

The American Legion Centennial Celebration

The American Legion was founded in March 1919 in Paris, France, by U.S. World War I military personnel, stationed there who were dedicated to four pillars of service and advocacy: veterans, military personnel, youth and patriotic values.

For 100 years, The American Legion has focused 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.

Through a Centennial Celebration, The American Legion wishes to call to the attention of the American people the record of achievements that have been accomplished by The American Legion during the 100 years since its founding; to emphasize the impact the organization has had upon the American society; and the extent of its contributions to the national security and the welfare of military veterans, their families and their communities.

The Centennial Celebration will include setting forth the objectives and the aims that will motivate its programs and activities during the years ahead and to illustrate the contribution made to the future of our country.

The American Legion 100th Anniversary mantra is “Legacy and Vision” – both a celebration of past accomplishments and a renewal of the organization’s resolve to serve communities, states and the nation for a second century.

The Department of Delaware is hosting its Centennial Celebration on Saturday, March 9, 2019, at Dover Downs Hotel & Casino, 1131 North DuPont Highway, Dover, DE 19901. Legionnaires, Auxiliary members, Sons of The American Legion, and guests are encouraged to participate in this special, once-in-a-lifetime event.

How It All Started

The American Legion was chartered by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic veterans’ organization. Focusing on service to veterans, service members 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. Membership swiftly grew to over 1 million, and local posts sprang up across the country.

The formation of The American Legion was led by General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. During one of the earliest meetings of The American Legion in 1919, a movement was afoot to nominate Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., as the first national commander. A World War I hero and the son of a former president, “T.R. Jr.” was widely perceived to have political ambitions of his own and possibly follow in his father’s footsteps to the White House. A term as National Commander would be a nice steppingstone for the young Republican. But Roosevelt would have none of it. Over shouts of “We Want Teddy,” Roosevelt told the delegates, “I wish to withdraw my name for a number of reasons... We are gathered together for a very high purpose. I want every American through the length and breadth of this land to realize that there is not a man in this caucus who is seeking anything for himself, personally, but that he is simply working for the good of the entire situation.”

Roosevelt knew that the best way for The American Legion to advance its pillars of fighting for a strong national defense, caring for veterans, establishing wholesome youth programs and promoting Americanism was to avoid partisanship and political labels.

He declared, "First, the organization should be nonpartisan, concerning itself possibly with policies, but never with partisan politics. Second, its membership should be comprised of servicemen and women, regardless of whether they served overseas or were unfortunate enough to have their duty keep them in this country. Third, it should be really civilian, and its councils, general and private, admiral and gob, should be treated on the same basis." In 1949, 3

Organizing

A group of 20 officers who served in the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in France during World War I is credited with founding The American Legion. AEF Headquarters asked the officers to suggest ideas on how to improve troop morale. One officer, LTC Theodore Roosevelt Jr., proposed an organization of veterans. In February 1919, the group formed a temporary committee and selected several hundred officers who had the confidence and respect of the whole army.

The March 15-17, 1919 Paris Caucus set in motion The American Legion. About 1,000 officers and enlisted men attended the Paris Caucus.

Minutes from the first meeting of the caucus of The American Legion, dated March 15, 1919 was called to order at 2:55 PM by Major E. P. Wood, Temporary Secretary of the Temporary Committee, in the absence of LTC Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., Temporary Chairman of the Temporary Committee. Major Wood, in opening the caucus, explained the steps taken by the Temporary Committee.

It was moved by Major Patterson, delegate from the Paris Command, and seconded by a delegate from the 28th Division, that LTC Bennett C. Clark act as temporary chairman of the caucus. This motion was voted upon by the caucus and LTC Clark was unanimously elected temporary chairman of the caucus. A delegate from the Paris Command nominated Major E. F. Wood as temporary secretary of the caucus. The nomination was seconded, and Major Wood was unanimously elected temporary secretary of the caucus.

Minutes from the second meeting of the caucus on March 17, 1919 show that committees on convention, organization, constitution, and name, were appointed.

- ❖ Committee on Convention. The members of the Committee on Convention recommended that the National Convention be held at 11 AM, November 11, 1919, at such place as the Executive Committee of the organization, acting with the Executive Committee of the organization in the United States, may decide.
- ❖ Committee on Permanent Organization Report. An Executive Committee shall be selected, two (2) from each unit (as recognized in this caucus) and eight (8) to be selected by the Executive Committee; the two members, one officer and one enlisted man, to be selected from each unit to be named by the respective delegations attending this caucus. Each unit shall present the names of committeemen who shall as far as possible represent in point of residence each state, territory and possession of the United States, and the District of Columbia.
This Executive Committee acting in conjunction with the committee of the United States is specifically charged with the duty of fixing a date and place for holding a National Convention, issuing a call for the holding of county and state conventions and providing a unit of representation and method of selection of delegates to the National Convention by the State Conventions.
- ❖ Committee on Constitution. Approved: We, the members of the Military and Naval Services of the United States of America in the Great War desiring to perpetuate the principles of Justice, Freedom and Democracy for which we have fought, to inculcate the duty and obligation- of the citizen to the State; to preserve the history and incidents of our participation in the war; and to cement the ties of comradeship formed in service, do propose to found and establish an Association for the furtherance of the foregoing purposes.
- ❖ Committee on Name Report. The following names were submitted: Comrades of the Great War; Veterans of the Great War; Liberty League; Army of the Great War; Legion of the Great War; Great War Legion; The Legion; The American Legion; American Comrades of the Great War; Society of the Great War; The Great Legion; and American Comrades. After due deliberation the committee selected the names in the order in which they follow:
Legion of the Great War 5 first 2 second 1 third
Veterans of the Great War 3 first 4 second 0 third
The Legion 3 first 0 second 1 third
Society of the Great War 0 first 1 second 3 third
American Legion 0 first 1 second 3 third.

Please note that the "American Legion" received the least support.

- ❖ Final: After lengthy discussion, it was finally moved, seconded, and passed to reconsider the motion to lay the report of the Committee on Name, on the table. Major Gordon, delegate of the 36th Division, moved that the name "American Legion" be adopted as the temporary name of the organization. Seconded and carried by unanimous vote.

With adoption of a temporary Constitution, the name "The American Legion," and an executive committee to complete the work of organizing moved to the United States. It considered each soldier of the AEF a member of the Legion. The executive committee named a subcommittee to organize veterans at home in the United States.

In May 8-10, 1919, the Legion held a second organizing caucus in St. Louis. It completed the Constitution and made plans for a permanent organization, setting up a temporary headquarters in New York City, and beginning its relief, employment, and Americanism programs.

At the St. Louis Caucus, Delaware was represented by four delegates:

- (1) George N. Davis, Major, 904 Market St., Wilmington from the 364th Inf. & Staff, Lawyer.
- (2) E. H. Kane, Musician, 2123 Gilles St., Wilmington from the 87th Infantry Division, Clerk.
- (3) Irving Warner, 1st Lieut.-Eng., 1016 Rodney St., Wilmington from the Cement Mill Co. No. 8 Eng. Purch. Off. Paris, Lime Mfr.
- (4) George L. Evans, Patmkr. 1st Class, 1507 N. Rodney, Wilmington, USN, Patternmaker

In the Minutes of the Caucus, the Delaware State Officers were listed as:

- Chairman, George N. Davis, 909 Market St., Wilmington and
- Secretary, L. K. Carpenter, Du Pont Bldg., Wilmington.
- Legionnaire Davis served on the Constitution and Resolutions Committees.
- Legionnaire Warner on the Organization, Finance, and Publications Committees.
- Legionnaire Evans was on the Place & Time and Credentials Committees.
- Legionnaire Kane served the Permanent Headquarters, Name, and Emblem Committees.

There was vindictiveness over adoption of the name, "The American Legion." One delegate thought that "American Legion" by itself is not at all sufficient. To the average civilian, the American Legion might be an organization of — well, street cleaners. It does not mean an organization of soldiers. It is not comprehensive enough. Of course, the name will be American Legion and everybody will call it American Legion, but the ordinary teach him what it means.") American Legion is not sufficient, it does not mean anything. Verbal protests followed. A Captain S. L. Lowry, Jr. (Florida): "I say call it the American Legion. We will soon show them what it means."

There was just as much rancor over the selection of the site of the first national convention. Six cities were nominated: Minneapolis, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Kansas City, Indianapolis, and San Francisco. On the first ballot, Delaware voted all six votes for Minneapolis. Results were:

Minneapolis received 452 votes.

Pittsburgh received 311 votes.

Chicago received 189 votes.

Kansas City received 85 votes.

Indianapolis received 30 votes.

San Francisco received 1 vote

Since it took 535 votes to win and on a second ballot between Minneapolis and Pittsburgh, results were 573 Minneapolis and 456 Pittsburgh. Delaware voted six for Pittsburgh so much for consistency.

The following cities were voted upon as a place for permanent headquarters: Kansas City, Chicago, Cincinnati, New York, New Orleans, St. Louis, Memphis, Washington, and Louisville. The result of the vote was decidedly in favor of Chicago.

On June 9, 1919, the National Executive Committee adopted the Legion emblem.

A Constitution was adopted conformably to the Act of the Congress of the United States of America, officially chartering The American Legion on September 16, 1919.

First National Convention

The first national convention convened in Minneapolis on November 10-12, 1919, adopting a permanent constitution and electing officers to head the organization. Elected to National Commander was Franklin D'Olier, Department of Pennsylvania. Delaware was represented by six delegates.

- ❖ L. R. Webb was assigned to the Credentials, Auxiliary, Finance, and Eligibility Committees.
 - ❖ N.A. Groves was on the Rules, Post Activities & Memorials, Employment, and Emblem Committees.
 - ❖ H.E. Pettyjohn served on the Political Restrictions, War Risk Insurance, and 1920 National Convention Committees.
 - ❖ G.P. LeFevre served on the Constitution & Organization, Anti-American Propaganda, and Military Policy Committees.
 - ❖ T.W. Miller was assigned to the Resolutions, and Beneficial Legislation Committees.
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- ❖ G.W. Miller served on the Legislation Committee. It is not clarified if G.W. and T.W. Miller were the same person. Many issues were addressed:
 - ❖ Delegates vote 361-323 to locate the Legion's National Headquarters in Indianapolis, instead of Washington, DC, another favorite with Chicago.
 - ❖ As soon as practical the American Legion Weekly Publishing Corporation will also have headquarters at Indianapolis, Indiana.
 - ❖ The Convention chose Cleveland, Ohio, unanimously as the next Convention meeting place of The American Legion.
 - ❖ A resolution was passed in support of Boy Scouts of America. Today, the Legion is the chartering agency for more than 1,700 Scouting units made up of approximately 64,000 youths.
 - ❖ From the Committee Reports and Resolutions, the convention addressed a myriad of issues, most especially to veterans' affairs and rehabilitation, employment, war risk insurance, draft dodgers, anti-American Propaganda, and foster and perpetuate 100% Americanism.
 - ❖ Resolutions were passed by the Convention regarding the regretful occurrence at Centralia, Washington, where four Legionaries were murdered on Armistice Day., November 11, 1919, as a result of a gun battle erupts during an Armistice Day parade of American Legionnaires and resulting in the lynching of one member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The philosophy and tactics of the IWW were described as "revolutionary industrial unionism", with ties to both socialist and anarchist labor movements.

The first four Department of Delaware Commanders were George N. Davis, Meredith I. Samuel, John P. LeFevre, and Harry Pettyjohn. T.W. Miller served as our 15th Department Commander. Henry G. Parker, The State Armory, Twelfth and Orange Streets, Wilmington was the first Delaware Adjutant. All these Legionnaires did attend the First National Convention and part of the laying the foundation of The American Legion.

Honorable Service – Moral Obligation

In one of Theodore Roosevelt's, Jr.'s speeches and in the formation of The American Legion, he promoted the ideal that the newly-founded organization should be of "Honorable Service and Moral Obligation." Hence, the D

Where From Here

Following in the footsteps of Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., The Legion continues to support the four pillars of service and advocacy upon which it was founded: Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children and Youth.

See more at: <https://centennial.legion.org/history>

Today, membership stands at 2 million in 12,811 posts worldwide. 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.

The 100th American Legion National Convention in 2018 kicked off a 15-month commemoration to honor the organization's first century of service and propel it into the second. Minneapolis, home of the 1st American Legion National Convention in 1919, served as host city of the 100th National Convention August 24-30, 2018. Centennial events and activities will be conducted at the national, department, and post levels through the 101st National Convention in Indianapolis, Indiana, August 23-29, 2019, and will culminate on Veterans Day 2019.

The American Legion Centennial Celebration is not only about honoring the past 100 years of our history, but also preparing to continue our legacy of service. A key component in the Legion's 100th-anniversary commemoration is a vision for the next century. Foremost, the Legion will end its first century the way it began in 1919: by helping a new wave of veterans make the transition to civilian life.

Events and activities at posts all around the world will showcase The American Legion "Still Serving America." There are 5,240 active posts, who were chartered sometime before and after the first National Convention in November 11, 1919 and through November 11, 1920. There are five (5) Centennial Delaware American Legion Posts:

- Delaware Post #1, Wilmington
- Walter L. Fox Post #2, Dover
- Callaway-Kemp-Raughley-Tee Post #7, Harrington
- David C. Harrison Post #14, Smyrna
- Laurence Roberts #21, Wilmington