

Post and department histories

The American Legion strongly encourages the preparation of post and department histories. Such information on their activities will be of considerable value in years to come.

National Headquarters is aware that a professional historian does not fill the position of historian in most posts and departments. This need not prevent a proper recording of their activities. The scope of the information included is the main consideration, keeping in mind, however, comprehensiveness, readability and arrangement, so as to make the history both an interesting account and a reference source.

At the start of the new Legion year, the historian begins making a permanent record of the organization for the year ahead, from the installation of officers up to and including the installation of next year's officers. To help gather specific details, ask the adjutant for a copy of the most recent Consolidated Post Report. The statistical summary will indicate the type and amount of activity that can help you put together as complete a picture as possible. Make plans to compile a complete post or department history since its founding, but focus, for the moment, on a one-year history. Then go back to the files and gradually write up the back story.

The national historian will conduct a one-year history contest for post- and department-level entries. One post entry and one department entry may be submitted by each department. These ongoing national contests will give stability and continuity to the recording of events for future generations of Legionnaires. The department historian will notify posts of any national contest changes that may occur.

Included in this guide is an outline to compile a one-year history with judging standards for competition in the national contests to be conducted in August 2024 for the 2023-2024 Legion year. Information on the 2023 contest is in the 2022 *Officer's Guide*.

To be eligible for the national contest, an entry must be a first-place winner in the department's contest, be certified as such by the department adjutant and be uploaded by the department to the contest website by Aug. 1. Department historians or adjutants need to contact the national historian or National Headquarters' Library and Museum director for exceptions.

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. Contact the department historian for additional ideas and information regarding department contest qualifications.

Outline for a one-year history

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

Format

Presentation A single PDF file not to exceed 50MB in size (smaller files are preferred).

Title page This will be the first page when the file is opened. It should be in a logical arrangement with double spacing or more and contain as a minimum the following:

History of
(Name of post) **Post No.** _____
Department of _____
The American Legion
(city and/or state)
For 20____ to 20____
By (person compiling history)

Introduction Every history should include a forward or introduction setting forth the reasons for the organization and may include:

- Mention of the national organization's founding (including the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion) with a tie-in of the department's and post's history. See **legion.org/history** or "Capsule History of The American Legion," listed later, as a possible beginning, and see your department historian for a capsule history of the department.
- If named for a departed comrade or comrades, include a short biographical sketch of their lives and include available photographs.
- If possible, a brief résumé of your community's history, especially the part played by that locality in furnishing men and women during wars and conflicts.
- A photograph of the building and street address, if your post has a post home.
- Acknowledgment of any assistance or contributions used in compiling the history.

Table of contents This is a "must" for any good history, which will list the pages of the chapters and appendices and should be in the front of the history immediately following the introduction.

Index The alphabetical index is a must for any good history. This comprehensive index of names, places and events mentioned in your history, with page references, shall be at the end of the history following the appendices. Be sure to include every person and activity in the history. If a person has a title, put that in with a cross-reference to the name.

Page numbering Do not forget to number the pages. Be consistent in placing page numbers, either at the top or bottom of pages.

Chapters

One-year summary history This should be a one-year chronicle. The history is to cover one year, beginning with the installation of officers, up to and including the installation of the next year's officers. This timeframe may vary in some departments. This is the most important chapter in your history and must be as complete as possible. The historian should relate all important events and programs conducted during the year or events conducted jointly with the Auxiliary, Sons of The American Legion, or county, district, department and national levels. Historians may use information from the minutes of meetings as a basis for information about the post's activities. Then contact members who were chairs of the committees for further details. Include anything you deem a special attribute of the post, setting it apart from all others.

While many American Legion programs and projects are of a continuing nature and may run through several administrations, such activities might be better covered in a separate chapter following those devoted to the individual administration. The activities of all standing committees should be given considerable coverage, particularly if one committee performs an outstanding service. You may want to include each committee in separate chapters: Americanism, Membership, Boys State, School Award Medals, Oratorical Contest, Junior Shooting Sports, Baseball, Children & Youth, Sons of The American Legion, patriotic observances, parties, Boy Scout troops and other sponsored groups, to name a few. Collect and record for posterity all activities, including photographs adds to the attractiveness of the entry. Give attention to the arrangement of illustrations in relation to the text and use of captions (identification) under each photograph.

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:

- Roster of officers – Photographs of current officers should be included in the history. If it is not possible to obtain photographs of every officer, make a special effort to include photographs of the commander and the adjutant.
- Roster of chairmen - Include a roster of chairs with photographs, if available.
- List of charter members and dates of temporary and permanent charters.
- A roster of all past commanders and adjutants since the charter date with their years served.
- Posts may want to add a roster of members listed in alphabetical order. This may include, after each member's name, the member's branch of service or the date he or she joined the post.
- A record of the citations and awards received, as well as awards presented.
- A list of members who served as delegates to the national and department conventions, or national and department officers and commission and committee appointees, including the county and district.
- Complete records of annual elections showing all nominations and votes received by various nominees.
- Membership standings by year since the charter date, a list of new members for the current year, a list of life members and Paid-Up-For-Life (PUFL) members, "In Memoriam" (also known as Taps or Post Everlasting) listings for the current year, the constitution and by-laws, the annual budget, and any other important statistics.

Readability

The emphasis should be on 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 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. The history should be written as a chronological and detailed account of events arranged in order of time without any analysis or interpretation. Statistics are of great value but should be included in the appendix rather than placed indiscriminately throughout the book.

Photographs/illustrations

All photographs must be identified by occasion, individuals, date and place of event, with the exception of individual photographs of officers and chairs (name and title/committee only). Provide left-to-right subject identification, and if necessary, by row.

Be sure all photographs are clear, as blurry prints will not aid materially and will take away from 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 or cigarettes in them.

Judges option/originality

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

Page format suggestions

Use a page format and layout that is accessible when viewed on multiple types of devices or when printed.

National judging standards

POST OR DEPT HISTORY JUDGING FORM	
10 Points	PRESENTATION Single PDF file with pleasing formatting and layout. This includes font, margins, spacing, etc.
10 Points	INTRODUCTION Background, tie-in with department and national, community, Preamble to Legion Constitution, etc.
15 Points	TABLE OF CONTENTS, INDEX AND PAGE NUMBERING Page reference of chapters, appendices, etc.
15 Points	ORGANIZATION Logical order, not to detract from general readability
20 Points	NARRATIVE Rather than a statistical style of presentation
20 Points	IMAGES All photographs are clear and must have names, occasions, sources, dates, etc. Provide proper left-to-right identifications
10 Points	JUDGES WILL CONSIDER qualities or content not readily cataloged under the preceding headings including features that make a history especially attractive or useful as a source of reference and historic value.
100 Points	

Research suggestions

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

Post adjutants and commanders can obtain information about post charter applications by contacting the national charters clerk, Internal Affairs & Membership Division, at ia@legion.org.

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

- Michael J. Bennett's "When Dreams Come True: The GI Bill and the Making of Modern America" (Brassey's, 1996)
- Thomas A. Rumer's "The American Legion: An Official History" (M. Evans, 1990)
- Raymond Moley's "The American Legion Story," (Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1966)
- Richard Jones' "A History of The American Legion" (Bobbs-Merrill, 1946)
- Marquis James' "A History of The American Legion" (William Green, 1923)

Where possible, use digital voice recorders or video cameras to record oral histories and interviews of

American Legion leaders to capture firsthand information.

Helpful hints for district/county historians

Some departments use the district and county structures, and historians at both levels must make a team effort to accomplish their respective responsibilities to posts in their jurisdiction. If you have been elected or appointed district/county historian, your primary duty is to coordinate the records of post activities within your district/county to ensure the preservation and accessibility of such records at all times.

Some departments conduct comprehensive spring and fall district meetings. If this is the case in your department, make every effort to be allotted time on the program. Travel to posts within your district with the district commander and his or her staff whenever possible, and speak at post meetings. Use the spring meetings as your vantage point for administering a final “morale booster” to the work-shy in your district. Emphasize the importance of adequate records and of giving all possible help and encouragement to post historians.

Many district historians have had no experience in this type of work. In addition, many posts have never tried to keep a history of any kind. You will have to begin by researching and compiling as much information as possible from past records, then focus on keeping your own records current.

Be sure that every post in your district has a post historian and that they are kept informed of the latest developments and material. It is your duty to give all possible aid to post historians within your district. If your department conducts an annual post history contest, encourage the historians to enter. Your department may conduct an annual district/county history contest. Naturally, some material suggested would not be appropriate for district or county books.

Capsule history of The American Legion

A group of 20 officers who served in the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in France during World War I is credited with founding the Legion. AEF Headquarters asked the officers to suggest ideas on how to improve troop morale. One officer, Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt Jr., proposed an organization of veterans. In February 1919, the group formed a temporary committee and selected several hundred officers who had the confidence and respect of the whole army. About 1,000 officers and enlisted men attended the Paris Caucus in March 1919. They adopted a temporary constitution and the name “The American Legion.” The group also elected an executive committee to complete the organization’s work. It considered each soldier of the AEF a member of the Legion. The executive committee named a subcommittee to organize veterans at home in the United States. In May 1919, the Legion held a second organizing caucus in St. Louis. It completed the constitution and made plans for a permanent organization, setting up a temporary headquarters in New York City and beginning its relief, employment and Americanism programs. Congress granted the Legion a national charter in September 1919. The first national convention convened in Minneapolis on November 10-12, 1919, adopting a permanent constitution and electing officers to head the organization. Delegates also voted to locate the Legion’s national headquarters in Indianapolis, Indiana. The Legion continues to support the four pillars of service and advocacy upon which it was founded: Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children and Youth.

The American Legion’s centennial website

As part of The American Legion’s 100th anniversary celebration, a special website was created: **legion.org/centennial**. Though the centennial is past, each post is encouraged to add its history. Post pictures and histories are important to share with other posts, departments and the entire community. Ideally, every post will be listed on the centennial website.