



# EVERY DEPARTMENT HAS A STORY

THE AMERICAN LEGION OF

# NEW YORK

*The American Legion's roots run deep in its Department of New York. Many of the Legion's founding leaders trained in Plattsburgh prior to U.S. entry in World War I and were members of Manhattan-based American Legion, Inc., a volunteer network of willing fighters who offered their services before U.S. entry in World War I. Over its first century, New York Legionnaires have distinguished themselves as national leaders in military support, aid for disabled veterans, mentorship of youth, community service, honor and remembrance. Nearly 113,000 members serve in some 900 posts statewide, alongside about 200,000 more in the state's American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion.*

## NY Legionnaires



**American Legion founder Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.**, of Oyster Bay called the meetings in France that formed the organization in 1919. He later traveled the nation to start posts and famously declined to serve as the first national commander. He died in 1944 after storming Utah Beach in the D-Day invasion and later received the Medal of Honor.



**Future U.S. Treasury Secretary Ogden Mills** of New York City resigned his state Senate seat to serve as a captain in World War I. He led the Committee on Convention at The American Legion's Paris Caucus March 15-17, 1919 and served as the Legion's Department of New York chairman.



**Hamilton Fish, Jr.**, commander of the famed all-black 369th Infantry Regiment, led the committee that wrote the Preamble to The American Legion Constitution in May 1919 in St. Louis. As a U.S. congressman, he introduced legislation to install the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.



**Col. William Donovan** of Buffalo, Medal of Honor recipient in World War I and future father of U.S. intelligence, was one of nine New York officers who met in Paris in February 1919 to lay the groundwork for The American Legion. He was a floor leader at the 1st American Legion National Convention.



## Band of the Tonawandas

The American Legion Band of the Tonawandas was formed in 1929 by veterans of World War I and soon became the perennial Department of New York senior band champion. Twenty-one times between 1972 and 2018, the ensemble of about 80 – none of whom is paid – has won the national American Legion Band Contest at the national convention. Included among its trophies is championship of the 2018 100th American Legion National Convention in Minneapolis.

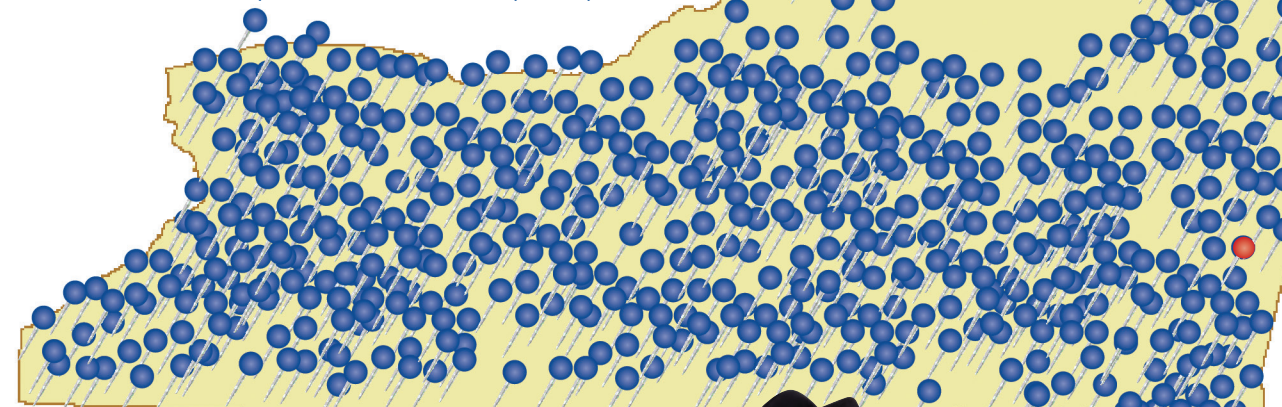
Musicians range in age from high school teens to octogenarians. Their careers and backgrounds include business, medicine, engineering, government, sales and education.

Booked year-round, the Band of the Tonawandas has performed for a PBS documentary tribute to march king John Philip Sousa, a New York City American Legion post commander in his day. The band has also toured internationally, having received a gold medal for its performance as the U.S. representative in the International Music Festival of 1992 in Sydney, Australia.

Moreover, the band stands "ready to aid in any worthwhile community function to uphold the great tradition of The American Legion," according to its program literature.

■ **The all-female Tamara Post 1708**, which operated for 50 years in Albany, had its own all-male auxiliary, which numbered at one point more than 300, including the mayor of the city. Male Auxiliary members had to also be members of the Legion. Dues for the Auxiliary were \$1 each, all of which went to the post's child welfare fund.

■ **Howard Van Wagner American Legion Post 962** collects funds, purchases U.S. flags and distributes them to each graduating Locust Valley High School senior in a ceremony on commencement day each year.



■ **Jane A. Delano Post 344** was named to honor the founder of Red Cross Nursing Services. The all-nurse post grew to more than 800 members in the first decade of The American Legion.



■ **U.S. Internal Revenue Post 1750** in Albany received its permanent charter on June 2, 1949, with 52 members who were employees of the IRS. They called themselves the "Revenooers." The post became extremely active in youth programs, sponsored a model blood drive program and helped veterans apply for jobs in civil service.

■ **Adolph Pfister Post 1038** in Valhalla conducts a major food drive to help unemployed veterans and their families who use the Montrose VA Food Pantry.

■ **Knifetown Post 1540** in Camillus was so named in 1946 because of historic cutlery manufactured there.

### Legend

- Legion posts
- NY Legion Department Headquarters

## Empire State Attractions



**Forest Lawn Cemetery** in Buffalo is the final resting place of 161,000 souls, including many famous New Yorkers and 7,200 veterans. Each Memorial Day and Veterans Day, the Erie County American Legion leads a massive community event to place flags at graves there.



**Miller Field** in Staten Island was named for Capt. James Ely Miller, first U.S. airman killed in combat while serving for American forces during World War I. American Legion Post 833 in Smithtown is named in his honor. The 187-acre Miller Field site is now a park.

**American Legion Post 911** in New York City meets on the historic USS *Intrepid* at the Air & Space Museum. The post formed immediately after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, when the Downtown Athletic Club post was destroyed.



**The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum** in Cooperstown helps tell The American Legion Baseball story in multiple ways, including recognition for more than 80 players who made the Hall of Fame via American Legion programs and "the girl Babe Ruth" who played Legion ball in Indiana in the 1920s.



**The Levittown Historical Society** operates a museum at 150 Abbey Lane in the city known as the primordial American suburb, brought to life by the American Legion's Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, the GI Bill.

1919

Nine New Yorkers are among 20 officers who meet Feb. 15-16 in Paris to plan a troop conference to establish **The American Legion**. Sixty New Yorkers come to Paris for the March 15-17 caucus that forms the organization.

The **American Legion Department of New York** receives its first post charter on June 2. Two months later, 200 local posts are open across the state. By October: 646.

1921

Membership in The American Legion's Department of New York passes **75,000**.

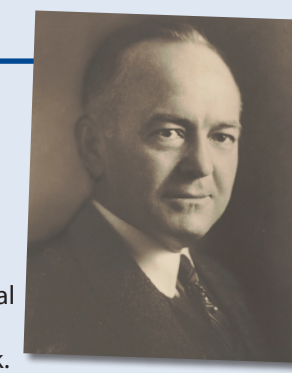


1924

One year after an American Legion-led conference sets rules of respect for the **U.S. flag**, New York and Texas make teaching those rules a state requirement in public schools.

1928

**Edward P. Spafford** of Lexington Post 108 in New York City is elected to serve as the first American Legion national commander from the Department of New York.



1932

A statewide American Legion effort produces more than **80,000 jobs** for unemployed veterans in New York.

1933

American Legion School Award Medals for community service, courage and citizenship are presented to **2,500 New York high school students**.

1937

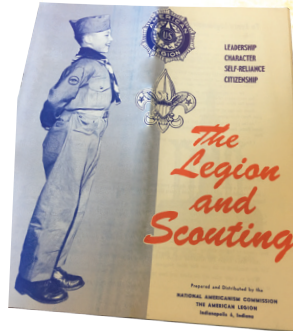
**Doty-Magill Post 771** in Rochester assigns 20 of its members to assist in an "Education in Automobile Driving" program sponsored by The American Legion.

# YOUTH programs



**Yonkers Post 321** defeated Pocatello, Idaho, 23-6 in 1926 or the first American Legion Baseball World Series championship. More than 1,100 attended the game in Philadelphia.

The American Legion Department of New York today sponsors approximately 230 Scouting units supporting some 6,100 Scouts. In 2016, the Department won the Frank N. Belgrano, Jr., Award for "most outstanding service" to Boy Scouts. Legion posts in the state also accounted for \$139,000 in contributions to Scout units that year.



The American Legion Department of New York annually sponsors some 1,000 students for **Boys State** each summer at SUNY Morrisville.

**Thomas E. Haggerty of Rosedale, Long Island**, won the third annual American Legion National Oratorical Contest, in 1940. Four other New Yorkers would take the national title in years to come, including Joel E. Bernstein of Buffalo in 1953, Robert O'Connell of New York City in 1961, John Joseph Cangilos of Albany in 1968 and Eron Egner of Ballston Lakes in 1995.

Three New York Yankees have been named **American Legion Baseball Graduates of the Year**, an award presented to former American Legion players who as Major Leaguers demonstrate sportsmanship, citizenship, integrity and playing ability. Second baseman Bobby Richardson was first in 1962, followed by left-handed pitcher Ron Guidry in 1978 and hard-hitting first baseman Don Mattingly in 1987.



## American Legion Mountain Camp

Early in 1921, Queens County American Legion member Charles Pope Caldwell, a lawyer and former member of Congress, brought to the attention of New Yorkers the plight of numerous disabled war veterans and those suffering with tuberculosis. There was no VA to care for them.

The American Legion Department of New York responded in 1922 by establishing a lakeside mountain camp in Adirondack State Park to care for those veterans and, later, to provide a low-cost vacation venue for Legionnaires and their families.

Recovering veterans – at a time when health-care facilities for veterans were nearly non-existent – were considered “wards of The American Legion.”

The department purchased the 1,260-acre property along Tupper Lake, with lots at nearby Horseshoe Lake, for \$85,000 from the estate of the late Col. William Barbour. The department spent the next years and decades renovating structures on the property and

staffing the facility with doctors and nurses.

The American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary of New York conducted massive fundraising drives to build the camp's endowment to more than \$450,000 by 1939, the year the mountain camp provided more than 7,500 patient days for veterans.

The American Legion Mountain Camp also was available to vacationing members of the organization for a small fee; most of them spent portions of those vacations working at the facility.

In later years, after the Veterans Administration and other government facilities came available to serve disabled veterans, the camp drew fewer and fewer patients. Vacation reservations also faded, and the property was sold in 1981.

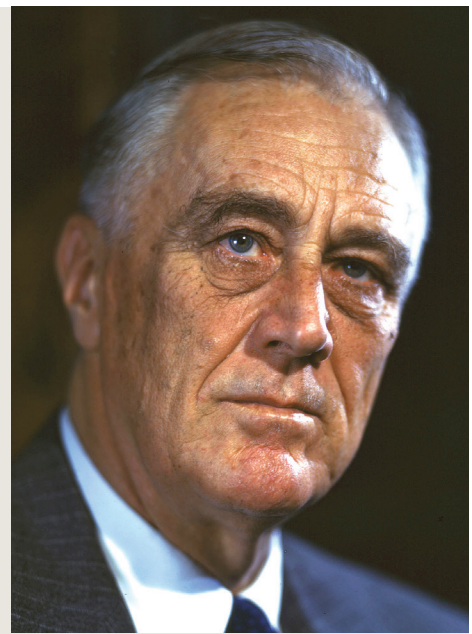
From the sale, a trust fund was established. Earnings are split evenly each year between The American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary in New York to help them with their veterans rehabilitation programs.

## Did you know?

Billed as the world's largest and fastest ferry boat, *American Legion* was launched Sept. 26, 1926, from the yards of the Staten Island Shipbuilding Co. City of New York and American Legion dignitaries, including Mayor James J. Walker and New York American Legion Department Commander Arthur E. Brundage attend its christening. *American Legion* could cross from Staten Island to Manhattan in an as-yet unprecedented 15 minutes.

## Was FDR a LEGIONNAIRE?

Despite his official status as a civilian (as opposed to a uniformed leader) within the Department of the Navy during World War I, sometime after 1919 Franklin Roosevelt was granted membership in a Dutchess County, NY, American Legion post, the Lafayette Post No. 37 located in Poughkeepsie, NY. This post, established on June 14, 1919, was located only a few miles to the south of Roosevelt's Hyde Park estate. An interesting side note to Roosevelt's involvement with the Poughkeepsie post is the fact that Hyde Park did have its own post, even though it had a very, very short life. The Hyde Park American Legion Post No. 522 obtained its charter on Oct. 17, 1919, and had it cancelled on June 20, 1920. With such a short history, it is hard to determine whether or not Franklin Roosevelt was active in the Hyde Park post.



John T. Evers, "Our Favorite Member: Gov. Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Fort Orange American Legion Post No. 30"

Fort Orange Post 30 in Albany signed up two of New York's leading early 20th century politicians as members of The American Legion: Gov. Franklin D. Roosevelt and Lt. Gov. Herbert Lehman. FDR had spoken at the first New York Department Convention in October 1919. Was FDR eligible for the Legion? He was later claimed as an "honorary member" by the Lafayette Post. Eleanor Roosevelt was a member of the American Legion Auxiliary through FDR's membership

We are 100 years strong and we are paving the way for the next 100 years to be the voice for veterans... Our organization shows our community and youth that veterans, old and young, are active and part of the community, and we support each other.

Cobleskill Post 248 member Gary Schacher, U.S. Navy veteran of the war in Iraq, commander of The American Legion's Department of New York, 2018-19

## Contact The American Legion of New York

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## Join The American Legion

www.legion.org/join

1938	1941	1958	1978	2001	2011	2013	2017	2019
New York conducts its first <b>Empire American Legion Boys State program</b> , in Syracuse.	New York Mayor <b>F.H. LaGuardia</b> joins National Commander Milo J. Warner in the recruitment of Legionnaires to lead and train volunteers under the U.S. Civilian Defense Office.	New York Department Americanism Chairman <b>Daniel J. O'Connor</b> reports that the number of competitors in the state's high school oratorical contest has grown from 4,000 to 350,000 in 20 years.	American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary members from throughout New York come to Brockport in August to provide <b>volunteer assistance</b> at the International Special Olympics Games.	American Legion posts throughout Manhattan <b>provide aid and supplies for first responders</b> in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks that bring down the World Trade Center.	Vietnam War veteran <b>Fang A. Wong</b> of Kimlau Post 1291 in New York City's Chinatown is elected national commander of The American Legion, the first veteran of Asian descent to hold the office.	The Department of New York receives the <b>national Daniel O'Connor Americanism Award</b> for having the best children and youth and family assistance programs in the organization. The award is named for a prominent former New York Legionnaire.	<b>U.S. Navy veteran Rena Nessler</b> of Winnek Post 396 in Geneva is elected New York's first female and first Native American department commander.	Saratoga Springs Legionnaire <b>Keith Koster</b> , a three-time cancer survivor, climbs each of the 46 Adirondack Mountain peaks to raise awareness of the organization's centennial.

