



# History of Post 291



*For God and Country*

Prior to 1924, a number of those who had served in World War I were residents of Newport Beach. Some of these men were active members of the Santa Ana Post of the American Legion. Others had been members of Posts in different localities, while the remainder had never joined the Legion. Such was the situation when Raymond Hitchcock Brunswick, namesake of his uncle, the musical comedy star of that era, and at the time a resident of Balboa decided to shoulder the task of organizing an American Legion in the Newport Beach area.

As a result of Brunswick's endeavors, an organizations meeting was held in the quarters of the Balboa Chamber of Commerce on January 15th, 1924, at which time the following men (30), signed the application for an American Legion Post charter:

## CHARTER MEMBERS POST 291

Frank Elmer Finster	Elmer Bruce Whitson
Ralph Lee Davis	Stuart A. Cundif
Ernest Grill, Jr.	Claude Corbin
Charles L. Weaver	Joseph Jost
Albert P. Jurnper	Theodore Robins
Reginald White	Lester Wilkin
Henry L. Sherman	Carl May
Eugene Reber	Frank L. Mathews
Clayton Thompson	Henry R. Greely
Louis W. Briggs	Israel Weiner
Norman Wilson	Percy J. Wilson
Eugene Fenelon	Harry J. Coon
Lloyd Claire	C.F. Clarke
Howard Smith	J. S. Welsh
Donald K. Kelly	Raymond H. Brunswick

After receiving their charter, the members of the new Post 291 honored organizer Raymond H. Brunswick by electing him the first Commander. Other office holders in the initial years were: Percy Wilson, Vice Commander; Ernest Grill, Adjutant; Dick Whitson, Finance Officer; Ted Robins, Sergeant at Arms; Joseph Jost, Chaplain and C. F. Clark, Historian.

For the first few months of the Post existence, meetings were held in the building known at the time (1924) as the

Lighthouse Café, formerly the Nuway, then the Rendezvous and, in 1931, the Green Dragon. Newport Harbor Post 291, of the Department of California, as the newly formed American Legion Unit was designated, and decided to issue a Post newspaper and H.L. Sherman was chosen to conduct the journal. The paper, known as the "Newport Harbor Legionnaire," was published monthly and made its debut in January of 1924. The publication remained in the hands of its first editor until October 1924, when Theodore Robins took over as editor. The first major problem confronting the new Post, which had a membership of seventy within three months of organization, was that of securing permanent meeting quarters. Rather than embark upon a regime of rented halls, the members of the Post decided to raise funds for the purchase of a suitable building site.

Fortunately, the Balboa Pavilion was not in use on Sunday nights during the spring of 1924 and, through the generosity of its owners, the Newport Bay Investment Company, this ballroom was secured for a series of benefit dances, at a nominal charge for lights and janitor services. The success of the Sunday night dances were marked and the weekly profits averaged between one and two hundred dollars. In addition to funds derived from the dances money was received from other sources as well. Mrs. W. Osgood (better know as Madame LaRue), was manager of the Balboa Theater and gave two benefit picture shows which materially aided the building fund. Sufficient money soon became available for the purchase of a building site, and a detailed investigation was made of all suitable locations. The Post finally decided to accept an offer from the City of Newport Beach to sell a track of land facing the bay and lying immediately east of 10th street for the sum of \$1,500! With the property went a 25-year lease on the tidelands intervening between it and the bay. Post 291 although chartered by the American Legion, had no legal existence and it became necessary to create a non-profit corporation in order to hold title to real property.

The purchase of the building site seriously depleted Post funds and it became necessary to mark time for a while before proceeding with construction work. Not only was it necessary to provide for the financing of a building, but the annual monetary needs of the Post also required consideration. A new series of fund-raising activities

was started which brought in more money and in October of 1924, the first of several building committees were appointed. Finally, in October 1925, construction started. The building, complete with all equipment including wiring and plumbing, cost \$1,900 and was financed by a mortgage from the Bank of Balboa. The hut was built almost entirely by volunteer labor provided by the Legionnaires and took about two months to complete. The first meeting was held in the new hut on December 2, 1925.

Following the acquisition of a hut, the Post put on its second great membership drive, starting February 16, 1926. Two teams, captained by J. Harry Estus and Harry Williamson respectively, competed and the Williamson team won. A dinner held in the hut on April 20th, 1926, was attended by over 80 members of the Post and various local citizens who had aided in the building work.

On March 16, 1926, the Post voted to use a portion of its property as a hut site for the Newport Beach troop of Boy Scouts of America. It's interesting to note that the Newport Beach Boy Scout Troop was formed in 1922 by Scoutmaster A.J. Twist. Scouting always had the problem of what to do with boys a year or two younger than the scout age of 12 years. Twist solved the problem by creating a branch called "Cubs". At that time, Cubs had no official standing in Scouting circles, but by 1929, the movement inaugurated by Twist was formally adopted and recognized by the National Council of Boy Scouts of America.

Shortly after the first hut was built, the tidelands suits were settled and it became possible to determine what use would be made of the bay front to the east of the Legion property. Also, the Pacific Electric tract to the west of the property was placed on the market. These two



Original Boy Scout Hut on 10th St. looking East (Photo courtesy Ken Taylor)

developments indicated a continuation of Bay Avenue westward from 8th Street (formerly 4th Street). Plans for the continuance of the street carried it through the center of the Legion property and the location of the Boy Scout hut. The original Legion property was very narrow in its north and south dimensions, and the tidelands, rented to the Post in conjunction with the land purchase, were much greater in area than the lot acquired by deed.

The Legion deeded back to the city of Newport Beach the land that would be needed for street purposes, and on November 2, 1930, Newport Beach sold to the Post the tidelands that were formerly leased.

As no court ruling, up to that time, had settled the tidelands situation in the vicinity of the Legion property, it was necessary to remove any doubt as to the status of the Post's title. This was done by a special act of the State Legislature, passed in the spring of 1931 and duly signed by Governor Rolph. Assemblyman Ted Craig of the town of Brea, himself a Legionnaire, kindly introduced the bill in the Assembly and its passage in the State Senate was attended to by Senator Nelson Edwards of Orange.

During all its history, Newport Harbor Post 291 has shown a steadfast commitment to supporting community based public service programs, not only in the City of Newport Beach, but throughout Orange County as well. This commitment includes: sponsorship of Boy Scout and Cub Scout organizations, Girl's and Boy's State, Oratorical and Americanism contests for local high school students and the near legendary nationwide American Legion baseball program. From its very beginning, Newport Harbor Post 291 demonstrated its dedication to the community-oriented programs of the city of Newport Beach. ■



Original Post 291 Hut on 10th St. looking East (Photo courtesy Ken Taylor)