

American Legion Beginnings

This week, the website for Veterans Still Serving America – Legacy and Vision of Clay County went on-line at www.vssa.us. Over the next several months, pages will be added providing not only about the Moorhead American Legion, but other posts in Clay County, VFW posts and Veterans of Clay County. During WWI, a group of officers in the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) met in France and laid the groundwork for the American Legion. One of the early goals was to help improve troop morale.

The first organization meeting took place in Paris in March, 1919, with about 1000 officers and enlisted men attending. The meeting, known as the Paris Caucus, adopted a temporary constitution and the name "The American Legion." It also elected an executive committee to complete the organization work. Each soldier of the AEF automatically became a member of the Legion. Soldiers were encouraged to form Legion posts when they returned to the US. On a personal note, my father, Adolph Bakke, serving in France became a Legion member. He continued his membership in the Otto Knutson American Legion Post 427 in Newfolden, MN the rest of his life.

Stateside, the Legion held a second organizing caucus in St. Louis, MO in May, 1919. It completed the constitution and made plans for a permanent organization. and began its relief, employment and Americanism programs.

The American Legion was chartered by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic veterans organization. Focusing on service to veterans, servicemembers and communities, the Legion evolved from a group of war-weary veterans of World War I into one of the most influential nonprofit groups in the United States. The posts are organized into 55 departments: one each for the 50 states, along with the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, France, Mexico and the Philippines.

Over the years, the Legion has influenced considerable social change in America, won hundreds of benefits for veterans and produced many important programs for children and youth. Following is a chronology of significant dates in Legion history:



Moorhead American Legion Melvin E. Hearl Post No. 21 building was completed in 1936 with grant assistance from the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Ground was broken November 11, 1935 by Mayor E.W. Humphrey on a site formerly the home of Andrew Holes. Original site features included a reflecting pool at the front entry. Check out the photos on our website. WPA engineer Frank J. Plut managed the construction of the building. At the upper corners of the building, four portraits are cast in concrete. The faces are unidentified. If

anyone knows who they represent, please contact me. Usher's House is currently located in the building.

Please mark your calendars to attend our street naming ceremony on 6 August at 10:00 am at the corner of 10th Street and 15 Ave N, honoring our Guard units.