

AMERICAN LEGION, POST 70

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ASSOCIATIONS of war veterans are among the oldest institutions in the United States. The Order of Cincinnati, organized by veterans of George Washington's Continental Army, in fact antedated the formation of the Republic. Every great war in which the nation has since engaged has produced its group bent on preserving the comradeship of the battle field and the fleet.

It was quite in accord with tradition, then, that the idea of the American Legion was already in the minds of the fighters in France before the last shot was fired on November 11, 1918.

One of the first to propose an organization of World War veterans, and to carry through as one of the founders, was the late Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., then a Lieut. Colonel in the now famous 1st Division. His activities were an outgrowth of a conversation with Sgt. William Patterson when both were convalescing at a base hospital in Paris from wounds received in the mid-summer Aisne-Marne battles.

They agreed that they wanted to return to their respective organizations, as quickly as possible, "get the whole job over" and then "go home and start a veterans' association for the good of the country."

Patterson was later killed in action. The weeks that followed the Armistice were busy and troubled for the leaders of the A.E.F. - moving more than a million men from the battle areas into the Army of Occupation or to winter billets in France, but Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., did not lose sight of the idea he had had that previous summer.

His opportunity for giving it concrete form arrived about two months after hostilities ended. General Headquarters of the A.E.F. had a morale problem of considerable magnitude on its hands with the end of fighting.

There were few professional soldiers in that army and the majority of the men "wanted out" and to get back home in the states. Due to lack of ships to ferry them home, this would take months. To devise a means of overcoming this trouble, General Headquarters detailed 20 National Guard and Reserve Officers, representing 10 infantry divisions, the S.O.S. and other A.E.F. groups to meet at Paris with a group of regular army officers.

They met on February 15 and 16, 1919, reviewed the situation and drafted a number of recommendations to improve the lot of the A.E.F. rank and file. After this meeting, Roosevelt invited the 20 officers to have dinner with him at the Allied Officers Club.

At that dinner the American Legion was born. The 20 officers became a committee to spread the news that a caucus would be held on March 15 at

Paris for further discussions and proposals of the Roosevelt plan.

Enthusiasm for the March 15 caucus is attested by the fact that approximately 1,000 officers and enlisted men were present at Cirque de Paris. (Incidentally, Gerald Hackett, who has been a member of Nutley Post 70 for many years, attended that meeting.)

A caucus in the United States, early in May, 1919, was held in St. Louis and the first national convention of the American Legion was held in Minneapolis in November.

Nutley Post 70 was formulated at a meeting held at the home of J. C. Buxton, on August 20, 1919. Buxton had circulated a petition and had 36 signatures on it before he was able to get the temporary charter which was necessary before an American Legion Post could be organized.

The following Friday, August 22, 1919, Nutley Post 70 had its first meeting in Town Hall. It was at that meeting that Buxton was elected the first Nutley Commander; so Buxton is considered the originator of Nutley Post 70.

At its first meeting, it was decided that the picture of the 17 Nutley men who had made the supreme sacrifice should be suitably framed and hung in a proper place wherever Post 70 met. The picture still hangs at Post Headquarters today.

Through the offices of Capt. Prout, the men were able to secure the use of the Nutley Public Library basement as a Post Headquarters from September 19, 1919, until the space was needed by the town's growing library. From July 1, 1925, until July 27, 1929, the Post then met in the Commissioners' Rooms at Town Hall.

At this time the Post moved into its own (and present) headquarters at 507 Franklin Avenue. This building, a revamped private dwelling, has suited the purposes of Post 70 very well and is still in use; however, present plans call for a new Post home to be built within two years.

The Post announced that it has purchased property on Franklin Avenue near the Belleville line.

Nutley Post was one of the few to get a good start financially. At the conclusion of the war, the Nutley Community Chest found itself with several thousand dollars on hand, of which they donated about \$4,000 to Post 70. This was spent on furnishing the club rooms in the Library basement and the purchase of Liberty Bonds.

Two captured cannons were donated by the Town Commissioners, a pool table from Grace Episcopal Church, a piano from St. Mary's Church and \$108 from the Honorary Club. The latter organization was made up of men who would pay fees each week to pay for gift packages to send to servicemen overseas.

At the termination of the war, this club held a "Welcome Home" dinner for returning servicemen and a clam bake at the "Fire Box" Picnic Grove on Washington Avenue.

It was during the Spring of 1920, through the efforts of Miss Klause, an ex-service Nurse of Nutley, the Women's Auxiliary of Post 70 was formed. It has been the staunchest supporter of the post; in fact, its helping hand has aided the post through many stormy days.

In 1926, the Post created a drum and bugle corps. It was a colorful outfit with the blue jackets, golden breeches and highly polished brass hats. Many Nutley citizens will long remember them as they marched proudly around town in parades.

They participated in many Legion parades throughout the state and marched in the National Convention parade in New York City in 1937. The corps was later disbanded due to the aging of the members and the stamina required for this participation.

Accompanying the drum corps on most of its parades, was a jalopy known to the members as "The Brass Hat." It was a cut down model T, with a huge brass hat serving as the roof. The car was used as advertising for various charitable drives in Nutley. Many of the Post's older members have a sheepish grin when some of the incidents are recalled. Most will tell you how it ended its career during a parade on Fifth Avenue, New York in 1937, when it caught fire and was virtually destroyed.

It was during a state convention at Asbury Park in 1935, that word was received that a ship had caught fire and volunteers were needed. Some members from Post 70 answered that call. They helped row boats, carried stretchers, aided the cold and needy and helped set up first aid stations. The next day, the newspapers blazoned the story of the "Morro Castle."

On Armistice Day, 1935, a memorial tablet to Dr. George B. Philhower was erected in Memorial Parkway, near the World War I Boulder, to honor the late doctor, who was the main advocate of the Memorial Parkway that was laid out and dedicated to honor the men of Nutley who served in World War I.

Enactment of the G.I. Bill of Rights was the outstanding legislative accomplishment of the Legion during 1944. Millions of veterans owe their education to this Federal Government program, which was the result of the Legion's fight for every veteran to have an equal right to an education.

Of no less, or scarcely less, importance to the Legion's legislative program, was the passage and Presidential approval of the bill providing for the widows and orphans of World War I, which was brought to a successful conclusion in December, 1944, thereby completing the Legion's four point program of 10 years standing.

American Legion, Post 70, while it has never entered into politics of any kind

in Nutley, because it is against the policy of National Headquarters, nevertheless, has been very active civically and can boast of many accomplishments in its 40 years of existence.

First, and foremost has been its respect to deceased veterans and to the widows or orphans. Services for the dead have always been administered whenever requested. A flag pole was presented to the Nutley Public Library and erected on the lawn in the spot where the World War II memorial pole now stands. The honor roll where it now stands is the culmination of the work of the Post 70, which kept the records of service men and women in front of the Town Hall during the conflict.

The Legion painted the name Nutley on the roof of the Franklin Theatre, on the north and south sides. This had been requested by the Aviation Authorities in 1928. The Post is the recipient of a scroll, signed by Colonel Lindbergh thanking them for their cooperation.

In 1932, the Post sponsored a drive to help the unemployed and until the activity was taken over by the state on July 6, 1933, they amassed a total of many thousands of hours of work, which made a cash return to the unemployed of \$29,695.

On the evening of November 11, 1931, a live demonstration of the Battle of Belleau Wood was held in Memorial Park. Several hundred veterans were involved in this enactment. The demonstration was witnessed by over 10,000 residents.

The Nutley Home Guard Defense, which was organized by members of the American Legion was the forerunner of the police and fire auxiliaries. The present Nutley Police Reserves is the culmination of a group of Legionnaires who started the ball rolling in 1940.

Major Harry Tribble, a past commander of Post 70, was the first chairman of the Nutley Defense Council. Charles S. Hammond, also a past commander of Post 70, now serves as Deputy Chief of the Nutley Police Reserves.

It was during World War II, when the government needed all the scrap iron it could get, that Post 70 gave up its cannon that stood in front of Post Headquarters from 1920 until 1943. In 1954, the Post burned the mortgage on its present home on Franklin Avenue.

During the Korean conflict Post 70 organized a "Clothes for Korea" drive and managed to gather over five tons of used clothing for shipment to the needy in Korea.

Originated by Elmer "Legs" Lawrence, a past commander of Post 70, the annual Athletic Award, since 1947, has grown to be one of the outstanding sports awards in Nutley. The winners, two girls, and 21 boys, have represented eight different sports.

Over 400 boys have participated in Post 70's American Legion Junior Baseball program. Since the Boys' State program was started by the American Legion in New Jersey, in 1946, Post 70 has been instrumental in sending 75 boys to these sessions held at Rutgers University in New Brunswick.

For one week, the boys learn how the state and national government's operate. They hold campaigns for elections, vote for their candidates on voting machines and elect a "Boy Governor."

The post service officer is constantly being alerted to new benefits in various government laws. Members and non-members of Post 70 have found the services available to them for filing claims for educational, medical or housing benefits.

Parties are held for the veterans at East Orange Veterans' Hospital and Lyons Hospital. Post 70 participates in Legion functions at all veterans hospitals throughout the state during the Christmas season by donating monies for gifts to these patients.

They participate in the American Legion Essex County Blood Bank and the Child Welfare Committee has been commended by county and state officials of the Legion. The Post is active on the Essex County Juvenile Delinquency Committee.

In 1958, Mrs. Mary B. Ryan, a former Army Nurse, made Post 70 stand out above others, when she was elected the first woman commander of a men's Legion Post in Essex County.

Post 70 has, since 1919, had only four men who served as commander for a second time: Charles S. Hammond, David Haliday, Raymond Van Vechtan and Arthur Hamilton.

Since its inception, only two of its members have been awarded the golden membership card, indicating the Post has honored them with a life membership. Hammond received his gold card in 1957, and George W. Munns was the recipient in 1958.

Two of Post 70's commanders have been elected to higher offices. In 1935, J. Ray Bray, and in 1956, Earl J. Crawford, served as Essex County commanders.

The members of Post 70, American Legion, have come from all walks of life, and it proves that one man in the Legion is as good as the next man - there is no class or caste among them. Post 70 is very proud of its accomplishments and contributions to the community, state and nation.