

American Legion

By

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First Commander, Joseph B. Westnedge Post 36

During the early part of March, 1918, each division in the A. E. F. was ordered to send a certain number of men to Paris, France, as delegates to a convention for the purpose of forming a veteran organization. These delegates, nearly 1,000 officers and men, met March 15 to 17 and adopted a declaration of principles and selected as their name "The American Legion." A similar meeting was held in the United States from May 8 to 10 at St. Louis and indorsed and confirmed all that was done at the Paris Convention.

Now why should the veterans of the World War form an association? May we not answer that question in the spirit of the Preamble of the Constitution. "For God and country we associate ourselves together for the following purposes: To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America, to maintain law and order, to fester and perpetuate a one hundred per cent Americanism, to preserve the memories and incidents of our association in the great war, to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation; to make right the master of might, to promote peace and good will on earth, to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy; to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness." For what greater reason could that body of men have an organization? It is a little over a year after the signing of the Armistice and today we all realize what a great need there is for an organization of this kind. Approximately 4,800,000 young men, men who offered their lives if need be that this nation might emerge from the greatest war in history victorious, still fighting for the right. Fighting that this nation may be as great in peace as it was in war. Fighting every faction that would destroy this government. Fighting that we may not lose all that we fought for in this great war, and attempting to teach those people who would believe otherwise that this nation is for Americans and those who wish to be Americans and that that man or woman who would destroy our very life as a nation had best return to that nation from which he or she came.

Those who are eligible to the American Legion are any soldier, sailor, or marine, who served honorably between April 6th, 1917, and November 11th, 1918, and all women who were regularly enlisted or commissioned and served honorably in the Army, Navy or Marine Corps, between the dates above given.

It is the organization of American Veterans of the World War, both men and women. It is nonpartisan and non-political. It is a civilian organization not military or militaristic. Nearly all of its members are men who were civilians before the war, and are now again civilians. It makes no distinction between overseas men and women and men and women who did not get overseas. The Kalamazoo Post of The American Legion was formed at the Armory the evening of June 5th, 1919. About 100 men of all ranks and organizations met and perfected the plans for this post.

(Excerpt from the Kalamazoo Country Honor Roll 1917 -1919)

After very little debate the post was named after the late Colonel Joseph B. Westnedge and the State office gave it the number, 36. Therefore the official name of the post is Joseph B. Westnedge Post No. 36. The American Legion. The officers elected for the first term were as follows: Commander, James M. Wilson; Vice-Commander, Otto K. Buder; Adjutant, Paul Tedrow; Finance Officer, Wheeler Rickman; Sergeant-at-Arms, William Walters; Chaplain, Rev. Father Ben Ivins. Some difficulty was experienced at first in convincing the ex-service men of the necessity of joining the local post but after considerable hard work on the part of the interested members, the membership has been raised until at the present time we have about 1,000 members. The post is recognized by the State officers as one of the most successful in the State and everything is being done to make Kalamazoo 100 percent The American Legion. Much good has already been accomplished in the way of assisting ex-service men and women to first-class positions, straightening out back pay, insurance, liberty bonds, lost baggage, allotments, etc., besides promoting the good fellowship that must be between such men and women and convincing all who live in our city that "America is for Americans."

May the American Legion be the greatest factor this country has ever had to promote good citizenship and enroll true Americans, and may it deserve the support of every red-blooded son and daughter of this great republic.

James M. Wilson,
Commander.