

When the World War had ended and the boys returned to their homes they found that there was a certain something missing from their daily lives, just what it was or how they were affected was not completely definable. The mind of Comrade Claude R. Roberts, a bugler who had served with Co. G 128th Inf. overseas finally solved the problem by acquainting the rest of the old company with a real soldiers outfit, The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

Through correspondence with and afterwards membership in the Merwin M. Carlton Post No. 5 of St. Paul, Minn., Roberts was made acquainted with the order and soon had 23 members signed up and a Charter granted.

The Charter was granted on June 6, 1920, and the Post was mustered in on that date. The boys chose the name Burns Post to honor two brothers who lost their lives in France in action. They were James A. Burns who was killed on May 28, 1918, and John E. Burns who died July 23, 1918. These men were the sons of Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Burns of Wausau, Wisconsin, both of whom are honored by being Social Members of the Post. These parents also had another son wounded in action. He was Patrick Burns, Jr., and was a member, and later Post Commander of the Post.

The Post arranged for and took part in the funeral of the Burns brothers on April 4, 1921. It was the largest funeral of Wausau's history and the entire city capitulated and attended the funeral en masse. An eloquent sermon by Rev. Father O'Toole of St. James Catholic Church preceded the burial in Pine Grove Cemetery. This marked the first activity of the Post in the doings of things patriotic and civic in and around Wausau.

On October 27, 1922, the auxiliary to Burns Post 388 was instituted by Post Commander S. Knox Kreutzer. Mrs. Pat Burns was their first President. They had 21 members then and have grown to 555 in 1994. These women have always been a great asset to the post and community.

Since that time the Post has ever been foremost in all activities in the city and Marathon County. They were the sponsors for the handsome statue in the court house grounds at Wausau. The Post took full responsibility for the collection of the funds and for all the necessary work in connection with the placing of the statue in its position, which was done with appropriate ceremonies on Memorial Day, 1923. The State Department was in accord with the plans for the dedication and had set their encampment dates to allow the unveiling of the statue to the city and county on the last day of the encampment. Among those who took part in the presentation of the statue were, Lt. Col. Chas. R. Williams, Major Gen. Wm. G. Haan, division commander of the 32nd division and U. S. Senator Irving L. Lenroot of Wisconsin. The statue is noted for its beauty and impressiveness and has brought many favorable comments to Wausau, Marathon County and Burns Post. It was one of the many things which the Post has done for the community and it has been highly appreciated by the residents of Wausau and vicinity. This statue is now located at the new court house and in 1990 was cleaned, repaired and refinished by the post.

The Vets have sponsored a hockey team for several years, and it was one of the outstanding teams in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota. It took on all comers with no thought of picking any soft spots. The team brought much favorable publicity to Wausau and the Post.

The Post has ever been in the forefront as go-getter for its home community and for the State and for the VFW as a National Organization. It has helped with the many problems confronting the veterans, such as, hospitalization, adjusted compensation, care of the families of the vets in sickness and death, and it has been especially generous in giving of its time and funds to help those in distress.

In September 1930, the Post took care of the body of the "UNKNOWN" who took his own life here. The Post with the Montgomery Post of the American Legion, made full and most complete arrangements for the burial of the unfortunate man who chose death to discouragement even though the whole need never have happened. It was the real test of comradeship with which the Post has become tested and it answered in real VFW fashion.

The post members have always turned out to perform the military rites for their deceased comrades. During World War 11 the post performed as many as five funerals a day and in 1947, 34 members formed what would become the Firing Squad. They raised money for uniforms and other expenses by operating concession stands at the Kelly Race Track, Athletic Park, Thom Field, White Water Kayak Course, Bingo games, and social stag parties. The squad has marched in many parades over the years and at one time was the back bone of the State Color Guard. They had a couple of fire trucks, a Crosby Auto, and cannons for parade use. The squad had many leaders through out the years , but Win Schmitt held it the longest, for 18 years before retiring in 1994 as its president. Win still remains an active member of the Squad. The Squad is now known as the Honor Guard and has 55 members and still turns out 20 to 30 members for each funeral or parade.

As in the past, with other veterans , the members were there to help the veterans of Vietnam with rap sessions and in 1984 the Squad

assisted two Vets to attend the unveiling ceremony of the Vietnam Memorial Statue in Washington D. C. We have also donated to and participated in many of the local VVA projects. Every year we furnish Breakfast to the Wisconsin Vietnam Veteran Bike-A-Thon as they pass through on their way to The High Ground.

The Post Supported the Persian Gulf Troops with aid to "Operation Home Town and Family Caring". We took part in support rallies and offered the returning vets free membership along with a Welcome Home Party in our shelter house.

This post has been the longest continuously active post in the State of Wisconsin, older than the Dept. of Wisconsin. In the Memorial Hall, on the south wall, hang the pictures of all the Past Post Commanders. All have done a remarkable job during their tenure. A number of them have earned the honor for the post of the title of All State and All American Post. During the administration of Post Commander Roger Sydow and his many dedicated workers in 1989, the Post exceeded the 1000 membership mark to 1113. The last time this had happened was after World War 11, in the late 40's. The membership in 1994 was 1169.

Also, out of Post 388 came the following 7th District Commanders: Stanley Bychinski, Bertell MacDonald, Victor Stolze, Ray Sheibe, Louis Gianoli, Jim Gutowski, Clarence Sydow, Clyde Siegel, Roger Sydow, and Dave Marquardt. Serving as State Commanders were S. Knox Kreutzer, Frank Loeffler, John Donovan, Bert MacDonald, and Victor Stolze.

Many of the members, too numerous to mention, have given of their talent and time to the post, district, state, and national. One of these was Art Dornstreich, who was Sgt. of the State Color Guard for 35

years before retiring in 1987. Art also served as Post Quartermaster for 26 years before retiring in 1994. Joe Voight, Len Shulta, Frank Prochnow, Warren Tessmer were other members who each had served 25 years or more on the State Color Guard.

Almost from the beginning when we first received our Charter, the members began making plans to acquire their own home. Membership grew so rapidly that the leased clubrooms were proving inadequate. Around 1929 the members found a centrally located building in the 100 block of Washington St. The two story brick building was purchased for 10,000 dollars with monthly payments of 75 dollars. An additional 4,000 dollars was borrowed for remodeling with 400 members each signing a 100 dollar guarantee towards the loan. The club house was right in the heart of things in Wausau. It was up-to-date in every detail. A lounge room, a bar with booths and two side rooms made up the first floor. Upstairs was the meeting room and a kitchen. The rooms were taken on every available night for different clubs, lodges and the whole proved very popular with those who visited us there.

After 41 years at the Washington Street Clubhouse, the property was sold to the City and torn down for a parking lot in July of 1970, and is now part of the Penneys Store of the Downtown Mall. From July 1970 until December 1975 the Post held their meetings at the Sportsman Club in the 300 block of Jackson Street. In the winter of '73-'74 a 50' by 125' steel building was ordered. It wasn't until August 1974 that we had a piece of land to build it on. The building was delivered in November of '74, and ground breaking ceremonies were held on May 30, 1975 with actual construction beginning on June 10th. On Saturday January 10, 1976, the Club was officially declared open and the first meeting was held on January 13th.

In 1981 a 30'x40' storage garage was built, then in 1982 our park shelter was constructed to the south of the club house. In 1985 a 18'x110' addition was added to the south side of the building to expand the kitchen and dining hall. In 1990 a 16'x20 storage addition was added to the north side of the building and in 1994 a 24'x30' addition was added to the east side of the storage garage.

In 1941 we joined our auxiliary in sponsorship of the VFW Essay Contest, the forerunner to the present Voice of Democracy contest. Within these years, we have had two First Place National Winners. In 1938, Mary Jane Beneditz, a senior at Wausau High School took the grand prize in Columbus, Ohio, during the National Encampment and went on to be the first woman to graduate from Notre Dame. In 1945, we had our second National winner, Ed Thiel, the son of our third post commander. He went on to become a noted geophysicist in Antarctica. Over the years, we have had many students participating in our Voice of Democracy contests, with many district and state winners. Most recently, Steve Shore in 1988 won the state competition and went on to Washington to compete in the National Judging.

The Debon-Aires junior girls unit was formed by the Aux. in Nov. of 1955 with 45 girls. The post co-sponsored them in 1961 with their first parade in Sheboygan when Vic Stolze was elected State Commander. They took many awards in their travels with their crowning achievement coming at the National Convention in Cleveland in 1964 when they took first place as a drill team. They were disbanded in 1973.

In Nov. 1970, we co-sponsored with the Legion and area business firms The Wausau Story Junior Drum and Bugle Corp. During their 17 years of existence, they won many awards and were finally disbanded in 1987.

Since the early days, the Post and Auxiliary have always joined together in giving a Christmas Party for the children. Attendance at these has ranged from 100-500 children. The programs over the years have consisted of recitations, musical numbers, variety shows, and concluding with Santa making his visit, talking to each child before handing over a bag of goodies. All excess bags were given to needy families, hospital patients, or the Salvation Army.

Members and their families have always enjoyed the annual picnic. In the early days, the women and kids would start in the afternoon with the men joining them in the evening. There would always be plenty of games, candy, pop, beer, and food. We now have our own park just south of the clubhouse that is utilized for this. Previously we used Riverview, Marathon, Rothschild Park, and Oak Island.

As a money making project, the post has operated a beer tent at the Wisconsin Valley Fair since 1934. This started out on the east end of the midway with the women serving full meals in a tent next to the men's. Opportunity came our way in 1965 when we acquired the old Eagles beer site under the grand stand on the west end of the mid-way. In 1967 we dispensed with bottle and can beer and went to tap beer. Some years over 3000 pounds of hamburger and 500 half barrels of beer are sold. The auxiliary takes a very active part in the stand over the years helping as both bartenders and cooks. Joe Steinke has been doing an excellent job as chairman since 1957. Since 1969, we have been awarding Horsemanship awards to the 4-H Youths for their skills in horsemanship at the Fair.

The Post also has been hosting Bingo at the Club since 1978 and averages 150 players on Wednesday nights. The Post operates it on the

first and third Wednesdays and the Auxiliary on the second and fourth Wednesdays with the Honor Guard taking it on the fifth Wednesdays.

The post has always contributed generously to the various fund drives, such as The March of Dimes, Infantile Paralysis, Cerebral Palsy, and Muscular Dystrophy. The Auxiliary had the honor of heading the task force for the county in the March of Dimes Drive in 1941. In 1952 and for the next 10 years the post challenged every organization in the city to the Mile -O-Dime Wheelchair and Iron Lung race. In the 1980s the Firing Squad led the March of Dimes parade as well as ran a concession stand for their winter games raising more money for them.

Post members have always been tied closely with the residents of the Grand Old Army (Veterans Home at King). In 1957, the VFW Department of Wisconsin held their first VFW Day at King with Ray Scheibe, a past Post Commander, as chairman, a position he held until his death in 1978. Many times our Firing Squad and our Debon-Aires girls unit had the honor of assisting the State Color Guard with the ceremonies. In 1974 when the girls unit disbanded, they donated a passenger bus, equipped with a lift for wheelchairs, to the home. On this day, the post gives each of our members at the Home a cash gift.

Joe Steinke took the reins and acquired the required 50 charter members to form the Post Life Membership Club #587 in January 1966. A dinner is held annually each November for all Life Members and their Guests.

The Post also has a Past Commanders Club which meets annually each December for a dinner meeting where they welcome in the new Commander.

-----

The above history is a combination of the original history from the 25th anniversary book and updates from our beloved Art Meyers, without whose hard work and dedication It would never have been completed. Art was our Post Historian and served as Post Adjutant for 26 years, retiring in 1994. If you seek more history, there are many scrap books and more history in the Debon-Aires Room.

This material was composed by Roger Sydow, 75th Anniversary Chairman, on behalf of the 75th Anniversary Committee