, 2017.
There is only one known picture showing the GAR Hall on Sixth Street.

The GAR Hall in 1916 after its move to Washington Street in 1908.
Fulton, Ind.,
Henry A. Ferris,
Co. G, 10th O.V.T.

A sample of our findings. It is difficult to overstate the level of historical detail that is accessible with today's internet.