

The Wheeler Medals

This includes the medals, society badges, and some insignia of Joseph Wheeler, one of the very few officers to rise to general in both the Confederate and United States armies, the medals of his son, “Joe Junior,” and the society badges and some insignia of his daughter, Annie. Included are some society pieces not included in Bishop and Lee’s *American Society Medals*. Before showing the various medals this paper will briefly cover the military careers of the two male Wheelers, then show and describe some of their medals: first society badges, then campaign and valor awards, then quickly cover a few military artifacts that belonged to the family. Lastly this will cover Annie’s medals.

Many of the Wheeler uniforms, insignia, and medals survive at the historic Wheeler home, Pond Spring. Pond Spring, as it exists now, consists of 50 acres of land, twelve historic buildings surrounded by formal boxwood gardens, and three family cemeteries, all situated in a rural setting in Lawrence County, Alabama. The plantation is located three miles east of Courtland, Alabama, adjacent to Alabama Highway 20 (US Alt. 72). The Wheeler home is undergoing major restoration and is scheduled to reopen to the public in 2012.

Joe Wheeler’s last service was in the Spanish-American War and he retired to Pond Spring in September 1900. Wheeler died on January 26, 1906. He is one of two figures from the State of Alabama represented in the Congressional Statuary Hall. The senior Wheeler graduated 19th in his class from the US Military Academy in 1859 and joined the First Dragoons (later the First Cavalry). He transferred to the Regiment of Mounted Riflemen (later the Third Cavalry) in 1860. Wheeler resigned his commission on April 22, 1861.

Joseph Wheeler had six children after the Civil War. Beside Joe Junior, the other son was Thomas H., born March 7, 1881, who drowned while a midshipman, and four daughters, of which only Annie will be discussed. Miss Annie, as she was known in her later years, lived at Pond Spring until her death in 1955. During the latter part of her time at the home it was she who turned the house into a shrine to her father and brothers. She was the one who placed most of the objects into display frames and preserved the many great artifacts that endure. She placed many medals and other small military pins in three large shadow boxes, the smallest of which is shown.



The senior Wheeler rose to major general in the Confederate Army. After the Civil War Joe Wheeler served as a lawyer for the Southern Railroad and became a member of the US House of Representatives from the 8th Alabama District. On May 4, 1898, he became a major general of volunteers and commanded the 5th Corps cavalry. Leonard Wood's and Teddy Roosevelt's 1st Volunteer Cavalry (the Rough Riders) was part of Wheeler's command. One of the great stories of the diminutive Wheeler (he was 5 feet, 5 inches tall and weighed only 120 pounds) is that when the US forces attacked and the Spanish soldiers began to retreat, Wheeler, now of course wearing Union blue, reverted to his days in gray when he shouted, "Come on boys, we've got the Yankees on the run now!"¹



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Of the senior Wheeler's medals at Pond Spring one is for the Society of the Army of Santiago de Cuba. Wheeler was the first vice president of the society and received medal #3 that is at Pond Spring.² His medal is at the right. The reverse (left) is engraved with his name and number.



Other Joe Senior medals are from the National Society Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) including a Type 2 membership medal with serial number 10425. The medal with blue and white ribbon is shown at the far left. A Rhode Island SAR device is shown with the HOPE pendant. This is engraved in script on the reverse, "From a/Rhode Island/Delegate/New York/April 30/1900."

A General Society of Colonial Wars medal, number 683, is in the collection. The reverse is shown to the lower right.





An attractive Type 2 General Society of the War of 1812 badge of the type introduced in 1894 is in the case of medals from the senior Joe Wheeler. It is not numbered and is engraved, “Gen’l Joseph Wheeler” (left).



Next to the 1812 medal in the shadow box is an attractive medal given by the Military Order of Foreign Wars of the United States (MOFW) . The ribbon is 1-1/2 inches wide and has number 683 on the suspension loop. Since only the first 366 of these are traceable, the original recipient is unknown. Also in the shadow box is another planchet from a medal of the Military Order of Foreign Wars of the United States, displayed with the reverse showing. That pendant has numbered 148 on the suspension ring. Records show that pendant 148 was awarded to 2d Lieutenant William W. Fiscus, 2d US Infantry. How this pendant ended up in the Wheel home is unknown.

Annie probably was more interested in displaying medals she thought belonged to her father and brother rather than getting the right badge in the proper frame.

Immediately to the right of the MOFW medal is a brass cross with a central square enameled Confederate flag design, with white arms bearing crossed sabers, crossed muskets, a cannon, and a gunboat. The top bar has C.V.C. of N.Y. This is the badge of the Confederate Veterans’ Camp of New York that started hosting big dinners at the Waldorf-Astoria in 1891.³ The organization invited prominent Civil War veterans like Wheeler to speak. The piece is back-marked C.G. Braxmar/10 Maiden Lane/New York. The badge is 1-1/2 inches wide and the suspension bar is 1-1/8 inches long.



In the bottom row are two more society medals. One is the Cross of Military Service of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (left). The ribbon is symmetrically colored red, white, olive green, yellow, olive green, white, and red and bears a small bronze star. The medal planchet is a flat bronze cross of the general design of the UDC’s Southern Cross of Honor but the central design is a Spanish castle. Each arm of the cross has the inscription, starting at the top and reading counterclockwise: FOR SERVICE/ SPANISH/1898/WAR. The reverse is inscribed UNITED/ DAUGHTERS/CONFEDERACY/TO THE S.W.V. This is not shown in Bishop and Elliot’s book but is discussed on their page 79 it was one of the “catch-up” pieces issued in 1931. The UDC initially awarded the World War I cross shortly after the war’s close and that medal is discussed later. It was after the World War I medal that the

UDC then began to create crosses for the other wars, hence the term “catch up.” On the lower edge is serial number 2. Presumably Joe Junior received this medal as he received UDC’s World War I medal number 4.



To the right of the UDC medal is another National Society Sons of the American Revolution medal, this one issued to Spanish-American War participants (left). This medal is interesting in that it bright brass, nearly gold in color.

Besides the medals and various pins, Pond Spring also has many of General Wheeler’s uniforms. Most are all of his uniforms from the Spanish American War period, where after serving as a volunteer major general, he became a Regular Army brigadier general in June 1900, only to retire in September of that year.

Joseph Wheeler’s Civil War field coat also is in good condition. Buttons down the front of Wheeler’s surviving Confederate coat at Pond Spring are mainly for the US Army Dragoons, although one is from the US Army Regiment of Riflemen. On the cuffs some buttons are missing but, of those present, all but one are from the Dragoons. With metal buttons scarce in the Civil War, Wheeler probably just used his old dragoon buttons taken off of his Federal uniform in 1860, and when he lost a couple of them in service, he went to his rifleman buttons as replacements.

A few of the military insignia in the frame with the senior Wheeler’s medals include pairs of shoulder straps for blue uniforms, both one and two stars, and a pair of dark blue epaulettes for the khaki uniform, each with two metal general’s stars. Also included is an embroidered U.S. for the 1895-style blue sack coat. In addition the frames include several corps badges from the Spanish-American War that can not be individually attributed. These are a red (First Division) 5th Corps; a yellow (Cavalry Division) 4th Corps; a 4th Corps headquarters; an 8th Corps headquarters; and a 1st Brigade, First Division, 7th Corps, badge.

Joseph Wheeler, Jr., the oldest son, attended the US Military Academy and graduated in 1895, having previously spent a year at the University of Virginia and a year at Lehigh University, majoring in mathematics. Gifted in math, Joe Junior, as he was known, joined the artillery. When the Spanish-American War broke out, Joe Junior was teaching mathematics at West Point. He became his father’s aide and headed for Cuba.

After serving in the Santiago campaign, he returned to duty at the military academy for a short time, only to serve in the Philippines from 1899 through 1901.⁴ The younger Wheeler became an Ordnance Department major in the volunteers in the fall of 1898, then a temporary major in the 34th US Infantry in July 1899, serving in the Philippines. He became a Regular Army captain in the newly formed Artillery Corps after being mustered out of the 34th Infantry in April 1901 and returning to the United States. Promoted to major in the Coast Artillery Corps in March 1911, he became a lieutenant colonel in July 1916 and a temporary colonel in August 1917, serving in France during World War I. Assigned to the Adjutant General’s Department in July 1919, he became a permanent colonel in June 1920.⁵ He transferred to the Adjutant General’s Department for his last years in the army before his 1927 retirement. He died in 1938.



The younger Wheeler was not nearly as active in joining societies as his father and sister, if we judge by the surviving medals and artifacts. While the older Wheeler and his daughter Annie may have joined various societies for their political value while in Washington, Joe Junior was always in the army after he left West Point and he made the military his career. The shadow box containing many of Joe Junior's medals and artifacts is shown above.



To the left is Joe Junior's Cross of Military Service given by the United Daughters of the Confederacy for World War I service. It is script marked on the reverse: "Presented to/descendents of/Confederate Veterans/who served the/Government." The ribbon bears a small dolphin device, showing his overseas service in the AEF. The medal is serial number 4, marked on the reverse. Records indicate Wheeler was the original recipient.

An interesting plain looking gold cross evidently cut from a sheet of gold that looks like a medal pendant is script engraved, "Awarded to Joseph Wheeler Jr., University of the South, 1885." The reverse is engraved "Vice Chancellor's medal for church catechism." The cross is 1-1/2 inches across at its widest points. Joe Junior earned this, probably his first medal, at age 13.

Colonel Wheeler's Cuban Occupation medal, No. 1591, is shown next. The number traces to the younger Wheeler, but this piece is very puzzling. The Cuban Occupation pendant has the ribbon for the 1898 Puerto Rico Occupation medal. The ribbons for the Cuban occupation and for the Puerto Rico occupation are similar with the center red and major outer blue stripes just reversed, with the major colors separated by narrow yellow bands. There is not an easy explanation as to why the ribbon and the pendant are mismatched.



Equally confusing is another mystery medal at Pond Spring, next to the mis-ribboned medal that has the correct ribbon for the Cuban Occupation medal. It is in the box of artifacts attributed to the senior Wheeler and is numbered 6785, making it not traceable, having been awarded after 1928.



Joseph Wheeler, Junior's Spanish Campaign medal (right) is No. 3924 and has a silver citation star. Wheeler received the citation star in 1924 for gallantry in action while a second lieutenant in the 4th Artillery, during the attack against Spanish forces at Santiago on July 1, 1898. Wheeler's Philippine Campaign medal is number No. 827 and also has a silver citation star. Like the other citation, this is listed in War Department General Order 10, 1924, and cites Wheeler for his gallantry as a major in the 34th Infantry in action on Luzon, June 14, 1900.⁶



The younger Wheeler received a Silver Star medal, number 8419, with an oak leaf cluster, as authorized in 1932, to recognize his two citations. Also in his frame is a World War I French Croix de Guerre with a bronze palm (right). His World War I Victory Medal has a "France" bar.

Pond Spring also owns other army campaign medals not yet discussed. Some are in the shadow box containing the senior Wheeler's artifacts and some are with the junior Wheeler's medals and insignia. Two are in with the general's objects so that one would suppose these were given to the senior



Wheeler. They are for the Spanish Campaign and the Philippines Campaign. Both medals have attribution problems. One basic problem is that the Spanish and Philippine Campaign medals were not issued until December 1907, nearly two years after the general died.



To the left is a Spanish Campaign medal with its separate ribbon immediately above, that are in Joe Junior's case. The medal is marked 10356. This causes problems however; medal numbers went only to 8500 and of course this one cannot be tracked. The Philippine medal is shown next is marked 6756. This Philippine medal traces to Battalion Sergeant Major Leroy D. Barr, 27th



Infantry. How can these two medals be in the Wheeler home and yet not track to the general or other family members?

Joe Junior spent his last years in the army as a colonel in the Adjutant General Corps, 1919-1927. This gave him access to campaign medals. It is not unreasonable to assume that when Annie started to assemble frames displaying everyone's awards after World War I, Joe obtained the medals that his father would have been entitled to, if he had been alive. While this is supposition, it is a plausible explanation, except of course, for the serial number

that is too high on the Spanish Campaign medal and the Cuban medal with the Puerto Rico suspension ribbon. The mystery remains for these two medals.



Part of the Wheeler home collection includes two sets of ribbons – one representing Joe Junior's service before World War I and the other showing his service after World War I but before receipt of his citation stars in 1924. His ribbons include those for the Puerto Rico Occupation medal, as they should, rather than for the Puerto Rico medal. Perhaps the colonel never noticed the error on the medal itself. As noted the ribbons are nearly identical except red and blue are reversed.

Some of the younger Wheeler's insignia in the frame with his medals include metal major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel insignia, an embroidered major's leaf, Adjutant General's Department insignia (both all gilt and enameled), post 1907 style Coast Artillery Corps insignia,

and the 34th Infantry (pre-1905 style). Also present are a pair of his artillery second lieutenant straps. Many of his uniforms and other insignia from throughout his career are also at Pond Spring.

Two other Wheeler children were also associated with the military. Thomas H. Wheeler, although a midshipman at the Naval Academy, served aboard the cruiser *USS Columbia*. After the Spanish squadron had been located in Santiago harbor, the *Columbia* was detailed to duties in the Cuban theater, beginning on June 30. The *Columbia*'s only action was to be part of a convoy that landed troops at Guanica, Puerto Rico on July 26, 1898. Thomas Wheeler drowned at Montauk Point, Long Island, on September 7, 1898, while his brother and Annie were stationed nearby at Camp Wikoff. Some of his Annapolis uniforms remain at the Wheeler home.

Annie Wheeler lived most of her life in Pond Spring and it was her residence at the time of her death in 1955. She left Alabama to be a nurse in the Spanish-American War and she joined the American Red Cross during World War I, serving in France. Her World War I nurse uniform survives at Pond Spring. A shadow frame with her medals and insignia is below:



Annie saw her calling to preserve the family's history and studied her family tree. She carefully conserved her father's and brother's uniforms, accoutrements, swords, medals, and other military paraphernalia. Although she served in France during World War I, and her well-maintained World War I uniform remains, she has only one World War I Red Cross medal. Annie did have a great many other medals, especially society badges that she saved

Her society medals include one for the Plantagenet Society (below left). To its left is a medal for the Colonial Order of the Crown that is script engraved on the reverse, "Annie/Early/Wheeler/ July 23, 1937." The gold colored top bar, not shown in *American Society Medals*, is embossed COLONIAL ORDER/OF THE CROWN with a laurel wreath behind the center.



Also in the frame is a badge with long ribbon for the National Society, United States Daughters of 1812. The ribbon bears four scrolls, top to bottom: ALABAMA, 1781 New York 1815, PETER EARLY, and RICHARD JONES. The pendant reverse is script engraved ANNIE/EARLY/WHEELER/1898 (above, third from the left). On the right (above) is a badge for the National Society, Daughters of the Barons of Runnemede, but the ribbon is different from that shown in *American Society Medals*, as it has a broad yellow center with a narrow brick red edge. The case of Annie’s awards also contains two bars that normally would go on the ribbon, but they are separate from the badge. The pendant’s reverse is block engraved ANNIE/WHEELER/336/Jan 1935.



Below the Runnemede medal is a membership badge for the National Society, Daughters of the American Colonists (left) that is engraved on the reverse, in block style, ANNIE WHEELER and on the next line, 4676.



To the right of this badge and below the one for the United States Daughters of 1812, is a badge for the National Society of the Colonial Dames XVII Century (figure 36). Some other society badges include one for the Daughters of the American Revolution with several ribbon attachments, including a top brooch showing Annie Wheeler was the Vice President General. The bars on this medal are District of Columbia; Harrison Jones; Lieut. Col. William Hull; Francis Smith; and Lieut. Joel Early, as shown in figure 37. The reverse is engraved “Annie Early Wheeler/13243.”

The badge with the longest ribbon is one for the Society of the Daughters of Colonial Wars (right), with 16 gold bars, each engraved in block capital letters. The bars are: CAPT. EBENEZER JOHNSON; ANDREW WARD; JOSEPH FULLER; CAPT. JAMES WHEELER; THOMAS DYER; EDWARD RIGGS; DR. JOHN HULL; CAPT. JOSEPH FULLER; LT. EBENEZER JOHNSON; ENSIGN SAM'L RIGGS; CAPT. JOSEPH HULL; JUDGE ABRAM FULLER; RICHARD HULL; SGT EDWARD RIGGS; CAPT. JOSEPH HULL; and SGT FRANCIS NICHOLS. The pendant is script engraved on the reverse, ANNIE/WHEELER/NAT. 2889/ST. 32.

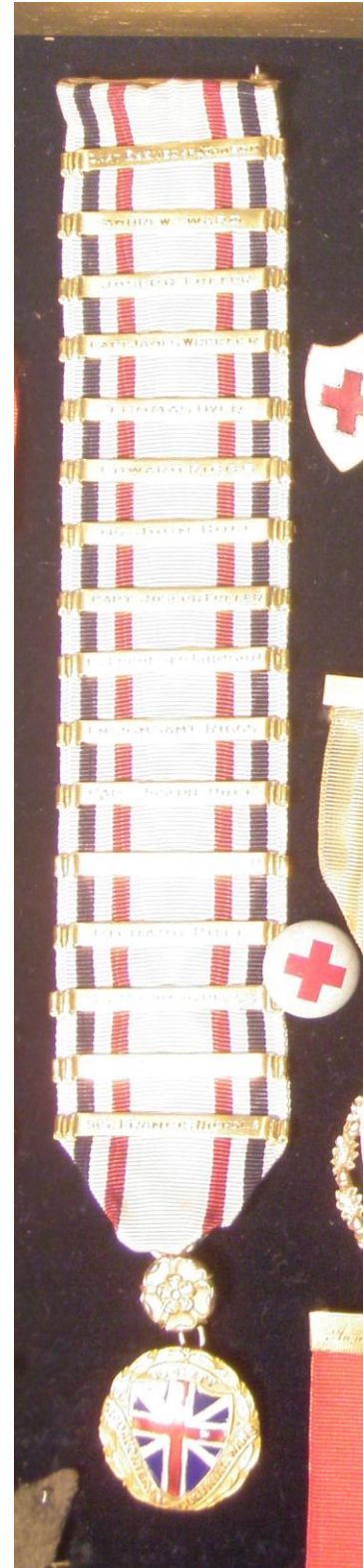


Annie was also a member of the Order of the First Families of Virginia, but her badge ribbon does not have a bar engraved with the name of her qualifying ancestor(s) (left). The medal is engraved on the reverse ANNIE WHEELER 285. As the society was founded in 1912, she was evidently an early member.

The Pond Spring badge for the Society of the Colonial Dames of America is Type 1a, the earliest style, according to Bishop and Elliott. It is script engraved Annie/Early/Wheeler/ No. 3369 1934. The top bar/brooch is marked VIRGINIA (below left).



Annie saved many things besides the medals and in the summer of 2009 the Wheeler Home catalogued many papers associated with her society badges. She even saved catalogues and price lists from some of the companies or organizations that sold society badges. One interesting example is the medal listed in Bishop and Elliott as number 9 and identified as the badge for the Somerset Chapter, Magna Charta Barons. A 1930s catalogue in the Wheeler Home archives identifies the badge as “an Alternate Badge of the Society” and as “The Royal Signet, the Seal Affixed to Magna Charta (An alternate Badge of the Society which may be worn by any member desiring it and if requested it will be sent on approval).” It is shown on the next page.





To the right is the presumed badge for the Society of the First Crusade. The badge is similar to that for the Order of the Three Crusades, but given the initials at the bottom of the pendant and the date, the designation is assumed. The one-inch wide ribbon is composed of seven equal width stripes, alternating black and white, with black on the outside. The reverse (below) is engraved with Annie's full name on one line and the number 559 below, with the first letters of each name slightly higher than the other block letters. The pendant is 1-1/32 inches wide across and is 1-15/32 inches high.

Annie had a red and yellow ribbon for the United Spanish War Veterans with a paper name tag at the top bearing her hand written name



and at the bottom a brass metal cross, for the national convention held in Mobile, Alabama, June 7-9, 1936. Some of her surviving insignia and other memorabilia, which number nearly 100, include a large red cross for her American Red Cross hat and her identification tags and chain. The tags are engraved "AMERICAN/RED/CROSS" on one side and on the reverse "4340." She also had two smaller sterling silver identification tags, each engraved "L. Wheeler/A.R.C. USA" and on the reverse, "Notify Lucy L. Wheeler/ Wheeler Ala." Lucy was an older sister who died on Christmas Day, 1924.



¹ Fact sheet from Pond Spring.

² Bishop, Lee E, Jr., and J. Robert Elliott, II. *American Society Medals: An Identification Guide*. Bishop and Elliott Publications, Santa Monica, CA, 1998, p 85.

³ Belden, Bauman L. *The Collection of American Insignia in the Cabinet of the American Numismatic Society*, plate

4. Reprint from the American Journal of Numismatics, 1909.

⁴ USMA. *In Memory of Colonel Joseph Wheeler, Jr*, np, 1938.

⁵ Ibid.; *Historical Register and Dictionary*, Francis B. Heitman, GPO: Washington, 1903, Vol 1, p 1024; War Department, *Official Army Register, 1 January 1923*, p 13.

⁶ *War Department Gallantry Citations for Pre WW I Service*, 1986, Planchet Press, pp 4 and 6.