

## NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTION RECORD

RG2959.AM: American Legion. Nebraska Department. Lincoln, Neb.  
Lincoln, Lancaster County, Neb.: Patriotic veterans' organization  
Department papers: 1919-1982  
Size: 3.0 cu.ft.; 6 boxes

### HISTORICAL NOTE

The American Legion was created by an act on September 16, 1919 by President Woodrow Wilson and was amended on October 29, 1942. After the fighting was over in Europe from this Great War, those men who were not career soldiers banded together to form an organization to assist in promoting life, liberty and community service. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. was in command during the start up of the American Legion.

The Nebraska Department of the American Legion was organized for the first time, on a temporary basis, at Lincoln, Nebraska, during the summer of 1919. John G. Maher being the first president called a meeting to send representatives to the first United States Caucus held in St. Louis, Missouri in May of 1919. Upon their return to Nebraska, work began for these delegates to build the organization in the state. By the time the first annual state convention in Omaha was held on September 10-11, 1919, there were a total of 110 posts. The first Commander of the Nebraska Department of the American Legion was Earl M. Cline from Nebraska City. Under his tutelage the membership for the state grew to 19,568 men. The state ranked 16<sup>th</sup> in membership when compared to the other states by the time of the Second National Convention. The Second Convention for the Nebraska Department, attended by 400 delegates, was held August 26-28, 1920 in Hastings. It was during 1920 when the Auxiliary was approved. Robert G. Simmons was elected as Commander for 1921. At this time the headquarters for the state was located at 314 Richards Block in Lincoln.

The commander for the department in 1922 was William Ritchie, Jr. from Omaha. Membership took a slight downturn to 18,470 members at this time. The next two commanders were Charles W. Taylor of Lincoln (1924) and J. Ed. C. Fisher from Beatrice (1925). Membership had risen to 22,000 by 1922. The year 1925 saw two leaders, Charles M. Courtney of Kearney, who resigned, and Charles M. Bosley from Palisade. J. R. Kinder, originally from Madison now in Lincoln, became Commander in 1926. There were two more leaders in 1927, Earl L. Meyer from Alliance, who resigned, and C. C. Fraizer from Aurora. The membership numbers decreased again, going down to 16,272 men. Jean B. Cain of Falls City was the Commander in 1928. It was Wade R. Martin from Omaha who took the leader position in 1929. Prior to his time as Nebraska Governor, Dwight Griswold served as Commander in 1930. Marcus L. Poteet from Lincoln succeeded Griswold in 1931. During his direction, membership rose again, seeing 21,252 Legionnaires. World War I veteran (and eventually WWII) Robert D. Flory from Allison was the leader in 1932. In 1933 the Commander was Robert M. Armstrong. The Great Depression was in full swing, and as people cut back on the 'extras', membership dropped to 13,274. The next two Commanders were Golden P. Kratz of Sidney (1934) and Fred. B. Winter of Grand Island (1935). World War I veteran Edgar J. Boschult of Lincoln served as Commander in 1936. As the United States was recovering from the depression, membership rose to 17,520.

In 1937 the Commander was Verne R. Taylor of North Platte; in 1938 it was Ted Metcalfe from Omaha. Metcalfe pioneered the Cornhusker Boys State for the Legion. The next three years brought Robert B. Waring of Geneva (1939), Eugene A. Nutzman from Nehawka (1940) and Walter F. Robert of Wahoo (1941) as Commanders of the department. On the cusp of WWII, membership rose again to 18,422 in 1940. In 1942 J. Francis McDermott of Omaha was overseas before finishing his role as Commander. The war did not deter the enrollment of new members, rising to 19,660 by the end of 1942. John E. Curtiss from Lincoln served as Commander in 1943 and the group numbers rose to 21,793. The first National High School Oratorical Contest was won by Brent Bozell. M.A. Shaw of David City was department leader in 1944. With the end of WWII nearing, the department organization grew to 26,084. In 1945 the Commander was Reed O'Hanlon from Blair and the returning soldiers exploded membership to 31,251 Legionnaires. A. C. Smith of Scottsbluff was in the lead position of the Nebraska Department in 1946.

The bulk of this collection dates from 1958 to 1960, covering the timeframe when Frank Landis was Commander for the Nebraska Department. Landis took his role as a leader to heart. He involved himself with as much as he could, from committees to membership drives, including being on the inquiry board at the soldiers home in Grand Island. In 1960 Post 3 in the city of Lincoln had the second largest number of members across the Legion, Denver, Colorado being in the number one spot. Landis and his post leaders took the total number of membership in the state to 53,052 for 1960. The state dedicated Highway 281 in honor of the organization's dedication to their state and individual communities in March of 1960.

### SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of six document boxes of material arranged in two series: (1) Nebraska Department of the American Legion and (2) National American Legion. This material relates to state and national activities of the American Legion, and primarily to the activities of the Nebraska Department.

**Series 1** contains the organization documents and convention materials for the state department of the Legion. The documents consist of membership statistics, correspondence and committee papers. Of note in this series is the document on the history of the department. This document provides background information for the Nebraska Department; it also includes more details on the goals of the Legion as a whole. The different committees in which the group participated in are also of note, showing how involved they were with their communities. The convention materials cover 1920, 1945, 1946 and 1959-1960.

**Series 2** contains documents relating to the national American Legion. These documents consist of publications, membership statistics and legal materials. The condensed history of the American Legion is of interest in this series. Post handbooks, manuals, and the Child Welfare Guide, along with other publications, offer insight into this national organization.

**Note:** See the photo component [RG2959.PH] for related photographs. See RG4454.AM for personal papers relating to Frank E. Landis.

## DESCRIPTION

### Series 1 - State

#### Box 1

##### Folder

1. History of the Nebraska Department (1919-1960)
2. Constitution & By-Laws (1955, 1957, 1959-1960)
3. Judge Advocate (1959)
4. Sergeant at Arms (1959)
5. State Headquarters (1959-1960)
6. Financial Statements (1958-1960)
7. Permanent Membership (1959-1960)
8. Membership Statistics (1958-1959, Oct.)
9. Membership Statistics (1959, Nov.-1960, Feb.)
10. Membership Statistics (1960, Mar. 1-June)

#### Box 2

##### Folder

1. Membership Statistics (1960, July 1-Aug. 22)
2. Department Directory-Officers/Committees (1959-1960)
3. Post Officers (1960)
4. Senior Vice Commander (1959-1960)
5. Area Vice Commanders (1959-1960)
6. District Commanders – Districts 1-7 (1959-1960)
7. District Commanders – Districts 8-15 (1959-1960)
8. Mid-Winter Conference and Executive Meetings (1957-1960)

#### Box 3

##### Folder

1. Annual Convention Programs (1920, 1945, 1946)
2. Annual Convention Correspondence (1959-1960)
3. State Convention Committees (1960, May 20-July 14)
4. Convention Program/Order of Business (1960, Aug. 26-28)
5. Annual District Convention Correspondence (1959, Apr. 12-Oct. 2)
6. 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention Session Minutes (1960, Aug. 26-28)
7. Officer Appointment Correspondence (1959, Apr. 14-July 27)

#### Box 4

##### Folder

1. General Correspondence (1919, 1928, 1959-1960, Mar. 31)
2. General Correspondence (1960, Apr. 4-Sept. 1, 1962, 1982)
3. Department of Veterans Affairs (1959 June-Dec.)

4. Department of Veterans Affairs (1960 Jan.-Aug. 22)
5. American Legion Clubs (1959-1960)
6. American Legion Auxiliary (1940, 1959-1961, 1982)
7. Americanism Committee (1958-1960)

Box 5

Folder

1. Highway 281 Dedication and Caravan (1960 Mar.)
2. Cornhusker Boys State (1938, 1941, 1960)
3. Cornhusker Boys & Girls County Government, Inc. (1960)
4. Boy Scout Committee (1959-1960)
5. Child Welfare Committee (1957-1960)
6. Community Service Committee (1959-1960)
7. Contests Supervisory Committee (1959)
8. Disaster Relief Committee (1958-1960)
9. Education Committee (1959-1960)
10. Employment Committee (1955-1960)
11. Finance Committee (1959-1960)
12. IBM and Legislative Committees (1958-1960)
13. Oratorical Contest Committee (1958-1960)
14. Publications Committee (1959)
15. Rehabilitation Committee (1959-1960)
16. Religious Emphasis Committee (1959)
17. Temporary Committees – Quota/Stamp (1959-1960)
18. Soldiers Home Inquiry Board (1959-1960)
19. Little World Series (1959-1960)

Series 2 - National

Box 6

Folder

1. Condensed History (1945, July)
2. National Headquarters (1959-1960)
3. Membership Statistics (1959-1960)
4. National Boys State Conference (1959, Oct. 2-3)
5. National Legislative Bulletin (1959, Oct. 22-1960, July 8)
6. Newsletters (1959, Aug.-1960, July 1)
7. Convention (1959, July 20-Oct. 12)
8. Legion vs. 40 and 8 (1959, Oct.-1960, Aug. 17)
9. Publications (1955-1960, n.d.)
10. Keep America Beautiful Brochures (1959, Oct. 8)

RG2959.AM: American Legion. Nebraska Department. Lincoln, Neb.

Added Entries:

American Legion. Nebraska  
Veterans -- Nebraska

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