

Charles A Hammond

Post 8

American Legion



The founding of the American Legion came about by a meeting March 15, 16, and 17, 1919 in the American Club in Paris. Present were several hundred World War I officers and enlisted men then on active duty overseas.

Among those attending was William D. Thompson, later to become a member of the Hammond Post and mayor of Port Huron. He was among six men from Michigan at the Caucus.

The name, American Legion, was adopted after one of the delegates said it was the fifth and the last choice of the 'brass'.

But the delegates were deadly serious about forming a veteran's organization that would continue in peace, the comradeship that the war had thrown them into. Also they wanted to continue the sense of service and dedication to America that the war had led them to offer their lives for their country. They were determined not to create another Grand Army of the Republic or United Confederate Veterans, both of which got into partisan politics after the Civil War.

To this day no American Legion officer can run for political office without resigning from his Legion job. Nor is any Legion post allowed to take part in politics.

It was to this aim, that Teddy Roosevelt Jr. (a leading republican) and Bennett Champ Clark (a leading young Democrat from Missouri, later to serve long in the Senate and spearhead the World War II GI bill) joined hands together in France in a non-partisan gesture as early leaders of the Legion.

Several days earlier, in Port Huron, a group of returned veterans held a meeting March 5, 1919 and decided to form a veteran's organization. They picked a temporary name, Military Relief Association, and named Dr. George M. Kesl as chairman. This group several weeks later heard of the American Legion being founded and decided to send three delegates to the first national caucus in St Louis, Mo, May 8-10, 1919. The delegates, Dr. Kesl, Capt. Isaac Bowden and W.J. Taylor, reported back favorably on the new organization

The group applied for a Legion charter June 18, 1919, adopted the American Legion Constitution and bylaws August 6, 1919 and elected Dr. Kesl as first commander Aug. 20, 1919. On the same date, members named the post for Charles A Hammond. In the minutes of that meeting, it reads: "On looking for a name for the organization from among those who had 'gone west', the

outstanding character and friendliness of our late comrade, Lt. Charles A. Hammond, was such that it was decided to call the post the Charles A. Hammond Post No. 8, in memory of a real soldier.”



Post 8 members gathered on November 11, 1920 for a parade

While a member of the Port Huron National Guard, Charles Hammond was a well-known and well-liked figure in Port Huron. In November 1914, he was chosen by his fellow men to be promoted to the rank of 2nd lieutenant, the custom at the time. He was highly respected by fellow soldiers and they must have felt that he was the most qualified to lead them. The Port Huron paper regularly printed articles about him. One incident that hit the front page was when a distraught woman claimed that Hammond was her long lost husband who had deserted her and demanded that his Unit Commander give him up. He was a member of Masonic Lodge an accomplished machinist. By the letters he had written, one can tell that he was an intelligent, thoughtful and caring person.

In the summer of 1916, Company L, 125th Infantry Regiment of the Port Huron National Guard including Charles Hammond was activated and sent to Texas to deal with Poncho Villa on the

Mexican border. While there, he was promoted to 1st Lieutenant. The Unit was on active duty for about a year and a half and were beginning to think about being deactivated and sent home, when the US entered the Great War to end all wars and in February, 1918, the 125th Infantry as part of the 32nd Red Arrow Division, including Charles Hammond, was redeployed to France.



Hammond in El Paso Texas

On July 31st of that year, during the battle of the Marne at Chateau Thierry, his unit was given the task of taking out a machine gun nest on a hill numbered 212. In the midst of that assault, Charles Hammond was shot in the arm. He was advised to fall to the rear to the first aid station so his injuries could be attended to. But instead, he continued leading his men on that assault where he received two more wounds, the last being fatal. His men continue their assault and eventually took out that machine gun nest thus completing their mission. A German military satchel taken from that machine gun nest is now in the Charles Hammond display case.

His remains were buried in France. For his bravery in action, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross by the United States

Army, their second highest medal for valor. The French Government awarded him the Croix de Guerre, the Cross of War, their highest medal awarded to a non-citizen.

In 1921, the members of Post 8 had the remains of Charles Hammond exhumed from his grave in France and returned home to Port Huron.

His casket was placed on display at the old city hall and on July 24th; it was placed on a caisson pulled by a team of horses and with a long procession of Legionnaires, city officials, Masons and dignitaries, taken to Lakeside cemetery, to his final resting place.

The Post slowly grew, meeting in the old Port Huron public library, Ballentine Dry Goods store, GAR rooms, Moose Lodge, Federal Court, and the old National Guard Armory building on Grand River (now McMorran Boulevard) and various other meeting areas. Members were very active in funerals, parades, holding dances, minstrel shows and other such activity. In 1937, with the help of O.B. Mueller and Louis A. Well, members purchased the old Reed home at sixth and Wall Streets. The third floor was removed along with a four-story tower and the rest of the floors and basement remodeled.

In 1946, the club rooms (bar and game room areas) were added. In 1950 the auditorium seating 500 was built. Later the kitchen was added. The post at the time, was very active in veterans funerals, parades, Wolverine Boys State, sponsored a Boy Scout troop, donated Flags and flagpoles to schools, churches and other groups. They once maintained a scholarship program to St. Clair County Community College along with other community service projects.

The Post early on was referred to as the 'mother post' by other area Legions because Post 8 helped organize and start many of the other posts now in the area.

On June 30th 1922, Unit 8 of the American Legion Auxiliary was chartered. Through the years, they have continuously helped our veterans and the youth of the community. Without their help, Post 8 would not have survived all these years. We are here today in no small measure because of the selfless work they have done in the service of their country, their community and this Post.

A Drum and Bugle Corps was organized at the Post in 1926. It consisted of up to about 40 members. The Corps wore uniforms when they performed at area parades where they were in high demand. It was disbanded during World War II but was later reorganized. Prior to the War, they wore white WWI style doughboy helmets and after the War changed to a pillbox style hat with feather plumes. The Corps competed in State competitions and placed second in 1935. They later disbanded when many of the younger members started to rear families and did not have the time to participate.



Taken in 1933

A 'Last mans' club was organized in the spring of 1938 that was made up of 100 Spanish American War and WWI veterans. Its first meeting / dinner was held on June 20, 1938 at the Gratiot Inn in Port Huron. A bottle of Champaign was bought and kept in storage so that the last man could give a toast to his departed comrades. Later they met at the Legion Post every June where they held a memorial for those members who had passed during the previous year. The last man was Edward Sandford who coincidently served with Charles Hammond and was wounded in the same battle at Chateau Terry that Hammond was killed in. The Champaign bottle, still containing liquid, is on display at the Post.



The Last Man's Club June 19, 1939
Taken at the Gratiot Inn, Port Huron

In 1950, a WWI veteran, Robert B Kersul, led the efforts to start a military artifacts collection. Through the years, it has grown to where there are now 13 display cases filled with over a thousand items ranging from a Civil War rifles and WWI machine guns to a Viet Nam era cigarette lighter. There are many WWI and WWII items and several Civil War relics. The collection includes a letter written by a young soldier named Robert H. Kellogg to his

grandmother in 1902. He at the time was stationed at Cabu, Cabu in the Philippines and tells of his life and experiences there.

In its hay day, the Post had a membership of over a thousand veterans. It now numbers 500 and grows smaller each year as the members pass away and are not being replaced due to the ever-decreasing manpower of the Armed Forces