

Histories Are Important

It has been a well-established policy of The American Legion to encourage the preparation of post histories. Such information on the post's activities will be of considerable value in the years to come.

The National Headquarters is also aware that in many posts a professional historian does not fill the position of historian. This need not deny a proper recording of the respective post's activities. The scope of the information included is the main consideration, keeping in mind, however, the comprehensiveness, readability, and arrangement, so as to make it not only an interesting account of your post but a reference source as well.

You, as post historian, should start now to make a permanent record of your organization for the year ahead, from the installation of officers, up to and including the department convention. To help you gather the specific details concerning your post, you may want to ask your post adjutant for a copy of the year's past Consolidated Post Report. That statistical summary will indicate the type and amount of activity that can help you put together as complete picture as possible. Make plans to compile a complete history of your post since its founding, but concentrate, for the present, on a one-year history. Then go back into the files and gradually write up the back history.

The national historian will normally conduct annual one-year narrative history or scrapbook/yearbook (pictorial) history contest on the post level. It is felt that these ongoing national contests will add stability and continuity to the recording of post events for future generations of Legionnaires. Your department historian will inform you of any national contest changes that may occur during your tenure as post historian.

You will find herein, comprehensive outlines to compile a One-Year Narrative History or Scrapbook/Yearbook with their respective judging standards for competition in the national contests.

To be eligible for the national contests, your entry in either category must be a "first place winner" in your department contests and must be "certified" as such by your department historian before being forwarded to the national historian.

The work of collecting, preserving and recording the activities of The American Legion is an important endeavor and demands much detail work; hopefully you will find it inspiring and rewarding.

You can appreciate the fact departments of The American Legion have their own particular set-up and policies. You will find it advantageous to adapt these suggestions of your department to your own needs, keeping in mind your compliance with the national outlines for the contests that are usually conducted for the posts.

OUTLINE FOR A ONE-YEAR POST NARRATIVE HISTORY

This outline has been developed to be helpful to the historian. It would be advantageous to check any compilation against this outline so as to include as much of the material suggested here as is possible.

PART I - FORMAT

(1) COVER: A standard three-ring binder, or similar type, to accommodate 8 ½ x 11 inch bond paper must be used with The American Legion emblem centered (left to right) on the cover with the name and number of the post. However, the binders available through National Emblem Sales have The American Legion embossed on them.

Since the standard three-ring binder is one inch wide, you may wish to use a wider binder. Each book is not to exceed three inches between the front and back cover. If you submit two or more binders, you must indicate on the COVER and TITLE PAGE the wording "VOLUME I", "VOLUME II", etc.

(2) NAME/ADDRESS OF COMPILER: The full name and complete mailing address of the history author should appear on the inside front cover in the lower left hand corner. It will be neatly typed or computer generated and centered on a 3 x 5-inch index card.

(3) TITLE PAGE: This will be the first page facing the reader as the history book is opened. It should be centered on the page and in a logical arrangement with double spacing or more and contain as a minimum the following:

HISTORY OF
(Name of Post) **POST NO.** (Number of Post)
THE AMERICAN LEGION
(City Location and State)
FOR 20_____ to 20_____
BY: (Person Compiling History)

(4) INTRODUCTION: Every history should carry a foreword or introduction, setting forth the reasons for the organization and may include:

The selection of the post name: If for a departed comrade or comrades, include a short biographical sketch of their lives and include photographs if available.

If possible, include a brief resume of your community's history, and especially the part played by that locality in furnishing the men and women during the wars and conflicts.

Mention should also be made of the formation of our national organization with a tie-in of the department and post.

If your post has a post home, you may want to include a photograph of it and street address location.

You can have a biographical background of the current post commander and/or the author of the history with a photograph included.

You may also use this space to acknowledge any assistance or contribution used in compiling the history.

(5) TABLE OF CONTENTS: This is a must for any good history and will list the page reference of the CHAPTERS and APPENDICES and should be carried in the front of the history immediately following the INTRODUCTION.

(6) PREAMBLE TO THE CONSTITUTION OF THE AMERICAN LEGION: This basic document which sets forth the principle aims of The American Legion is a fitting introduction and should follow the TABLE OF CONTENTS. It should be centered on the page and spaced in a neat and logical arrangement. Multicolored prints 8½ x 11 inch, of the PREAMBLE may be obtained through National Emblem Sales.

(7) ORDER OF PAGE NUMBERING: The above pages should appear in order as listed above with pages listed in Arabic numerals or Roman numerals as follows:

- Title Page 1 or i
- Introduction 2 or ii
- Table of Contents 3 or iii
- Preamble 4 or iv
- Acknowledgments 5 (if any) or v
- Author's Notes 6 (if any) or vi

The following units will list each page in consecutive order using Arabic numerals. If you used Arabic numerals, then the next number will follow your last number (e.g. if Author's Notes is 6, then the first page of the history is 7). If you used Roman numerals, then the first page of the history is 1 (e.g. if Author's Notes is vi, then the first page of the history is 1).

CHAPTERS

Following the PREAMBLE, the CHAPTERS may be sequenced in this suggested manner:

CHAPTER 1 - Roster of post officers: Photographs of present post officers should be included in the history. If not possible to secure photographs of every officer, special efforts should be made to include the photographs of the commander and the adjutant.

CHAPTER 2 - Roster of post chair: This should be your next chapter and photographs, if available, will add immeasurably.

CHAPTER 3 - One-Year post Chronicle: The history is to cover one year, beginning with the installation of officers, up to and including the annual department convention. This timeframe may vary in some departments.

This most important Chapter in your history must be as complete as possible with a graphic account of the post and its activities. The historian should relate in narrative form, and in chronological order, all important events and programs held during the year by the post or events jointly with the Auxiliary, county, district, department or national level.

Historians use the minutes of meetings as a basis for information of the activities of the post. Then they contact the members who were chairs of the committees involved for further details. Include anything that you may deem is a special attribute of your post that sets it apart from all others.

Do not use any photographs or newspaper articles in this chapter of your narrative history. However, photographs may be placed in dedicated committee chapters and newspaper articles in the appendices.

CHAPTER 4 (...AND 5 AND 6, ETC.) - While many programs of The American Legion and post projects are of a continuing nature and may run through several administrations, such activities might be better in a separate chapter following those devoted to the individual administration.

The activities of all standing post committees should be given considerable coverage, particularly if one committee performs an outstanding service. You may want to include each of these committees in separate chapters.

These dedicated chapters can be on Americanism, Membership, Boys State, School Award Medals, Oratorical Contest, Baseball, Children and Youth, Sons of The American Legion, patriotic observances, post parties, Boy Scout troops and other sponsored units to name just a few. Collect and record for posterity all activities of the post.

The inclusion of illustrations (photographs) in the committee chapters will add to the attractiveness of the entry. Attention should be given to arrangement of illustrations in relation to the text and captions under each illustration.

APPENDICES

Appendices are pages of statistical data that should be carried at the end of the history, following the CHAPTERS and before the INDEX, and might include:

- The organization of the post with a list of names of the charter members and the dates of the temporary and the permanent charter
- Roster of all past post commanders and adjutants since charter date with the years they served
- If the post is not too large, a roster of members listed in alphabetical order can be added. This may include, after each member's name, the organization with which he/she served or the date joined the post
- Record of citations and awards received by the post, as well as awards presented by the post
- List of members who served as delegates to the national/department conventions, or national/department officers and commission/committee appointees to include the county and district organization level
- Complete records of annual elections showing all nominations and votes received by various nominees
- In addition, you may also include the membership standing by year since the charter date; list of new members for the current year; a list of Life members and Paid-Up-For-Life (PUFL) members; In Memoriam (Taps/Post Everlasting for the current year); the Constitution and By-Laws of the Post; the annual post budget; and any other statistics of importance.

(7) INDEX: The alphabetical index is the last must for any good history. This comprehensive index of names, places, and events mentioned in your history, with page references, shall be carried at the end of the history following the APPENDICES.

(8) PAGE NUMBERING: This appears to be a common oversight when compiling history books. Do not forget to number the pages. However, be consistent in where the page numbers are placed, either at top or bottom of pages. Page numbering will start with the title page.

PART II - GRAPHIC ACCOUNT/READABILITY

Emphasis is placed upon the narrative rather than the statistical style of presentation. Use your imagination and be original in thought and presentation.

A high degree of literary style is not essential to success, but the method of presentation should be pleasing to the general reader. The reader must be able to follow the story of the post without difficulty or confusion.

The most common error is in not writing in the third person. This means you should write as an observer, not as a participant.

It is to be written as a chronological and detailed account of events without any analysis or interpretation.

Statistics are of great value but should be included in the Appendix, rather than being placed indiscriminately throughout the book.

PART III – ILLUSTRATION

All photographs must be identified by occasion, individuals, date and place of event with the exception of

individual photographs of the post officers and chairs (name and title/committee only). Provide “left-to-right” subject identification, and if necessary, by row also.

Be sure all photographs are clear, as blurry prints will not aid materially and will detract rather than enhance your history. Proper arrangement with the text is a must to achieve an eye-catching history book. Avoid using pictures with alcohol in them.

PART IV - JUDGES OPTION

Under this category, judges will consider a number of qualities or items of content in the history, which are not readily cataloged under the preceding headings. Some histories, for example, have rather complete rosters of members. In other words, judges will determine features that make a history especially attractive or especially useful. By the same token, if inaccuracies should come to the attention of the Judges, they would have a disqualifying effect on that entry.

PAGE FORMAT SUGGESTIONS

Use plain and unruled 8½ x 11 inch white and/or colored bond paper for your history binder filler. The history should be typewritten or computer generated on one side of the paper using black ribbon or print. Single sheets of paper may be placed back-to-back using the transparent plastic protective covers.

Margins are a must for neatness, readability and standardization. Use a one-inch margin on all sides (except one inch from the perforation side of paper, if necessary).

Where feasible, provide double-spaced copy on pages with a 3 to 6 space indentation for new paragraphs and single line for photograph identifications.

If you have any doubt of the spelling of a word, use a dictionary. Also some people have a tendency to get upset when their name is misspelled. Check before compiling.

Some entries would have a better chance in the contests as a scrapbook/yearbook even though they were submitted as a history. Make sure of your entry. Is it a history or a scrapbook/yearbook? There is a big difference. Read the outlines for each category.

**NATIONAL JUDGING STANDARDS FOR A
ONE-YEAR POST NARRATIVE HISTORY CONTEST**

You will note that PART I, PART II, PART III, and PART IV, as identified in OUTLINE FOR A ONE-YEAR POST NARRATIVE HISTORY, coincides with those listed in the NATIONAL JUDGING STANDARDS. The “etc.”, listed after several of the scoring elements on the JUDGING STANDARDS, shows that there are additional requirements necessary for the score points.

It is suggested that you re-examine the OUTLINE using the STANDARDS as a checklist before submitting your entry for the contest. The comparison will assist by avoiding being penalized in score points needlessly.

PART I – FORMAT--40 POINTS		
(1) COVER - standard three-ring binder for 8½ x 11 inch, bond paper, emblem, etc.	(5)	
(2) NAME/ADDRESS OF COMPILER - inside front cover/lower left hand corner	(3)	
(3) TITLE PAGE - centered in logical arrangement/double line spacing plus, etc	(5)	
(4) INTRODUCTION - background of Post; tie-in Department/National; community, etc.	(5)	
(5) TABLE OF CONTENTS – with page reference of Chapters, Appendices, etc.	(5)	
(6) PREAMBLE - to the Constitution of The American Legion, etc.	(2)	
(7) INDEX - comprehensive alphabetical listing carried at end of history book	(10)	
(8) PAGE NUMBERING - for Table of Contents, Chapters, Appendices, and Index	(5)	
Subtotal	(40)	
PART II -- GRAPHIC ACCOUNT/READABILITY -- 40 POINTS		
(1) NARRATIVE – rather than a statistical style of presentation	(10)	
(2) PRESENTATION - chronological order and in the third person; not to detract from the general readability	(10)	
(3) CLEAR/GRAMMATICALLY CORRECT - pleasing to the general reader	(10)	
(4) ORIGINALITY - different in thought and presentation	(10)	
Sub total	(40)	
PART III -- ILLUSTRATIONS -- 10 POINTS		
(1) ARRANGEMENT - check in relation to text and captions under each, etc.	(5)	
(2) CLEAR-CUT PHOTOGRAPHS - blurry/foggy prints will not aid materially	(5)	
Subtotal	(10)	
PART IV – JUDGES OPTION -- 10 POINTS		
(1) JUDGES WILL CONSIDER - a number of qualities or items of content in the history which are not readily cataloged under the preceding headings		
(2) JUDGES WILL DETERMINE - features which make a history especially attractive or useful as a source of reference and of historic value	(10)	
TOTAL POINTS OF ENTRY	(100)	

POST SCRIPTS

Consider making a copy of your entry in the event it should become a national contest winner. With your permission, it will be retained in the National Library archives of The American Legion in Indianapolis, Indiana for visitors to view.

In the event that your post records are missing and there is no history, the post historian may search the local newspaper files and interview past commanders, adjutants and older members. Many important post events can be found using these methods.

Information about the post charter can be obtained by writing the Charter Clerk, National Headquarters, The American Legion, Post Office Box 1055, Indianapolis, Indiana 46206.

Perhaps your department is fortunate in having a department historian's association. Many of our departments have organized such groups, patterned along the lines of our National Association of Department Historians of The American Legion (NADHAL). They are proving very effective in rendering assistance so necessary to carrying out successful historian's program. Be sure to inquire if such an organization exists in your department and join in its activities. If there is no such department organization, try to establish the closest contact possible with your department historian who should be only too happy to assist you.

The serious post historian will find informative and interesting any one of the following published histories about The American Legion:

Bennett, Michael J. *When Dreams Come True*. Washington: Brassey's Inc., 1996

Rumer, Thomas A. *The American Legion: An Official History*. New York: M. Evans, 1990

Moley, Raymond. *The American Legion Story*. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1966

Jones, Richard. *A History of The American Legion*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1946

James, Marquis. *A History of The American Legion*. New York: William Green, 1923

Where possible, oral histories should be recorded by use of a cassette or other recorder to tape interviews of American Legion Post founders and leaders to capture "first hand" information about the historical events of the posts.

CAPSULE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN LEGION

A group of twenty officers who served in the American Expeditionary Forces (A.E.F.) in France in World War I is credited with planning the Legion. A.E.F. Headquarters asked these officers to suggest ideas on how to improve troop morale. One officer, Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., proposed an organization of veterans. In February 1919, this group formed a temporary committee and selected several hundred officers who had the confidence and respect of the whole army.

When the first organization meeting took place in Paris in March 1919, about 1,000 officers and enlisted men attended. The meeting, known as the Paris Caucus, adopted a temporary constitution and the name The American Legion. It also elected an executive committee to complete the organization's work. It considered each soldier of the A.E.F. a member of the Legion. The executive committee named a subcommittee to organize veterans at home in the U.S.

The Legion held a second organizing caucus in St. Louis, Missouri, in May 1919. It completed the constitution and made plans for a permanent organization. It set up temporary headquarters in New York City, and began its relief, employment, and Americanism programs.

Congress granted the Legion a national charter in September 1919. The first National Convention, held in Minneapolis, adopted a permanent constitution and elected officers to head the organization.