For the opening, and the local newspaper reported: “Although the event had been advertised as a barbeque, it turned out to be a banquet. Never before had so many people attended the opening.”

By May 24, 1934, everything was done except construction of the roof. The 20,000 shakes needed to cover the roof were cut and floated across the river to frame the exterior of the building. $1,120 was earmarked for labor. Over 300 cypress logs were cut and floated across the river to frame the exterior of the building. The $1,779 was approved for the project, of which $1,120 was earmarked for labor. Over 300 cypress logs were cut and floated across the river to frame the exterior of the building. The 20,000 shakes needed to cover the roof were made onsite. The 20,000 shakes needed to cover the roof were made onsite. By May 24, 1934, everything was done except construction of the stone fireplace and chimney and the addition of a rail around the balcony. On June 21, the Legionnaires announced that a barbecue would be held on July 4 to bring the hut officially into service. Some 150 people attended the opening, and the local newspaper reported: “Although the event had been advertised as a barbeque, it turned out to be a banquet. Never before had so many people attended the opening.”

Jess Norman Post 166, Augusta Arkansas

American Legion Post 166 is housed in a vernacular log meeting hall. It was constructed in 1934 through local efforts with the assistance of the Depression-era Civil Works Administration (CWA). The post was named for Jess Norman, the first man from Augusta to be killed in action during World War I. The CWA approved $1,779 for the project, of which $1,120 was earmarked for labor. Over 300 cypress logs were cut and floated across the river to frame the exterior of the building. The 20,000 shakes needed to cover the roof were made onsite. By May 24, 1934, everything was done except construction of the stone fireplace and chimney and the addition of a rail around the balcony. On June 21, the Legionnaires announced that a barbecue would be held on July 4 to bring the hut officially into service. Some 150 people attended the opening, and the local newspaper reported: “Although the event had been advertised as a barbeque, it turned out to be a banquet. Never before had so many people attended the opening.”

White River flooding May 4, 2011 brought water up to the floor boards of the hut. The river crested 14.8 feet above flood stage. The original Arkansas State House was renamed by the Arkansas Senate to the Arkansas State War Memorial and became the home of Department of Arkansas American Legion from 1921 to 1949. The Serviceman’s Readjustment Act was signed into law on June 22nd, 1944, by Mr. Sam Roeres of Little Rock, co-author of the G.I. Bill of Rights, was distinguished to personally present the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act to President Roosevelt at the White House for his signature. This photo was taken as Sam, with the bill under his arm, stopped at the White House door. Sam provided much of the legislative know how to help create the bill. At the time, he was serving as U.S. District Attorney. He was an active Legionnaire serving Arkansas as Department Commander 1936-1937 and on the National Executive Committee.

Arlona Rauzer of Clarksville was the first woman elected District Commander in Arkansas. After her election in May of 1953, it was learned that she was the first female District Commander in the Nation. She joined Bunch-Walton Post 22 in 1946 and quickly became the Post adjutant. She also served as Post Child Welfare Chairman, on the National Rehabilitation Commission and as the Johnson County Service Officer.

The first three CWF grants, totaling $22,500, were awarded to the Delinquency Control Institute, the Child Welfare Foundation, and the National Rehabilitation Foundation of two departments is held for the first time a national commander is elected without a contest.

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Military Presence in Arkansas

Historically, Arkansas has been prime real estate for military installations. Since the 1800’s forts, posts, installations, and bases dotted the landscape. Fort Smith was established 1817 as a military outpost to patrol the neighboring Indian Territory.

Camp Robinson was developed in 1917 to support the war effort. Originally the home of the Eighty-seventh Division, the post served as a replacement training facility after the division deployed to France and then as a demobilization station and home for the U.S. Third Infantry Division after the war ended. With the start of World War II, the post took on a new role as a replacement training center. Initially, there were two centers, one for basic training and the other for medics. In 1944, the two were combined into the infantry Replacement Training Center.

In addition to its role in training soldiers, Camp Robinson also housed a large German prisoner of war facility, with a capacity of 4,000 prisoners. Today, Camp Robinson continues to serve as the home for the Arkansas National Guard’s Joint Forces Headquarters and other Arkansas National Guard units.

Fort Chaffee was established in western Arkansas in September 1941. Originally designated as Camp Chaffee, the site included 72,000 acres of predominantly farmland. Combat training was initiated at Camp Chaffee in 1941 and most of the major buildings on the site were completed by the following year.

Former Air Force Bases include Blytheville AFB and the Titan II ICBM Launch Complex. Blytheville AFB is home to the 19th Airlift Wing and supports the largest fleet of C-17 Globemaster III aircraft in the world.

Little Rock AFB in Jacksonville is home to the 19th Airlift Wing and supports the largest fleet of C-17 Globemaster III aircraft in the world.

With the adoption of Act 141 of Arkansas’ 91st General Assembly, military retired pay is exempt from Arkansas State Income Taxes. This is keeping retired veterans here and attracting veterans from other states.

Tribute To O.L. Bodenhamer

O.L. “Bodie” Bodenhamer, was the National Commander of The American Legion, 1929-1930 and the fifth Department Commander of Arkansas (1922-23). He attracted statewide attention in 1922 as commander of Roy V. Kinard Post 10 at El Dorado, when the membership jumped from 74 to 814 of 1,000 eligible veterans in the county.

He was an English teacher at San Marcos Baptist College in San Marcos, Texas when the United States entered World War I in 1917. He volunteered for military service, entering the Army in the infantry as a private and was discharged as a major 26 months later. He moved to El Dorado in 1921, lured by the oil lease and real estate business.

During his administration as department commander, the department membership reached a new high mark of 6,976 which was not surpassed until 1927. He was the principal sponsor of the Arkansas Service Bureaus measure which assisted ex-service men in handling claims against the government for compensation.

At the 1929 National Convention in Louisville, “Bodie” was elected national commander by acclamation — the first commander to receive a convention’s unanimous vote. By the time of the Boston national convention in 1930, Legion membership had reached a new high, almost one million members.

In his honor, the National O.L. Bodenhamer Trophy Award was created. This trophy is awarded to the department whose standing is number one in membership on Flag Day (June 14th). This department also leads the national parade.

Land is purchased across from the state capital and construction begins on the new Arkansas Headquarters.

As a gift to the people of the United States, The American Legion’s 50th Anniversary is marked by a presentation of a permanent lighting system for the Tomb of the Unknowns.

The American Legion takes leading role in identifying veterans that were exposed to “Agent Orange” in Vietnam and are now experiencing health issues.

The American Legion succeeds in its 20 year campaign to have the Veterans Administration elevated to a cabinet-level department.

Arkansas Legionnaires incorporate the American Legion Department of Arkansas Foundation to provide financial support for charitable programs conducted by the Department.

Did You Know

• The Old Statehouse in downtown Little Rock was our original headquarters and the Legion was the building landlord.

• The World Duck Calling Contest in Stuttgart, Arkansas was originally sponsored by Daniel Harder Post 48.

• Dr. Horace Ruff of Magnolia attended the first two meetings in Paris, France that resulted in the formation of the American Legion.

• Arkansas Post 1 was the second post in the U.S. to be granted a temporary charter July 11, 1919.

• Department headquarters use to be a bank building and the vault was converted into the Commander’s office.

• The first resolution passed by a state convention calling for terminal leave payments to enlisted men was written by Department Adjutant Bert Presson. The resolution was passed by the 1945 Arkansas convention and went on to be approved in substantial form by the national convention and then Congress.

• 106 Legion huts and community buildings were built in Arkansas beginning in 1933 through the Civil Works Administration “New Deal” program initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.