



G.A.R. Memorial Hall - located at 120 SW 10th Avenue in Topeka, Kansas

The idea of a Memorial Hall began as a movement to honor the Civil War veterans from Kansas. In 1906, Captain P.H. Coney of the Kansas Grand Army of the Republic suggested that the state construct a soldiers' memorial, originally envisioned as a 155-foot high shaft crowned with a peace figure. The following year, Coney and Governor J.D. Martin suggested the construction of a sailors' and soldiers' monument hall.

Meanwhile, the Kansas State Historical Society was running out of space for its collection. In December, 1876, the Society was located in a small room of the Capitol, and over the years it grew to eventually take up the entire fourth floor of the statehouse's south wing.

Then in 1908, it was announced that Kansas would soon receive a large sum of money when the state's war claims debts were paid by the federal government. Public sentiment favored using the money to construct a memorial building, and the GAR Council of Administration adopted a resolution for "the erection of a building as a memorial to the memory of the soldiers of the war for the Union, a portion of said building to be used as a headquarters for the department of Kansas Grand Army of the Republic so long as the organization may exist, (and) the rest of the building to be used by the Kansas State Historical Society."

A bill was passed the following year to create the Memorial Hall Building Commission, and a total of \$200,000 was appropriated for the building's construction. By the end of the project, more than \$400,000 would ultimately be provided.

President William Howard Taft laid the cornerstone on September 27, 1911, and on the stone were these words: "Erected by the State of Kansas as a Memorial to the Union Soldiers and Sailors of the War of the Rebellion." However, the words carved into the stone could not be read easily, so two tablets were ordered and placed on the cornerstone, one of which had the inscription and the other depicted two military figures and the state seal.

Construction of Memorial Hall continued off and on throughout the next few years, until on May 27, 1914, a dedication ceremony was held, attended by an estimated twenty-five thousand people. During that ceremony, GAR Commander John N. Harrison summed up the building philosophy:

"It's magnificent walls of pure white marble are more eloquent than articulate speech — its very silence is impressive far beyond and above the words of man, for it assures my comrades living, that my comrades living and dead, are held in sacred memory by the great, patriotic liberty-loving people of Kansas."

Memorial Hall continued to house the Historical Society until its move to a new building on the west side of Topeka in 1995. Memorial Hall underwent an extensive restoration effort, during which time areas which had previously been used for storage, display, and the stacks were converted into office space. A re-dedication ceremony was held on January 28, 2000, and the building became the home of the Kansas Attorney General and Kansas Secretary of State.