

## VETERANS – THE AMERICAN LEGION

While the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) was founded in 1899, after World War I, veterans formed the American Legion to promote patriotism and civic pride and to “preserve the memories and incidents of our association in the great war.” It was organized in St. Louis in May of 1919 as a patriotic, mutual-help war-time veteran’s organization, and held its first meeting in Minneapolis of the same year.

The Preamble to the Constitution of the American Legion states the goals of the organization and reads as follows:



We associate ourselves together for the following purposes:

- To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America
- To maintain law and order
- To foster and perpetuate a one hundred percent Americanism
- To preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the Great Wars
- To inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation
- To combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses To make right the master of might
- To safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy
- To consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness

In 1920 the Fairport Post was established with Lauren Knapp as its first commander, and was named for James Willard Brooks and Howard Shepard who gave their lives in the conflict. Private Brooks died in the Argonne Forest on October 15, 1918, and his citation for bravery reads in part:

“Private Brooks stuck to his post under the most intense artillery fire, and when mortally wounded he refused to leave his post until another runner had been sent to relieve him.”

Brooks is buried in the Argonne American Cemetery. Howard Shepard was a member of the National Guard and was mustered into federal service in April 1917, promoted to Sergeant, and sent overseas in May. On September 30, 1918, his right thigh was shattered in the battle of the Hindenburg Line near St. Quentin. He died of his wounds on October 1, 1918 and was buried in the Somme American Cemetery.

Like the VFW, the American Legion supports a number of community projects, probably the best known being their baseball team. The Legion has traditionally supplied the village with flags that are usually flown between Memorial and Veterans Days. They also plant flowers and flags on the graves of veterans. The Legion helps to support a number of local organizations, among them the Dollars for Scholars program. The plaque and World War I guns at Potter Memorial owe their placement primarily to the Legion. In 1933 the Legion secured the cannons for a patriotic area in the new Perinton Park. Together with a flag pole, they remained there until they were moved to the war memorial next to the Potter house in 1948. The original plaque at the site was in memory of those who died in World War II. It was replaced in 1988, by both the Legion and the VFW, to honor all those who had served and died in all of America’s wars.

On the national level, the Legion lobbies for veterans in such areas as pension and health benefits. The annual civic training event called Boys' State is sponsored by the Legion. The Legion Auxiliary runs Girls' State. In 1935, concerned about the future of democratic institutions and deciding that the best way to learn democracy was by practicing it, Legionnaires began to gather teenage representative high schools together for a few days each summer to participate in creating mock governments and holding mock trials. They called it Boys' State and it remains a strong program in 49 of the 50 states.

Today the members of the local Brooks-Shepard American Legion Post, the VFW as well as the smaller Vietnam Veterans and Korean War Veterans groups continue to remind citizens of the sacrifice that so many have made to preserve our freedoms and urge them to honor country, flag, and, most importantly, those who continue to serve.