



History of the Forty & Eight

1920

The experiences of World War I inspire a new veteran's society!

In March, Joseph W. Breen, an officer in Breen-McCracken Post 297, and fifteen other Legionnaires met in Philadelphia to develop the concept of The Forty & Eight. Behind the idea of the Society of Forty Men and Eight Horses was the thought that Legionnaires needed an opportunity to have some fun and blow off some steam. The very familiar box car of French Railways became the launching platform for the organization, and the French theme parlayed into the titles of officers and functions. Members of the Forty & Eight would be known in the future as Voyageurs Militaire (Military Travelers) and candidates for membership would be Prisonniers de Guerre (or Poor Goofs) who would be initiated by a Wrecking Crew. The numerals 40 and 8 on a "French horizon blue" were devised as the every day symbol of for the new society. Based upon the common experiences of soldiers, sailors and marines an initiation ceremony was developed which incorporated fun making and interesting ceremonial aspects. The first statewide meeting, or Promenade was held in June of 1920 immediately following the 2nd Annual Convention of the Legion's Department of Pennsylvania. A number of prominent Legionnaires were "wrecked". Joseph W. Breen was unanimously elected Premier Chef de Chemin de Fer. The plans for the Society had been so popular, it was decided to travel to Cleveland, Ohio and introduce the thought to Legionnaires gathering for the national convention. A box car was rented, and a delegation set out via the rails for Cleveland. The stunt provided instant notoriety for the organization. More than 700 Legionnaires became "Hommes" and the Cleveland Promenade re-elected their officers for another term.

1921 - 1922

The National Headquarters were to be established in Seattle, Washington. The Constitution proposed during the Kansas City Promenade placed the Society on the road to progress. In the preamble, the serious side of the organization was outlined:

"For God and Country; to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America and The American Legion; to be loyal members of The American Legion and at all times to strive and promote its principles and advance its welfare; to be present at all memorial services for departed comrades whenever possible; to hold Memorial Day sacred to the memory of our departed comrades, and to participate in a proper observance

of this veteran's day and of Armistice Day, as established by The American Legion; to hold dear the memory of our days in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and to never forget a "buddy".



1922 - 1923

During the Promenade Nationale held in New Orleans, a motion was made for a "Children's Welfare Fund", the monies to be raised with an annual assessment of 50 cents from dues collections, and to be used for the care of orphaned children.



1923 - 1924

National Headquarters are moved to Indianapolis. La Societe became a full partner with The American Legion and The American Legion Auxiliary in the Child Welfare Program. The Societe funds for child welfare (which amounted to \$24,823.91) were safely invested and growing to meet any needs of the future. A joint committee composed of members from each organization were to inaugurate the policies for the future.



1925 - 1926

During the 6th Promenade National, held in Omaha, Nebraska, a donation of \$25,000.00 was made to The American Legion Child Welfare Fund. The funds assisted the Legion in a national campaign to build a Child Welfare Trust Fund.



1926 - 1927

Membership in La Societe reached 32,449 by the time of the National Promenade held in Philadelphia. For the first time in its existence The American Legion membership stood at a figure larger than the previous year. Much of the growth was attributed to the recruiting and membership efforts of Voyageurs who were credited with obtaining not less than 17,000 new members. William C. Mundt of Voiture 24, Bloomington, Illinois was recognized for signing up 509 new members.



1928 - 1929

Programs of La Societe had expanded along with the increases in membership. Programs were conducted in concert with The Legion in membership, child welfare, junior baseball, Americanism and emergency relief. Yearly donations continued to the Child Welfare Fund

with \$18,960 earmarked for 1928. Locales were devising their own programs, as an example Voiture 220 of Chicago sponsored a youth summer camp and offered the use of a log cabin to all Legion Posts. Even during the depression years, which began in 1929, La Societe and the Legion continued to grow steadily for the next three years. Voyageurs enrolled 27,000 new members in the Legion during 1928 - 1929 and proudly watched the Legion pass the one million member mark.



1932 - 1933

The effect of the depression was now being felt not only by the Legion, but across the country. La Societe pledged itself to membership and enrolled a total of 46,000 Legionnaires. A new activity in Child Welfare was started in the form of a campaign against diphtheria. Vaccination toxin was distributed through Voiture National to children whose parents could not afford it. Physicians donated their services, and educational campaigns were carried out to combat the disease. during the period 1932 - 1936 La Societe worked to bolster the impact of the Legion and veterans upon the Congress of the United States at issue were veteran's benefits. La Societe sponsored national radio programs, featured well know political figures as the guests, and made the point for equitable treatment of veterans. Realizing that power came with numbers, Voyageurs brought in over 100,000 Legion members, hitting a total of 111,159. The much sought after compensation bill passed Congress after a presidential veto placed the matter back in the hands of lawmakers.



1936 - 1937

Voyageurs returned to Cleveland for their seventeenth Promenade National, and had one of its largest parades which lasted nearly three hours. Membership had reached 34,809.



1938 - 1939

Voyageurs continued to add their support to the 20 or so states which were sponsoring Boys State programs. Many of the Leadership positions were filled with members of La Societe. Locale programs were gaining in popularity with activities as varied as supplying iron lungs, to juvenile delinquency programs, and support of Legion Junior Baseball and Scouting.



1941 - 1942

The one and only objective of La Societe was deemed to provide supports to The American Legion and the United States to win the war began on December 7, 1941. Membership was considered a priority if The Legion was to carry out its obligations to the nation. As a result a goal of 200,000 members was established by the 40/8, and at close of books a total of 211,301 members for the Legion were reported. The Legion reached an all time high in membership. While fully supporting the Legion Child Welfare program, Locales offered Christmas activities for unfortunate children continued community and national health programs. Voyageurs volunteered for continued military service, or as air raid wardens, and other civil defense programs. They aided in salvage drives and recruiting efforts for the Army, Navy and Marine Corps. A special war effort was made to insure that men on transports and in the overseas forces were supplied with playing cards. As a result over 60,000 decks of cards were distributed across the globe. The fun-making activities of La Societe were placed on a siding until the end of the war. all during the war years, the Forty and Eight continued their community efforts by assisting in Bond drives and War Stamp sales. They were often accompanied by their "boxcars" which were used to promote publicity and make sales. Blood drives became a regular routine. Realizing the need for nurses, La Societe started a program to assist individuals in becoming nursing graduates. By September, 1942 over 100 nurses had been received grants to continue their education. During the second year of the program to provide playing cards for servicemen, a total of 610,498 decks of cards were reported as having been distributed. Voyageurs also paid tribute to the men who were returning from the war, and made visits to hospitals providing entertainment, magazines and books. Over 1 million decks of cards were distributed in 1943- 1944 and eventually peaked at over 4 million.



1945 - 1946

The 25th Anniversary of the Forty and Eight also brought the end to World War II, and a new program was proposed to provide free telephone calls home for recently returned wounded servicemen. The program met with success with Kentucky contributing over \$50,000 and Indiana providing \$39,000. The end of the war also signaled the end of war time rationing and travel restrictions. The Forty and Eight once again held promenades and wrecks in increasing numbers.

Leaders of The American Legion began to realize they needed a place where they could meet in a spirit of comradeship and the Chateau Locaux provided the right setting. Enrolling Legion members took a top priority. Over two hundred veterans organizations had sprouted up across the country, and there was a need to combine all of those forces.

Instead of fighting each other, the various organizations needed to band together. The Forty and Eight members across the country threw themselves into a membership drive which would eventually lead to over 500,000 new members for The American Legion.

With increased membership in the Legion, the Forty and Eight also carried increased responsibility as the "playground of The American Legion". La Societe brought Legionnaires from many posts and counties together in one setting, serving to strengthen unity within the Legion, and stimulate "devotion to mutual helpfulness". As Legion membership increased so did that of La Societe. Younger veterans were joining, and the age of Poor Goofs ranged from 20 to 60. Membership exceeded 70,000 for the time in history. Although yearly contributions to the Legion's Child Welfare Fund had continued throughout the war years, the addition of World War II veteran's children brought an increase to the 1945 donation to \$30,000, and in 1946 was further increased to 50,000.



1947 - 1948

Two accomplishments can be noted for this year. The Forty and Eight began it's long association with (what was then the US Marine) Hospital in Carville, Louisiana and the resident published magazine "The Star". A new printing press and other equipment was purchased to assist the patients to, "Carry on more effectively their fight against the ignorance which surrounds this (Hanson's) disease." Voyageurs numbered 95,000. As result of the increased membership work for the Legion, and the addition of new Voyageurs who had proved themselves with a least three years of work in Legion activities.



1948 - 1949

One of the big events of the year was the welcoming of the French Gratitude Train. Voyageurs in every state participated in ceremonies, and in many states La Societe took on the responsibility for maintaining the boxcar.



1959 - 1960

An entry in the official history is intriguing. "The Soviet's Big K beating his desk in the United Nations - Cuba's Castro raving against the United States for four solid hours - The American Legion's leadership denouncing the Forty and Eight as 'offensive'. These are some of headline happenings of the year which are difficult for the historian of today to understand, but which perhaps will come clear to those of the future." Although there had been some ripples of discontent in past years, 1960 cast a dark shadow on the future relationship of The American Legion and The Forty and Eight.

Many issues brought the organizations to logger heads. First, the Forty and Eight had been refused authority to have a separate parade function at National Legion Conventions for the past few years. Secondly, the Forty and Eight felt the National Executive Committee of the Legion had been attempting to usurp the independence of the Forty and Eight. Thirdly, certain allegations had been made by the Forty and Eight regarding the power of seven individuals within the Legion, which was interpreted by the National Executive Committee of the Legion as demeaning to that organization. Fourth, The Forty and Eight was "Snubbed" by the American Legion after it had donated \$50,000 to the Child Welfare Fund, and no mention of gratitude was made. Fifth, The American Legion had refused the Forty and Eight the opportunity to hold its Promenade Nationale in the same city with the National Convention of the American Legion. Lastly, The American Legion demanded changing of the Constitution of the Forty and Eight, an action which did not pass in two previous Promenades Nationale. The bickering, over years, had finally brought the organizations to sever their long term relationship as a parent and subsidiary organizations.



1963 - 1964

The Nurses Training Program reached a record of 520 Voitures Locales sponsoring 2,129 nurses at a cost of \$248,047. Some wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of Voyageurs have organized a group known as La Societe de Femme. Cabanes have been formed in 15 states with over 1,000 members. Their program is to, "further the programs of the Forty and Eight".



1964 - 1965

Donations for child welfare, which started in 1922, and have then been passed along to The American Legion amount to \$1,221,444.62. The Charles W. Ardery Child Welfare Fund, as recommended by committee, was adopted by the Promenade Nationale and rules governing the dispersal of it's initial \$300,000 fund were drawn up in an irrevocable trust.

Other programs for the year were listed to be: Flag Education, Memorial Day Programs, Boys State, Girls State, Scouting and the Salvation Army Christmas Tree of Lights program.



1965 - 1966

Child Welfare activities have always held a high point in Forty and Eight activities. During the Promenade Nationale in Baltimore, Maryland it was announced that 51 Voitures had reported aiding 770,086 children with total expenditures of \$2,690,296.



1968 - 1969

We learn from history, and so we should carefully study the following words of Linley L. Crostwaite, National Americanism Director (1969), whose words of 1969 are just as relevant today as they were when originally written: "The magic words for our success are, and have always been, rights and freedoms under law. The total prosperity of our nation can be attributed to man's freedom to exercise his ingenuity and ambition, but never in our history did we, as a nation, condone these exercises to infringe upon, take away or destroy that which belongs to another. Freedom and rights must have limitations. We must establish within our Locale and Grande Voitures, Americanism programs which contain the basic principles of being loyal Americans, upholding its traditional concept of rights, freedom and justice. We must ever be watchful for encroachment upon these principles and be ready to speak out when necessary - be it local state or national levels. We must through our actions and programs work to destroy apathy and to re-kindle the finest of patriotism. We must condemn and expose the militant and subversive elements for they are - else they will destroy our nation. Our program in Americanism is serious. It needs your and my immediate attention.



1969 - 1970

The Charles W. Ardery Fund has grown considerably both in the total amount of the fund, and the amounts reimbursed to Voitures Locales. The fund, generating income interest and infused with a 50 cent per member allocation, has over \$400,000. In 1969 - 1970, a total of \$44,775 in grants were made from the fund.



1972 - 1973

In addition to individual grants, The Ardery Fund makes a \$4,363 grant to the University of Illinois to support advanced research into the causes of diabetes in children. Another grant in the amount of \$10,000 was presented to the University of Kentucky Chandler Medical Center for research into cystic fibrosis. In total expenditures were over \$37,000 for the year.



1973 - 1974

After years of constant floor debate a resolution was passed during Promenade Nationale to remove the word "white" from membership requirements in the Forty and Eight constitution. The final vote was 1280 for acceptance and 467 against. The official history of the Forty and Eight states, "It can be reported that the Voyageurs have shown their

willingness to cooperate fully as truly great Americans. The organization is now in step with the laws of the land." The nationwide gas shortage caused concern for traveling to the proposed site of the Promenade National in Anaheim, California. As a result a decision was reached to hold the 55th Promenade Nationale in St. Louis, Missouri. In June, 1974 a grant of \$10,000 was made to the University of Wisconsin in support of research in "serum Insulin Precursors in juvenile diabetes. The Nursing Program reported 2,475 nurses receiving financial help, with more than \$291,000 spent on nursing activities.



1975 - 1976

The continued "good work" of the Forty and Eight seems to go on year after year, with little in the way of public or organizational recognition or notoriety. These activities appear to be the daily work of the individual Voyageurs, and include activities such as these reported in 1975 - 1976: Missouri V. 1541 buys and old fire engine to convert into a Locomotive; Florida V. 790 presents an air conditioner to a local day care center; Indiana V. 1390 sells over 8,000 ears of roast corn as a fund raiser. Bill Eggleston of V. 206 in Nebraska completes over 5,760 hours of volunteer service; New York V. 595 presents an appreciation plaque to base ball player Rick Monday for preventing two would be flag burners from carrying out their wrongful act. Delegates to Promenade Nationale vote to create a \$100,000.00 nurses training trust fund honoring George B. Boland, who served as Chef de Chemin de Fer in 1952 and as Avocat National for many years.




1977 - 1978

John Clark Wodetzki, Chief of Police, Lincoln, Illinois is selected as the first "Outstanding Officer of the Year". Wodetzki, was a 22 year veteran of the police department, a member of The American Legion, and Past Chef de Gare of Logan County Voiture 95.




1978 - 1979

The Charles W. Ardery Memorial Child Welfare Trust made a gift of \$15,600 through the Grande Voiture du Colorado to the National Jewish Hospital in Denver to purchase special equipment. A second grant of \$10,000 is made to Children's Hospital in St. Petersburg, Florida for equipment in the Newborn Intensive Care Unit. A third gift of \$16,600 went to Saint Jude Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee to purchase a new spectrophotometer. Child Welfare continues as a high rated priority with \$6,329,276 expended in money, materials, mileage and man hours. It was also reported Voyageurs had contributed 6,481 pints of blood. For the first time in history, the Carville Star program reached an all time high and 100 percent participation for the first time. Contributions to the program exceeded \$93,000.




1980 - 1981

Once again it is the little activities which tell the true story of the Forty and Eight. During this year these projects were noted in the official history: St. Louis V. 38 continued its annual outing for disabled children to Grant's Farm; South Dakota Voyageurs were busy restoring their Gratitude Train Box Car at Huron, South Dakota; Voiture 762 in Kansas City provided toys to children in Mercy Children's Hospital, Voyageurs and Dames of V. and C. 85 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin visit the School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind, providing clown acts, rides on locomotives, and hand out goodies such as candy and gum.



1982- 1983

Child Welfare again led in the interest of delegates to the Promenade Nationale when they adopted recommendations to promote the activities of the AAU/USA Junior Olympics.




1985 - 1986

Although the Forty & Eight had participated in the Veterans Administration Voluntary Service program since 1980 little reference had made about its success over the years. This year it was reported participation has reached 230 medical facilities serving our fellow veterans.



1991 - 1992

On November 9, 1991 La Societe changed from a fraternal organization to a veteran's organization, the result of action during the 72nd Promenade Nationale. The Preamble of the Constitution was revised to reflect the change: "For God and country we associate ourselves together for the following purposes: To create a charitable and non-profit veterans organization; to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; to assist and promote the welfare and well-being of those who served in the Armed Forces of the United States, during all wars and conflicts, recognized the Congress of the United States, and their widows and orphans; to participate in all memorial services for and to be part in and to encourage others to participate in the proper observance of all days honoring veterans' to preserve the memories of our Services in the Armed Forces of our Country; to actively participate within our membership in projects relating to (a) the welfare of the children of America; (b) the health of our Nation by fostering a nurses training program; and © selected charitable endeavors."



1992 - 1993

This will probably be remembered as a year of hurricanes and Forty & Eight assistance. Not all details of the total relief effort were written in the Forty & Eight Magazine, however the following actions outline the type of assistance La Societe provided. In Florida 22 youngsters were provided with clothing and supplies. Medical supplies were supplied at a cost of \$1595.11. Sixty-six migrant families in Florida City with a total of 255 children were provided with vouchers for food, clothing and household supplies. As of December 1992 over \$11,000 had been spent to aid families. Louisiana Voyageurs also fought the impact of Hurricane Andrew providing relief teams to distribute clothing and supplies. The Ardery Trust Fund was used to provide assistance to four families with eight children. From Hawaii, where another hurricane had come ashore on the island of Kauai, the Ardery Fund assisted 80 children. Early reports of assistance were sketchy at best, however the efforts of La Societe could be realized with the few reports which had arrived at Voiture National. Gaining immediate popularity, "Flags for First Graders" became a buzz-word phrase for Forty and Eighters across the country, as they participated in flag education programs in elementary schools. Within a few years the program would be responsible for thousands of youth learning the heritage of, and respect for, the American Flag.



1993 - 1994

Natural disasters continue to plague section of the United States, and La Societe is there to provide assistance. Wisconsin Voyageurs reported assisting 24 families and 56 children in Black River Falls. Michigan Voyageurs came to the assistance of St. Louis, Missouri families with a "Box Car of Toys for Kids" project. The idea drew immediate support and in November 1993 Washtenaw County Voiture 957's boxcar made its way to St. Louis to provide roughly \$30,000 worth of toys to the children of the flooded areas. Voyageurs Militaire across the nation routinely assist the children and orphans of veterans. Indiana Forty & Eighters met at Voiture 145 for their annual Christmas party for the children of the Indiana Soldiers and Sailors Children's Home. The senior class was treated to a shopping trip, buffet luncheon and contributions from La Societe in the amount of \$3,070 were given to the Senior Class Project of the home. Voiture 99 in Vancouver, Washington is highlighted in the Forty & Eight Magazine for contributing in excess of \$150,000 annually (since 1985) to their local community. Dakota Voiture 1457 assists students of the Dakota County Technical College in their "Handicapped Ladies and Gentlemen's Prom and Graduation". The Voiture provided funding to insure musical entertainment and food. One youngster's thank you note said, "Thank you for supporting our prom ... the money went to a very good cause like the punch and food. They came out to be the best things to have when people got hungry."



1994 - 1995

This year marked both the 100th year founding of the Gillis W. Long Hanson's Disease Center (leprosy research) in Carville, Louisiana, and the 50th anniversary of the Forty & Eight's sponsorship of the patient- published Carville "Star" Magazine.

The Forty & Eight established a national Youth Sports program, to encompass and expand beyond the narrower scope of the existing Junior Olympics program.



2001

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon occurred one day before the Forty & Eight Promenade Nationale was scheduled to begin in Hagerstown, Maryland, not far from Camp David. Terrorists crashed a civilian airliner just north of town. Voyageurs already at Hagerstown were briefly isolated by security forces. Many Voyageurs and spouses were stranded at airports, some were mid-air during the attacks, and several found it impossible to reach Hagerstown. The organization voted total support for America in its war on terror. The Forty & Eight immediately began around-the-clock delivery of relief goods to New York and Washington DC, 215 tons of relief goods valuing \$881,000 were reported delivered in the aftermath of the attacks. 11 trips by truck we made over 24 days to "ground zero" in NYC.



2006

Women veterans become eligible to join the Forty & Eight. Like their male counterparts, women too must be members of the American Legion and be invited to join the Forty & Eight. The debate on this issue was between honoring the all-male battle past that created the founders of this organization and honoring today's male- and-female battle veterans who are America's modern military. It was decided that the best way to honor the past, is by honoring the male and female battle veterans who are American's future.



2008

The Promenade National brought a major change to the Constitution of La Societe. You no longer have to belong to the American Legion to join La Societe. With two-thirds of the members at the National Promenade in Orlando, Florida voting yes to remove the requirement it opens up our membership to any honorably discharged veteran or anyone on active duty. It is still by invitation only. How this will change La Societe only time will tell.



GOD BLESS AMERICA