



# **The Society of the Cincinnati: The History of the Hereditary Group Established by the Founding Fathers After the Revolutionary War**

*Charles River Editors*

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\*Includes pictures \*Includes the Founding Fathers' quotes about the society \*Includes online resources and a bibliography for further reading "Omnia reliquit servare rempublicam" ("He left everything to save the republic") – The motto of the Society of the Cincinnati The American Revolution is replete with seminal moments that every American learns in school, from the “shot heard ‘round the world” to the Declaration of Independence, but the events that led up to the fighting at Lexington & Concord were borne out of 10 years of division between the British and their American colonies over everything from colonial representation in governments to taxation, the nature of searches, and the quartering of British regulars in private houses. Over 230 years later, it’s hard to imagine just how turbulent the post-Revolution era was for the new United States of America, and the Society of the Cincinnati was emblematic of that. With prominent Founding Fathers like George Washington and Alexander Hamilton leading the Society of the Cincinnati, comprised of Revolutionary War veterans, it should come as little surprise that the Society was both powerful and controversial. One of the reasons that the Society of the Cincinnati was able to endure is that its founders designed it to. Though they originally founded the Society for themselves, they also knew that they would not live forever. They wanted the memories of their shared hardships and triumphs to be shared by their descendants and thus made the Cincinnati not just an organization for themselves but one in which their sons could inherit membership, so long as they proved worthy of the ideas upon which the organization was founded. While this sounds like a simple, even quaint, concept in the 21st century, it was still somewhat controversial in the wake of the Revolution. This caused controversy and consternation among many, both those who were part of the Society and those who were not, because some feared that the officers were creating a sort of feudal system of knights, lords and ladies, similar to that which the rank and file in the nation had just fought and died to overthrow. Others feared that the Society, made up as it was of some of the most powerful men in the nation, might come to dominate and even supplant the weak Congress that was then functioning under the Articles of Confederation. Even Congress came to fear the members of the Society of the Cincinnati, if only because they proved to be a forceful voice on behalf of veterans demanding pay for their service during the war. Ultimately, none of the major fears about the Cincinnati expressed by those living during the time of its founding came to fruition. The Society grew during the years leading up to the American Civil War, but then, like so many similar institutions, fell into disrepair following the war. However, the years leading up to the turn of the 20th century were a heyday for such organizations, and the Society of the Cincinnati’s state and national meetings evolved into occasions when men could get together and tell old war stories and drink a toast or two to their late fathers. Today, the Society is proud to be “the nation's oldest patriotic organization,” and it declares that its mission is “to promote knowledge and appreciation of the achievement of American independence and to foster fellowship among its members.” 230 years after it was founded, the Society is now “a nonprofit educational organization devoted to the principles and ideals of its founders...” The Society of the Cincinnati: The History of the Hereditary Group Established by the Founding Fathers After the Revolutionary War examines the history of one of the most famous organizations in American history. Along with pictures of important people and places, you will learn about the Society of the Cincinnati like never before.

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