

## **By Suzanne Hill, President American Legion Auxiliary, Unit 218**

The American Legion Auxiliary was founded at the American Legion's first convention on Nov. 10, 1919. When the auxiliary held its first convention in 1921, members decided upon the name, omitting the words "women's" or "ladies."

In the years following, many Legion posts encouraged formation of auxiliaries. Washington was no exception.

The Washington Citizen noted on Sept. 15, 1922, that "Steps are being completed to organize an American Legion Auxiliary in Washington. Every American Legion Post has a ladies auxiliary and Washington should not stand back. A meeting will be held at the City Hall Wednesday night, September 20, at which time organization plans will be perfected. Every lady eligible should attend this meeting. Ex-service men are also asked to be present at this meeting."

A second meeting was held in Washington on October 4, 1922. Mrs. E.N. Bartlett, Clarksville, explained details to prospective members, according to the Franklin County Observer. This was considered Unit 218's first meeting.

Officers elected at this meeting were: Mrs. G.H. Otto, president; Mrs. B.E. Mankopf, vice president; Cassilda Wynne, recording secretary; Rose Mauntel, treasurer.

The auxiliary held an evening St. Valentine's dance and lunch in 1923 and 1924. The American Legion Drum and Bugle Corps performed on the streets to advertise. While the dance was free to ladies, gents paid 75 cents.

**After receiving its charter on May 16, 1923, Unit 218 assisted with grave decorations on Memorial Day. Poppy Day was held for the first time on Memorial Day in 1924.**

The unit held a Jitney Dance at the City Park on Wednesday, June 6, 1923. Fees were charged for individual dances at this event. The pavilion was decorated with red, white and blue lanterns. The Muench Orchestra "furnished" the music.

After the Washington City Hall was dedicated in October 1923, Unit 218 requested use of the auditorium on the second Tuesday of each month.

Members collected old magazines and musical records in November 1923 at Otto's and Mauntel's for the Government Hospital in St. Louis and Penitentiary Hospital in Jefferson City. They sent fruits, candies, nuts, cakes and cookies to the county poor home in Union on Thanksgiving Day, 1923.

In 1924 the auxiliary collected contributions of cakes, pies, cookies and candy as Easter gifts to convalescent soldiers at Jefferson Barracks. It also sponsored a 500 (card game) and pinochle tournament at the City Hall auditorium that year. It donated \$50 for the stage curtain in the new high school auditorium.

In those days, Post 218 held Saturday evening dances and entertainment at the City Park pavilion. Unit 218 assisted the Legion with this fundraiser.

After donating \$70 to Post 218 in January 1925, Unit 218 disappeared. No mention appeared in local newspapers of the Valentine's dance or participation in the Memorial Day observance that year. A report of the Feb. 25, 1926, Post 218 meeting noted that the auxiliary had been quite active, but "has practically disbanded." Post members wanted to see it reorganized.

### **Starting Anew**

Monday, May 11, 1931, the auxiliary was “organized” at a Post 218 meeting, as if it had never existed. Twenty members attended, planning to participate in Poppy Day on May 23 and to make poppies to place on local veterans’ graves on Memorial Day.

The unit’s first meeting was held May 18. Dues were set at \$2.01. Officers elected were Freda Rush, president; Daisy Neher, vice president; Ruth Thias, secretary; Clara Jones, treasurer; Anna Meyer, historian; Mary Brune, chaplain; Florence Boston, sergeant-at-arms.

Members met again on June 8, 1931, rechartering on that date.

June 13 and 14, 1931, an American Legion and Legion Auxiliary Ninth District convention was held in Washington with a parade. The community was invited to the parade. Because Unit 218 was chartered so near to the district convention, it appears that Post 218 wanted to have Unit 218 involved for it.

The Washington Post and Auxiliary were hosts to the Ninth District convention in 1931, 1935, 1938, 1945 and 1948. The Ninth District is composed of area Legion Posts and Auxiliary Units. Conventions included guest speakers, large parades of Legionnaires and auxiliary members with bands and floats, drill teams, novelty stunts, as well as baseball games and dances. Convention business was held in various places: City Hall, City Auditorium, Commercial Hotel, Turner Hall and Elks Hall.

### **Poppies and the Auxiliary**

Poppy Day has long been a national American Legion Auxiliary project. The auxiliary is assisted by the American Legion Family in this project. Poppies are distributed, not sold, with a request that the recipient donate to support veterans, active-duty military and their families. Poppies honor those who have died serving their country.

Unit 218 uses poppy donations to support veterans at the St. James Veterans Home, Mexico Veterans Home, St. Louis Veterans Home, the St. Louis VA Medical Centers at John Cochran and Jefferson Barracks and the Grandview Healthcare Center veterans activity fund. The unit supports resources for active-duty military families, including the USO and Fisher House.

Auxiliary members use funds to make lab robes, pillowcases, wheelchair caddies, catheter bag covers, dining vests and large blankets for veterans in homes.

In the past, Unit 218 collected items for the Jefferson Barracks gift shop. Today, the unit donates money to the gift shops.

For several years, the unit sponsored a Poppy poster and poem contest. A local business displayed the winning posters in its window. Winning posters and poems would be advanced to the district and department contests.

Throughout the years, the Auxiliary raised funds using different methods. These included bake sales, food stands at various Legion and auxiliary activities, quilt raffles and pillowcase socials. Pillowcase socials were popular in the Washington area during the 1940s and 1950s. Participants played cards or bingo with winners receiving embroidered pillowcases.

Throughout the years, Unit 218 met in City Hall, members’ homes and later the Post Home. It has served the American Legion and the community during that time.

The auxiliary has held Buddy Suppers in November for many years to honor Legion members’ service. At one time, members decorated tables and presented musical program,

singing patriotic songs. Buddy Suppers now are covered dish dinners held prior to November meetings.

Unit 218 members have long participated in Post 218's ceremonial activities, such as Memorial Day and July 4 opening ceremonies and Veterans Day.

Missouri Girls State, sponsored by the American Legion Auxiliary, Department of Missouri, was established in 1940, patterned after Boys State. Unit 218 sponsored a girl that year and asked for another organization or individual to sponsor another girl. Jeanne MacDonald, Washington High School, represented the auxiliary that year. Names were drawn from a list of eligible girls. Unit 218 remains involved in this program.

During World War II auxiliary members donated items for Red Cross kits to be given to servicemen. Members cut and sewed garments for the Red Cross' use in hospitals and battlefields.

National defense and Americanism committees had a public meeting at the Grammar School in 1940. Weekly Americanism classes were held that year at another local school. An Americanism program was held in February 1942 at the Elks Hall. The one-hour program included a variety of patriotic music. The Americanism chairman of the Department of Missouri was the principal speaker. The unit sponsors an Americanism essay contest for elementary and high school participants to this day.

The auxiliary asked the Lions Club to cooperate in a move to make "Decoration Day," (Memorial Day) a holiday. After the club agreed, Unit 218 organized a Memorial Day program in conjunction with the Lions Club round-up in 1940.

The unit helped families with food, clothing, medical assistance and other needs in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1941, auxiliary had a "clothing department" to collect school children's clothing. The community service chairman oversaw supplying clothing to a clothing depot for those in need in 1942.

For several years, the auxiliary provided and attached Scotchlite strips to bicycle rear fenders and handlebars to reflect auto lights at night.

Two Unit 218 members were also Department of Missouri presidents: Marie Schoepp, 1950-1951; and Enid Struckhoff, 1972-1973. Several members were Ninth District presidents. They were: Maye Fallis, 1945; Marie Schoepp, 1946-1947; Enid Struckhoff, 1964-1965; Marsha Dorrell, 2002-2003; Vera Gerner-Taylor, 2006-2007.