

## Common Flag Holders and Emblems

Ever wander through a cemetery and come upon a flag holder or emblem carved into the headstone and wondered what it meant? In days gone by, more people would participate in social clubs and other organizations; they did not have all the electronic and other distractions to keep them at home. Membership in a group could be a lifelong commitment and at the time of one's passing, an emblem on the stone or a flag holder could bear witness to that commitment.

With this in mind, several of the emblems and holders have been highlighted in the paragraphs below. Some of these organizations are no longer in existence, others have transformed themselves to keep up with the times, and still others are pretty much the same as when they came into existence. Each paragraph is summary of information found elsewhere. The source of the information has been noted for each, if further information is required, these provide a starting point for more research.

As for military flag holders, several styles can be found around the cemetery. The most common wars depicted include the Revolution, War of 1812, the Civil War, Spanish American War, both World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam. Most wars have distinctive flag holders, some wars might have different variations. Some may feature the name of the war, others might just have the years of the conflict.

Occasionally, symbolism works into the flag holder. As seen in Wilson Cemetery, sometimes the Revolution is represented by the figure of a patriot. Symbols in a GAR flag holder have specific meanings to that organization. The world wars may have symbols on their flag holders, World War I can be represented by the poppy, the flower that grew in Flanders field, and World War II has an eagle with wings spread. (World War II veterans will refer to this bird as a "ruptured duck.") Regardless of symbols or words or dates, each flag holder will give some indication of the conflict the veteran participated in.

As important as serving during the time of war, those serving in peacetime deserve the same honors as any other veteran. Sometimes, a veteran's grave may not have a flag holder that indicates a specific war, only the fact the grave is occupied by a veteran. Not to say a veteran without a conflict on his holder never fought in a war, but probably the veteran stood face-to-face with our enemies and through courage not backing down, kept America free.

Surely there are some that have been missed, maybe they don't exist in our cemeteries, some samples found don't have the quality to adequately represent the organization depicted. Not to say others can't be added to this list as they come to light.

## **B./O.S.C.**

### **B**enevolent **O**rder of **S**cottish **C**lans

Source: (from [http://www.stichtingargus.nl/vrijmetselarij/r/osc\\_en.html](http://www.stichtingargus.nl/vrijmetselarij/r/osc_en.html), on a webpage belonging to Stichting Argus, Goedestraat 46, NL-3572 RV Utrecht, Netherlands.)

James McCash of St. Louis, Missouri, a member of a local Masonic organization, joined with a group of his friends to found the original order in 1878. Initially, they limited membership to males between the ages of 18 and 55 years having Scottish ancestry. The group also set up death benefits for the family of a deceased member, and helped the sick by providing funds from a relief program. At the same time, they celebrated their common Scottish heritage.



As part of the celebration of their heritage, the organization developed unique rituals based in part on Scottish military victories of the past. They also built the organization's emblem using items from Scotland's own emblem. Members used the thistle, the national flower of Scotland, and the lion from the Scottish coat of arms. The group also used the motto, "Nemo Me Impune Lacessit," or "No one attacks me with impunity," the motto of the country of Scotland.

The group had three distinctive levels. They had local groups, regional groups, and a national group. The national group referred to itself as "the Royal Clan," while the locals became "the Subordinate Clans." Eventually, the order merged with the Independent Order of Foresters.

## **B.P.O.E.**

### **B**enevolent and **P**rotective **O**rder of **E**lks

#### History:

(<http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/masonicmuseum/fraternalism/elks.htm>, on a webpage belonging to Phoenixmasonry, Inc.

In days of old, not really that long ago, things known as blue laws kept most public gathering places closed on Sundays. On the other hand, in New York City, a group of performers expressed their desire to continue socializing on Sunday by forming a group they called the "Jolly Corks." The name came from a bar gag performed by the



group's organizer. The club kept its social agenda and never really progressed beyond that level of participation. A few months later, In late 1867, one member passed away leaving his family in dire financial straits. The remaining group members decided to add more than socialization to their get-togethers and decided to help not only their friend's family, but others in need as well. Two months later, they had prepared a goal statement, rituals specific to their group, a symbol of strength, and miscellaneous trappings not unexpected for a group of performers. Thus the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks began.

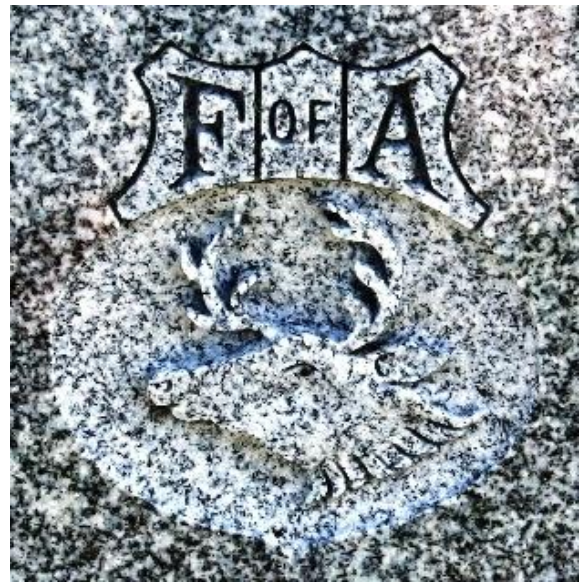
## **F. of A.**

**Foresters of America**

History:

([www.phoenixmasonry.org/masonicmuseum/rationalism/foresters.htm](http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/masonicmuseum/rationalism/foresters.htm), on a webpage belonging to Phoenixmasonry, Inc.

Many orders of foresters have been in existence over time. The US, and Canadian branches, came onto the scene in the 1870's. A primary goal of the group included offering life disability insurances. Other groups included an Ancient Order, an Independent Order, a British Royal Order, and a Catholic Order, most no longer in existence. The group chose the stag as their emblem, a choice that occasionally has them confused with the Elk's Club.



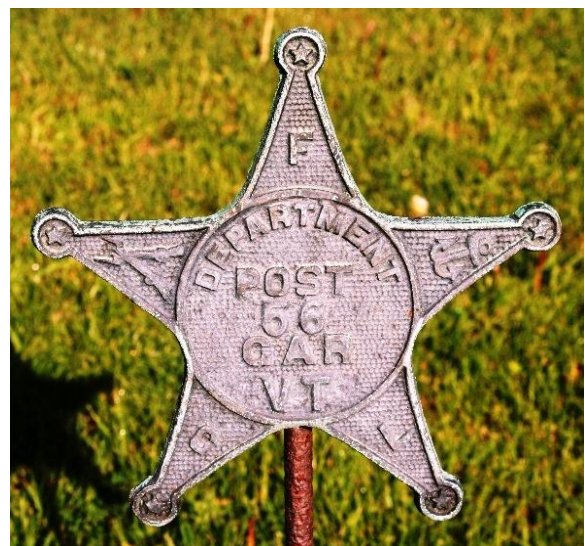
## **G. A. R.**

**Grand Army of the Republic**

History:

(from: <http://vermontcivilwar.org/pw/gar/> a Vermont Civil War webpage by Tom Ledoux)

Born in Springfield, Illinois, the Grand Army of the Republic came into being and rose to be the largest veterans' organization for those who served in the Union Army during the Civil War. Membership rose as high as 400,000 veterans around 1890, spread out over the country. Each group had a post number, the number of members within the post usually reflected the population it served. The greater the population, the



greater the likely membership. The G.A.R. came to Vermont in October of 1868. During the height of membership in Vermont, 113 posts existed. Post 117 had the highest number for a post used in Vermont, but 151 posts could be identified at one time or another. The discrepancy in numbers may be due to the re-use of numbers as posts came and went. As with the national statistics, the largest number of members, 5,473 veterans, could be counted in 1890. Nested in the emblem's star, the three letters "F", "C", and "L" can be found. The group set a mission statement based in Fraternity, Charity, and Loyalty. The presence of the crossed rifles of an infantry regiment and an anchor signifies that membership included by army and navy veterans.

### **I. O. O. F.**

#### **Independent Order of Odd Fellows**

History: <http://www.ioofn.org/history.htm> , a webpage owned by the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and Rebekahs, Grand Lodge of Tennessee, 6329 Valley View Road, Goodlettsville, TN. 37072

The Order of Odd Fellows can trace its origins back to England and the end of the 1700s. Their group assisted other members during times of sickness or loss of job, or other unfortunate circumstances, benefits they extended to a member's family.

Although not affiliated with any religion, the group has based its rituals and the way they conduct their affairs in the words of the Bible. The name "Odd Fellows" may extend back to England during a time when the common working class did not form fellowship groups.

As these men did, other judged their behavior as "odd." In the modern world, members of the group maintains the origin of the name is unknown. The Odd Fellows have a women's auxiliary referred to as the Rebekahs. The grave marker shown in the photo has the I.O.O.F. as the word independent has been added. The three letters, "F", "L", and "T" convey the slogan of the Odd Fellows, Friendship, Love, and Truth.



## **I. O. R. M.**

### **Improved Order of Red Men**

History: (<http://redmen.org/redmen/info/>, on a webpage belonging to the Texas Red Men Foundation)

The group began in colonial America in response to the tyranny imposed on the colonies by the British. These ancestor units, such as the Sons of Liberty and the Sons of St. Tammany made life interesting for the British. Red Men refers to the Sons of Liberty members who boarded the English ship in Boston Harbor and dumped the cargo of tea overboard while disguised as Mohawk Indians. After the Revolutionary War, many secret societies, including the Improved Order, continued on, but in a more social setting. Some of them, however, reformed and renamed and in 1813, became the Society of Red Men. Further reorganization made them the Improved Order of Red Men by 1834. From there, the group went national and membership eventually rose to more than 500,000 members in 46 states in the mid-1920s. The group continues to function as a patriotic organization to uphold the ideals of Freedom, Friendship, and Charity. In the photo at the right, the member's name, F. J. Tucker, is stamped into the grave marker. As for the letters T.O.T.E., reputedly it refers to some secret motto or other slogan known only to the members.



### **Degree of Pocahontas (Pocahontas Council)**

The female auxiliary of the Improved Order of Red Men

## **K. of C.**

### **Knights of Columbus**

History: (from: <http://www.kofc.org/en/about/history/index.html>, a webpage owned by the Knights of Columbus)

The group dates back to 1881 when members first came together at a church in New Haven, Connecticut. The fraternal organization has since grown into the Catholic church's largest service oriented group. They anchored their mission in strength and security for their faith, families, and their country. They took their name from Christopher Columbus, he has been given credit for bringing Christianity to the New World. The group also provided life insurance benefits for the widows and orphans of the members who passed away. They also support the introduction of the Catholic faith to others, Catholic education, community service, and assistance to anyone in need. A supreme council sits at the head of the Knights and oversees the entire organization, runs the insurance programs, and establishes new chapters. Most of the actual charitable works come from local chapter members.

## **M. W. A.**

### **Modern Woodmen of America**

History: (from: [www.modern-woodmen.org/AboutUs/History/Pages/The%20Story%20of%20Our%20Name.aspx](http://www.modern-woodmen.org/AboutUs/History/Pages/The%20Story%20of%20Our%20Name.aspx), a webpage owned by Modern Woodmen of America)

Founder Joseph Cullen Root put the organization together in 1883 to create a group that would provide financial protection to members and their families in the case of death of the family member answering the financial needs of the family. Root chose the name after hearing a sermon praising the woodmen who cleared the forest and provided space for families to build homes. As he wished "to clear away the financial burdens for families," Root chose the name woodmen for his group. Modern signified what would be the ever changing role of the group, America spoke to the patriotism of the group and as an honor to the country. Family members had the opportunity to purchase grave markers from the group until the mid-1970s. Another the symbol can be found would be carved somewhere near the base of a member's tombstone carved in the shape of a tree stump.



## **P. of H.**

### **Patrons of Husbandry (National Grange)**

History:

(<http://www.nationalgrange.org/about-us/history/>, a webpage owned by the National Grange.)

Now known as the Grange, this group began in Washington, D.C. under the direction of Mr. William Saunders. Saunders and six other individuals became the founding fathers of the group, an eighth name has since been added to the list of founders. Saunders worked at a high level of management for the Department of Agriculture. He and his associates built an organization to uphold democracy, faith in God, faith in man, and visions to build for the future. This group of founders, firmly rooted in American agriculture have been honored with a monument on the mall in Washington, the only group to receive such an honor.



### **K. of P. - Knights of Pythias**

History: (from: <http://www.pythias.org/about/pythstory.html>, a website owned by the Supreme Lodge Knights of Pythias, 25 S. Morton Ave., Morton, PA 19070)

The order began in Washington, D.C. in 1864, but the beliefs and rituals come from the Greek philosopher Pythagoras. The tales of friendship between his students Damon and Pythias provided the name for the order. As with other groups, this fraternal organization had been founded in friendship and the relief of suffering. Their motto includes the words "Friendship, Charity, and Benevolence." Members must prove themselves to be of good moral character and rooted in truthfulness, honor, and integrity. These characteristics and deep friendship provides the extremely strong bonds that develop between the members. President Abraham Lincoln, after a thorough review of the group and their ideals, recommended they bring their ideas to Congress and obtain a charter. They became the first such group to gain a charter via an act of congress.



### **P. F. L. E.**

Meaning unknown.

The letters appeared on grave markers of those affiliated with the Vincitia Temple, Knights of Pythias. The 1905 Barre City Directory, published by L. P. Waite & Co., 50 Second Street, Newburgh, N.Y., listed the lodge as Vincitia Lodge, No. 10, K. of P. and listed the names of 18 members.



### **St. Aldemar Commandery**

History: (from: <http://history-world.org/templer.htm>, a website belonging to the International World History Project.)

The group, associated with the Knights Templar and the Masonic orders, take their name from Geoffrey de St. Aldemar, a knight during the Siege of Jerusalem, first crusade. The Templars came into being to defend the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, they spent over 200 years in pursuit of their mission. Members brought both warlike tendencies and monastic retirement.



## **Ladies Auxiliary, VFW**

<https://www.ladiesauxvfw.org/>

Origins of the Veterans of Foreign Wars go back to the Spanish American War era, 1898 – 1902. During that time period, veterans did not receive a pension or medical care, the VFW provided a vehicle for veterans to obtain those benefits. Membership had swelled to nearly 200,000 by 1936. Since its inception, the organization has been instrumental in the creation of the Veterans Administration and the GI Bill. Other programs have aided in compensation for veterans exposed to Agent Orange or suffered from Gulf War Syndrome. The group represents the rights of both men and women veterans. Their hard work has helped to create several memorials, including those for the Korean and Vietnam wars and for World War II as well.



## **Gold Star Mothers**

History: (from: <http://www.goldstarmoms.com/>, a website belonging to the American Gold Star Mothers, Inc.)

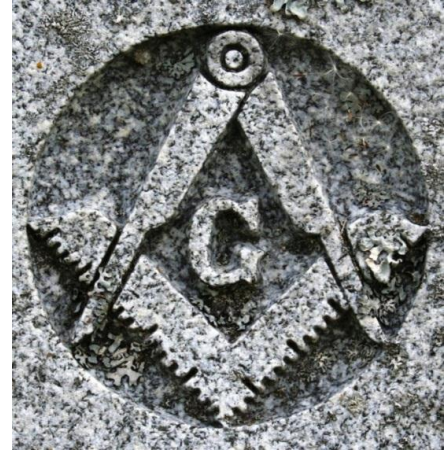
Grace Darling Seibold began the organization as a way to help other mothers who had lost sons in military service. Her son, 1st Lieutenant George Seibold, died in action while serving as a fighter pilot in the 1st World War. Mrs. Seibold believed service to others to be a better use of the emotions associated with grieving for a lost child. Her organization went national in June of 1928. The name comes from the Gold Star Banner that would hang in the front window of a home to identify the family as having lost a member serving in the military. (The Blue Star Banner in the window signified a family with a member serving in the military, generally displayed during times of war, multiple stars signified multiple family members serving.) The group continues today and as a patriotic organization dedicated to the families who have lost loved ones and also to serve returning veterans and maintain the memory of all who have served.



## **Masonic Order**

History: (from: <http://www.msana.com/historyfm.asp>, a website belonging to the Masonic Service Association.)

In a quick snapshot, the masonic fraternity probably dates back to the late 1300s when a reference to the Masons showed up in a poem. By the early 1700s, the group began to gain strength when four lodges in London, England joined together into a larger and more powerful group. From that point, group membership swelled across Europe and spread across the ocean to the American colonies. Many of America's early patriots and founders became involved in Freemasonry.



The fraternity encourages the personal growth of its members through community involvement and giving. They have also been involved with political issues, education, and have been at the forefront of religious issues and the freedom to practice one's religion as the individual wishes to do so. In the past two hundred years, the Masons have stepped forward to provide social services and provide backup for services governments may not have been able to adequately provide. They continue to support orphanages and children's hospitals, and to provide other medical relief. The group boasts a membership of approximately four million spread throughout the world.

The masonic emblem features a carpenter's square, symbolizing moral rectitude, and a compass to circumscribe the boundaries for exercising one's passions and desires. The letter "G" is for geometry, the mathematical language of architecture and masonry.

## **Order of the Eastern Star**

History: (from: [http://www.easternstar.org/about\\_oes.html](http://www.easternstar.org/about_oes.html), a website belonging to the Order of the Eastern Star.)

This group has open membership for both men and women. The 500,000 members share spiritual values but not as a religion and is open to all faiths. They have four stated purposes for their organization, charity, education, fraternity, and science. They use biblical scriptures to provide the necessary guidance to help them live a principled life dedicated to charity, truth, and loving kindness. Their emblem shows a bible on an altar surrounded by a five point star. Each point represents one of five strong women in history, four of them rooted in the bible, Adah, Ruth, Esther, Martha, and Electa representing fidelity, constancy, loyalty, faith, and love.



## SAMPLE MILITARY FLAG HOLDERS

