

May 20, 1919, was one of the biggest red-letter days in the history of Ames, Iowa, up to that date. At 4 p.m. that day, a parade welcomed Ames and central Iowa residents home from World War I. It was the first "official" day home for Company I, 168th Infantry Regiment, 42nd Infantry "Rainbow" Division. The parade included all the servicemen from the area, not just Company I, but since Company I was located in Ames, it was only natural that their return marked the celebration.

Actually, the troops of Company I had passed through Ames on their train trip home to Camp Dodge a few days earlier. During that trip, they were granted the privilege of stopping in Ames for a short period. Camp Dodge was to be their demobilization point. One can only wonder how hard it must have been to get back on the train and leave Ames for Camp Dodge after having been gone for many months.

The homecoming celebration featured a parade through the downtown area, a banquet at the Methodist church and subsequent party at the newly built Sheldon Munn hotel. Of course, there were speeches as part of that banquet. Pictures of the parade can be seen in the Farwell Brown photographic archive in the Ames Public Library catalogued parades, 1915.

Eight days later, an article in the Ames Tri-Weekly Tribune announced the beginning of a drive to affiliate with an organization named The American Legion. Dr. Earl B. Bush who had commanded the medical detachment for the 126th Field Artillery, 34th infantry Division was named temporary Commander for that effort. Fifteen prospective members were necessary to apply for a temporary charter. Dues were set at \$1 for the initial membership.

On June 16, 1919, the temporary charter was issued, and Ames Post #37 came into existence. Prominent names on that temporary charter were Dr. Bush, Anson Marston, Dean of Engineering at Iowa State College and a nationally and internationally known design engineer and Jos. B. Gerbracht, later to operate the Ames Airport with his brother and a movie theatre pioneer in Ames.

That temporary charter document also designates the Post as Snedden E. Winter Post #37 of Ames, IA. Many posts bear the name of a resident of that town killed in action, often the first resident killed in action. Cpl. Snedden E. Winter was killed in action on the Champagne front on July 15, 1918, during an artillery bombardment. He had mobilized with Company I.

Notes on the original charter application housed at American Legion National Headquarters state that a letter was received from John MacVicar, Adjutant of Iowa, requesting that the name of Snedden E. Winter be removed and that the Post be named the Ames Post #37. No reason was given in that letter, but the request was honored.

An Ames Community History published in 1964 states that in November 1917, "All stores closed for the military funeral of James Luke Mattingly, Ames' first boy to die in the service of his country." Pvt. Mattingly, also a member of Company I, contracted measles while with his unit in New York. He was hospitalized there where he developed pneumonia and died on Nov. 19, 1917. Apparently, the decision was made to take the middle ground and not designate a name for the post.

The Post began to operate a clubroom almost immediately after the charter was granted. The permanent charter was granted on Sept. 24, 1923, and states that the Post was maintaining a clubroom. A 1922 City Directory in the Ames Historical Society lists The American Legion at 308 Main. That is the current address of Skunk River Cycles.

A later address listed for the Post is the National Bank Building from a 1924 telephone directory. Meeting minutes for the Post on Oct 1, 1928 state that discussions were to be held with the International Order of Odd Fellows, IOOF, for rental of part of their building. Later minutes, Dec 9, 1931, authorize signing a lease with the IOOF. A November 26, 1932 article in the Ames Tribune gives an address of 108 ½ Fifth Street it appears the lease with the IOOF did not materialize.

The next location identified is 233 ½ Main Street in the 1936 City Directory, above what is now The Loft. In 1940, the City Directory lists the address as 225 ½ Main Street, the second floor of the IOOF building. That building has since become the home of The Ames Legion Family with purchase of the building from the IOOF in 1947. The Post home was on the second floor until 1981. That year saw the remodeling of the building to allow the Post to move to the ground floor.

The permanent charter of the Post in 1923 contained several interesting features. Five women were listed on that document, with one of them, Ruth Clough, listed as the Post Historian. Three doctors and three dentists are also listed. The population of Ames in 1920 was 21,000. Having that many health-care professionals having gone to war must have had noticeable effect on the community.

One of those dentists, Dr. Tom L. Rice, D.D.S., is especially interesting. Dr. Rice's military service began in Cuba with Roosevelt's Rough Riders as a veterinarian for seven months during the Spanish-American war. Following that period, he enrolled in dental school and changed professions before leaving private practice for service on the Mexican Border in 1916 and then World War I. He served as Post #37 Commander in 1934-1935.

The late 20s and early 30s were a very active time in American Legion Post #37. The story of the Post working with the Commercial Club/Chamber of Commerce to keep an airport alive in Ames will be the subject of next month's article for the Centennial of The American Legion. Stay tuned.

This article was published in the September 3, 2018 issue of the Ames Tribune.