



**The American Legion
Smyrna, Post 160
“For God and Country”**

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In the Beginning



Post Home, 1953

January 26, 2002

Several years ago **Robert B. Logan**, who was Commander of Post 160 in 1951-1952, started putting together a Post History. Recently, I reviewed what Bob had assembled, and attached is a condensed version of his research.

I thought that it might be interesting to some Legionnaires to see when our Post was organized, and what our accomplishments were from 1941 through 1953.

When you read the attached history of the early years of our Post, you can readily see why we were then, and why we are still today, an integral part of the Community and the City of Smyrna.

As **Bob** so aptly put it, “every American Legion Post should be a symbol of service to the Veterans, and to the Community in which it is located.”

Respectfully submitted,

Pete Williams

A BRIEF HISTORY OF AMERICAN LEGION POST 160

The first meeting of which there is a record, was held on November 14, 1941 at the *First Methodist Church*, with eight (8) veterans present. **Ernest Jones** was Acting Commander, **J.C. Johnson** was Acting Adjutant, and **Jack Hufstutler** was Acting Chaplain. The only business transacted was the decision to buy the Adjutant a Record and Minute Book. The "hat" was passed, and \$1.41 was collected.

The first meeting of the Executive Committee was held on November 30, 1941 for the purpose of drawing up a Constitution and By-Laws. These were adopted by the Post and were used as a, temporary Charter.

The first record of Community service was the appointment of **Gordon Fowler** to work with Committees from other local organizations on the "*Empty Stocking Fund*", and the Post subsequently donated **\$5.00** to this fund. **This donation is noteworthy considering the fact that donations at the meeting ranged from \$.70 to \$1.45.** Much more significant however, is that this donation set a precedent which has not been broken to this day. Members of the American Legion Post 160 can always be counted on to support any cause that is worthwhile.

The **Temporary Officers** mentioned above were installed on **December 27, 1941**. They were later installed under the New Charter, in **Clayton's Service Station**, on **January 21, 1942** and served until the election of new Officers on **May 27, 1942**.

By April 1943, the Post had donated **\$150.00 to the Boy Scouts, \$150.00 to the Smyrna School, and had \$150.00 in the Treasury**. One of the outstanding activities of 1943 was a rally to sponsor the sale of "*War Bonds*". Over **\$21,000.00 worth of Bonds** were either purchased or pledged at this rally.

In addition to Community Service and War-time activities such as "Bond Drives" and "Scrap Iron Drives", the Post took its first step toward building a Post Home. At the meeting of **November 21, 1944**, the first **Building Committee** was appointed by **Commander Gordon Fowler**. The Committee was instructed to draw up the plans and estimate the cost of a new building. At the same meeting, a "Fish Fry" was planned for December 8, 1944 to kick-off a fund raising campaign for the building program.

During the 1945-1946 Legion Year it soon became obvious to the membership that in the very near future, literally hundreds of WWII veterans would be returning to the Smyrna area. These veterans had, by an Act of Congress, become eligible for membership in the American Legion. The existing membership of Post 160 was made up of almost exclusively WWI veterans, and they felt a responsibility toward the younger WWII veterans, and invited them to join the Post.

The move to build a Post Home accelerated, and in October 1946 a committee was formed to arrange for the raffle of an Automobile. The car was raffled off on December 23, 1946, and the Post realized a profit of **\$3,987.00** on the raffle. Also, on January 7, 1947, arrangements were made to acquire the property on which the Post Home now stands. This property, (about 210 feet by 450 feet) belonged to **Miss Mary Derinda Martin**, who deeded it to the City of Smyrna, with the understanding that the City would lease a portion of the property, (about 200 feet by 210 feet) to the American Legion for a period of 99 years, under warranty deed no. 183, commencing on the 15th day of January, 1947 and ending on the 14th day of January 2046, with an option to renew the lease for another 99 years. The Girl Scouts had a

similar arrangement, under warranty deed no. 207, for the property on which the Legion Auxiliary now stands, (about 75 feet by 210 feet).

Warranty Deed 185 conveyed approximately two and one-fifth acres of land from **Miss Derinda Martin** to the City of Smyrna for a sum of **\$1,500.00**, which was raised by the American Legion Post 160 members. The deed was signed by **W.F. Stewart**, who was Commander at that time. There was a clause in the deed that stated that the City could hold the property as long as it was used for Civic Organizations and Parks and Recreational purposes.

After the Girl Scouts disbanded, the Legion used all of the property and in 1995, we began negotiations with the City to get the property transferred to the American Legion. The then **Mayor, Max Bacon** and the **City Council** arranged to issue a *Quit Claim Deed* to transfer the property to the American Legion Post 160, in the year 2000. This was accomplished during the term of Office of **Commander William Brown**.

During the early part of 1947, numerous fund raising projects, including Automobile Raffles, Fish Fry's, and BBQ's, were held to raise money for the building fund. These activities raised about **\$4,000.00** and contributions by Local citizens and businesses enabled the Legion to plan a big day for the **4th of July**. A **BBQ, Car Raffle, Beauty Contest, and Open-Air Dance** on the sub-floor of the partially built Post Home were planned for the big day. The Car was won by **Ham Dabney**, who announced on the spot that he would sell the Car to the highest bidder, and would donate any money over \$1,500.00 to the Building Fund. The Car auctioned off for \$2,100.00, and **Ham** donated **\$600.00** to Post 160.

The minutes of the **October 21, 1947** meeting reported on the progress of the building, and were believed to be the **last meeting held in the office of the Justice of the Peace**, on West Spring Street, and showed that the Roof was on, and materials for the windows, flooring, and chimneys were being installed. The late **Harry Mitchell**, presided over the historic meeting of **November 4th, 1947**, which is believed to be the *first meeting held* in the new Post Home.

By January 1948, the basement floor had been poured and the doors and windows installed in the downstairs area. However, the building fund was depleted, and all work had been suspended. It was estimated that **\$11,000.00** would be required to complete all remaining work, which then turned out to be **\$1,500.00 below** our needs. Again, **Ham Dabney** came to the rescue, and granted an **interest free loan** to the Legion.

In **February 1948**, the Post authorized the Trustees to negotiate a loan in the amount of **\$11,000.00** to complete the building, and many were skeptical of this since it placed the Legion in *debt for the first time*. However, the money was obtained and construction was resumed.

At the March 2, 1948 meeting, a Committee was appointed to begin making plans for the **4th of July Celebration**. At each succeeding meeting plans were discussed for the big day, and it was decided to raffle off a **Freezer, Gas Range, and Washing Machine**, with all the proceeds being donated to the Building Fund.

By this time, regular dances were being held in the building, even though it was not fully completed. There was no furnace, and the fireplaces at each end of the building were the only sources of heat, which required us to build fires in the early afternoon, and keep them going until Dance time. Of course this meant that the House Committee had to devote just about their entire Saturdays, to prepare for the Dances.

It must be emphasized at this point that the Auxiliary, having assumed the responsibility of equipping the Kitchen, was working vigorously to finance and carry out their project. The

very practical and much used upstairs kitchen is the product of their efforts and excellent planning.

By June 1948, the building was essentially complete, although there were many finishing touches still to be done, and all of the equipment and furnishings had to be acquired. The only equipment the Post had prior to June 1948 was a *used drink box, several surplus government tables, a Juke Box*, donated by **B.F. Reed**, and a *piano*, loaned by **Mrs. Lorena Pruitt**, who incidentally, was the **first woman Mayor of Smyrna**. At the June 1, 1948 meeting the membership voted to purchase a *Snack Bar* for the downstairs area, and investigate the possibility of *purchasing Fans*. The **House Committee** was also authorized to purchase a *Public Address System* from the Dance proceeds. In November 1948, **Howard Martin** was hired as a *full time Manager*, and he ran the Clubroom for many years. **Membership for the Legion Year 1948-1949 was 226.**

In 1949, a Central Heating System was installed in the building. Chairs and Tables were also purchased, as money became available. During the spring of 1949, the *Legion provided lighting for Brinkley Park, two 55mm Guns were obtained* for the front of our new Post Home, and the Post accepted *sponsorship for the Teen-Age Canteen*.

The residents of the Smyrna area, both veterans and non-veterans alike, had been very generous and helpful toward the efforts of building a Post Home. With the membership well over 200, the American Legion was by far the largest organization in the Smyrna area, with the exception of the Churches. This was recognized by the citizens and it was an opportune time for the Post to launch a Civic and Community Service program to show their appreciation for all the support the Post had received from the Community.

During the 1948-1949 Legion year, the Post contributed **\$150.00 to the Grace Sloan Community Lecture Fund, \$490.00** for the completion of the **Tennis Courts at Brinkley Park**, and **\$300.00 to the American Legion Junior Baseball Team**. Later, another **\$200.00** was donated to erect a **fence around the Tennis Courts**. In addition, **Grand Stand seats were constructed; Bases and equipment for maintaining the Tennis Courts, and Ball Fields** were purchased. All of this was **paid for by our Post**. It should be noted that **permission was granted, allowing the equipment of the American Legion Baseball Team to be used by other Smyrna baseball programs.**

The willingness of the Post to support all worthwhile projects in the Community soon became apparent to the citizens of the City of Smyrna. In keeping with this policy, the Post joined in with the City and other Civic organizations to employ a Recreation Director for the City Parks, during the summer months. The Post also accepted **sponsorship of Boy Scout Troop 156**, and a **Truck was purchased for the Scout Troop for use in Paper Drives and Camping Trips.**

In the December 20, 1949 meeting, **Finance Officer Butch Holahan** reported that the Mortgage had been paid in full. Plans were discussed for a *“dinner party”* to celebrate the *“burning of the mortgage”* and to **dedicate the new monument erected in front of the Flag Pole**. The building addition was also discussed.

Due to the Post's involvement with various activities, it is not surprising that the Post was **honored at the State Convention in 1950**, with the highest award presented by the State; the **Edgar Dunlap Trophy**, awarded each year to the **most outstanding Post in the State.**

At the first meeting in 1950, **Commander Holahan** appointed a Committee to continue studying the possibility of a building addition to **accommodate our increasing membership**. It was also decided to restrict all but essential expenditures, and put all monies in the building fund. In September 1950, bids were taken for the addition, however the bids were excessively high, and it was decided to postpone the building addition. Also, the Korean Conflict made steel and other building materials difficult to obtain.

The decision to delay the building proved to be a wise one, as a short time later the property behind the Legion was offered for sale. The property was the **J.J. Baldwin estate**, and consisted of approximately thirteen acres, and a six room House. After much discussion it was decided to **purchase the property for the price of \$12,825.00**, and use the \$10,000.00 that was in the building fund. Arrangements were made to pay the remaining **\$2,825.00 over a five year period**. The House was used for several years as a Kindergarten. It was also decided to have the Senior Class of Georgia Tech study this property, to determine the best possible use. It was then decided to let the property to remain undeveloped.

The **Community Service programs** continued during the Legion year 1951-1952, and included **Junior Baseball, the Boy Scout Program, the Teen-Age Canteen**, and participation in the **Smyrna Citizens Council**. In addition, some of the highlights were sending four boys to participate in the Boys State Program, sending the **Harpe child to Mayo Clinic, paving the Parking Lot**, adding **two rooms to the Scout Hut**, starting a **Christmas Program**, and winning our **second State Trophy**. **Commander Logan** steadfastly maintained that every American Legion Post should be a symbol of **Service to the Community** in which it is located.

Early in 1953, **Commander Max Parnell** and the Executive Committee turned their attention to the long awaited building addition, and in February an Architect was hired to draw up the plans. On May 1, 1953 bids were taken and a Contract was let for the addition, which would double the size of the Post Home.

The cost of the **new addition was \$24,000.00**, and the Trustees were authorized to negotiate a **loan of \$18,000.00** to supplement the building fund, and construction began. The addition was **completed** during the term of office of **Commander Max Parnell**.