

ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: American Legion in Elmhurst, T.H.B. Post 187

The Mission of the American Legion

The American Legion was chartered and incorporated by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic veterans organization devoted to “mutual helpfulness.” It is the nation’s largest wartime veterans service organization, committed to mentoring youth and sponsorship of community programs, advocating patriotism and honor, promoting strong national security, and continued devotion to fellow service members and veterans. The American Legion is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization supporting the nation's veteran community.

In 1942, the American Legion changed its charter to allow World War II veterans to join, and in 1950 membership was opened to all Korean War veterans. Since 1990, all veterans are welcome to join the American Legion, whether they served during wartime or not.

The Elmhurst Post History

A post is the basic unit of the American Legion and usually represents a small geographic area, such as a town or part of a county. American Legion T.H.B. Post 187 was established with nineteen charter members in September 1919. T.H.B. was chosen as Elmhurst’s post name to honor three Elmhurst residents who were killed-in-action during World War I: Ernest Timrott, Richard Hintz and Kinsley Clark Buck.

The post member wives formed an Auxiliary in the early 1920s. Early meetings of T.H.B. Post 187 were held in various public buildings. In 1944 members purchased a house at 224 S. York Street, remodeling the building with mostly member-labor to suit the post activities.

Commemorating Veterans

In 1927, T.H.B. Post 187 raised money for a monument in Wilder Park honoring the three Elmhurst residents killed in action during WWI. It was re-dedicated on Memorial Day 1977 to honor all veterans of all wars. The plaque from that memorial now sits near the Veterans Memorial in Wilder Park.

A Veterans Memorial was dedicated in the park, south of the Wilder Mansion, in 1993. It is “dedicated to all U.S. veterans who have honorably served our country to defend our freedom and American way of



The American Legion dedicated the first permanent home for the post at 224 S. York St. on July 1, 1945.

life.” The Elmhurst Veterans Commission hosts a service, and the American Legion provides an honor guard, on Sunday afternoons in the summer.

The American Legion, City of Elmhurst and the Elmhurst Chamber of Commerce co-sponsor an annual Memorial Day parade followed by a ceremony at the Veterans Memorial. There is a long tradition of honoring veterans in Elmhurst on Veterans Day. A color and honor guard unit posts the national colors at the funerals of veterans when requested by the family and at ceremonies at the Veterans Memorial.



On September 5, 1943, 2,000 people gathered at a lot at 119 N. York Street for the dedication of an Honor Roll that listed the names of 1,045 Elmhurst men and women who were serving in the military.

Supporting Veterans

Since its inception the American Legion has supported veterans in numerous ways.

A newspaper article in the *Elmhurst Press* circa 1930 reported that since the organization of the American Legion, the care of disabled veterans was its primary purpose. As a result of American Legion activities about 250,000 men were drawing compensation at that time.

At the state level, the American Legion Department of Illinois Service Department, familiar with the many

rules and regulations, assists with applications for compensation for repeated medical aid. This service is available to all veterans, not just American Legion members.

T.H.B. Post 187 initiated *Elmhurst Cares* during the Vietnam War, sending care packages to soldiers fighting in Southeast Asia. Members of the American Legion Auxiliary have continued this tradition of sending care packages to soldiers serving overseas.

In 1979, the T.H.B. Post 187 American Legion regularly hosted 20 veterans from Elgin Hospital and the Du Page Convalescent Home as special guests at Friday night dinners. Over time the program evolved and currently disabled veterans from the Du Page Convalescent Home come to the American Legion Hall in Elmhurst once a month for lunch.

The post also hosts an annual Chili Cook-off with the benefits going to veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and their service animals. The post purchases service dogs with the proceeds of this event.

Every year the American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary provide a Thanksgiving dinner to recruits from the Great Lakes Naval Station. In 2015 about 250 recruits attended and 100 people from the area came to greet and converse with the sailors and to help serve the dinner. This, like most post activities, is open to the public.



American Legion at the Memorial Day parade on N. York Street, 1946.

Collaboration with the Community

A newspaper article in the *Elmhurst Press* in 1930 stated that the American Legion's work could be summed up in two words: community service.

The American Legion successfully led a campaign to build a swimming pool at East End Park in the late 1930s. Members were leaders in planning Elmhurst's 1936 Centennial celebration. They have sponsored, and continue to sponsor, students to attend Boys State where they learn

about state government and citizenship in a week-long experience. Likewise the Legion Auxiliary sponsors girls to the Girls State program. The American Legion provides the opportunity for the public to properly dispose of American flags with a simple drop-off at the Legion post. A Flag Day ceremony is conducted with assistance of local Boy Scouts followed by proper disposal. T.H.B. Post No. 187 continues to offer college scholarships to Elmhurst high school seniors.

Enjoying Camaraderie

The veterans have always enjoyed the camaraderie of their fellow post members whether it was providing assistance to veterans, sharing a meal, participating on a sports team, or exchanging stories at the post hall.

The American Legion often combined fund-raising with sociability. In 1927 the Legion hosted *Legionnaire Frolics* at the York Theatre, a benefit show which included presentation of the colors, a drum & bugle corps performance and the Legion Quartet followed by a showing of "Tell it to the Marines" with Lon Chaney. Over the years the Elmhurst post sponsored numerous baseball teams and bowling leagues. There are many expenses associated with keeping the building and its programs operating. The proceeds from Wednesday Bingo, Friday Fish Fry and themed parties throughout the year go towards operating costs.

Poppy Day

One of the most well-known fund-raising efforts for veterans is the selling of Remembrance Poppies around Memorial Day. Since 1921 the poppy has been used to commemorate military personnel who have died in war, and represents a common poppy referred to in the poem "In Flanders Fields." Poppies were first adopted by the American Legion to commemorate American soldiers killed in WWI. They were then adopted by veterans' groups in other parts of the world. At the Elmhurst post the Auxiliary

oversees this project. Disabled veterans make the poppies and all proceeds go to the care of disabled veterans at Hines Veterans Administration Hospital.

A New Home

The American Legion built a new post home at the same location, and had its Grand Opening on May 22, 1988. According to 2016 website, membership of T.H.B. Post 187 is 500 with 127 senior members. For more information on the Elmhurst American Legion T.H.B. Post 187 go to <http://americanlegionthb187.org/> or stop by the post hall at 310 W. Butterfield Road.

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The post purchased land fronting Butterfield Road in the mid-1950s. The second post home was built on this property at 310 W. Butterfield Road for \$140,000 and the grand opening was in the summer 1957. That building was destroyed by fire on January 25, 1985.