

The American Legion History

Today's 93,000 member American Legion began its journey when Colonel Fred M. Alger was appointed Chairman of the Michigan Temporary Committee of the New York meeting in April, 1919, which met under the leadership of Theodore Roosevelt Jr. There, they crystallized the idea of an American Legion of World War I veterans, both male and female, developed at the Paris, France Caucus on February 16, 1919. On August 1, 1920, the American Legion, Department of Michigan received its permanent charter from the national organization.

With Colonel Alger at that meeting were H. Stevens Gillespie, Truman Newberry, George C. Waldo and Charles J. Loos, Acting Secretary; "a group of men probably as capable as any that could have been selected with this particular purpose in mind".

Forty-six delegates were selected for the St. Louis Caucus of May 8, 1919 and Sergeant Werner R. Larsen of Ironwood was named Chairman of the delegation with Major Charles D. Kelly of Detroit the Secretary.

The Michigan Department of the American Legion held its first meeting in the Hotel Statler in St. Louis, Missouri on Saturday, May 10, 1919. The Department of Michigan was then divided according to Congressional Districts with George C. Waldo as Temporary Chairman, Benjamin B. Bellows as Temporary Vice Commander, and Lyle B. Tabor Temporary Adjutant.

The Michigan Department was incorporated under a State Charter and headquartered at Detroit. The headquarters relocated to Lansing in 1974, while maintaining a Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation office in Detroit. On May 17, 1919, application was made to the Michigan Patriotic Fund for money to organize in Michigan assistance for the 160,000 Michigan World War I veterans in obtaining employment and financial assistance as necessary. The Fund Trustees allotted \$25,000 as the Department's first treasury.

The Michigan organization worked so efficiently that by the end of July, 45 Posts, representing 2,088 members, had been granted charters with seven more in progress. That trend continues with Michigan adding many new Posts since 1999. Today's membership is 93,000 war-time veterans from all of America's wars.

Michigan's first State Convention was held in Grand Rapids, October 13-15, 1920 with Colonel A.H. Gansser of Bay City Post 18 named State Commander and Lyle Tabor as State Adjutant. At that time, Michigan had 192 Posts covering every county in the state.

Michigan's first ever resolution was a statement of partisan politics neutrality. This basic theme has been continued. Legislatively, the Department of Michigan enjoys a continuing positive working relationship with the Michigan Legislature; it continues to champion veterans issues, not political parties; a policy that mirrors the national American Legion organization.

From these rapidly expanding beginnings, the American Legion, Department of Michigan is faithful to its origins and to the veterans and families it represents within the Michigan State legislature and the Department of Veterans Affairs in Washington DC.