

70 Years

Prologue

Draft

As with many narratives, events which are not documented, must be “cobbled” together from memory to establish a time frame and recognize individuals who helped define an organization’s history. Such is the case with how Post 147 journeyed from Folly Beach in 1951 to a little white house at 792 Folly Road, to where it is now. It has taken 70 years and the growing process has not been without difficulties and setbacks, but it has been punctuated with great investments from numerous individuals, men and women, who gave freely of their time, resources, and expertise to bring us to where we are now.

What is presented herein is by no means a finished or definitive piece of work. Thanks to Pat and Barbara Evans, who provided a good deal of information on events and people, it is a beginning which allows many others to come forward and contribute additional information, either verbally or with artifacts, to more completely frame what follows.

Please note: Where there is uncertainty, (**citation needed**) is used and those that have documents or artifacts that can better define a date or event are invited to bring this information forward. In doing so, it is hoped over time to assemble a more accurate history of our Post and its significant benchmarks.

The Early Years

In late September/ early October in 1951 (**citation needed**) Post 147 was born and was located at Folly Beach which is about five miles from its present location at 968 Folly Road on James Island. At this time, the Post was granted a temporary charter as it did not have the required ten members for a permanent charter. At its inception, Post 147’s 1st Commander was Landon Carter and Walter Gregg was the Adjutant. The exact location of the Post on Folly Beach is to be determined (**citation needed**) but it is surmised that meetings were held in the homes of members and in churches located on Folly Beach.

On November 7, 1966, the Post had ten members and filed for a permanent charter. The Charter was granted on December 7, 1966 (Pearl Harbor Day) and was received by Commander Mel Clayton and the Adjutant Clyde McLean. The Post’s name at this time was Folly Beach 147 even though a purchase of land had been made at 792 Folly Road on James Island. This was to later be renumbered as 968 Folly Road our present address. The Post was then affectionately known as the “little house” and thanks to the many contributions of people like George and Clyde Whetsel, Marion Cox, and Henry Gilbert the Post had a canteen, extensive electrical resources, air-conditioning, and a Bingo Room named Gilbert Hall.

As the “little house” was the focal site for all the Post functions, Pat and Barbara Evans built a handicap ramp and painted the building, inside and out while providing other volunteer services as needed which included cooking every Friday, as well as launching the Children’s Fund.

Under the leadership of Mel Clayton and his ten-member Executive Board, the newly located Post undertook several initiatives to involve and serve the local community. These included a School Awards Program, Girls and Boys State, Oratorical Contests, and Veterans Day celebrations to name a few.

In the late 60's Mel Clayton was joined by Bill Williams and together they began the legacy of Legion Baseball on James Island. In May 1984, Leon (**citation needed**) built the monument that still graces the front of our property. The monument and flowerbeds which followed were maintained over the years by Harry and Inge Sproles who also undertook many other projects to support the Post. Ms. Inge, as she was affectionately known, contributed her energies long after the passing of Harry and sadly we said "goodbye" to her in 2020.

A New Home & Era

In June of 1981, the remainder of the current property of 1.62 acres was acquired, a plat registered, and the construction of the present-day canteen was undertaken by Bobby and Quincey Kiser. The canteen named Kiser Hall had many other contributors over the years. Mike Anthony cleared trees and graded the entire property, Tom Conrey, in addition to his many other duties, donated to many projects, Harvey Thomas offered his plumbing expertise, and Al and Pat Wand added their talent to the continual landscaping of the property, cleaning, and food preparation for years to come.

There was also the passing of the torch in baseball as Jenny and Kurt Thomas took over from Mel Clayton and Bill Williams. The structure of the canteen bar was provided by Fred Downs who was assisted by Bill Caldwell who also provided much needed refrigeration.

John Rodgers appeared on the scene and over time was a Commander and a leading force in Boys State. As the canteen took shape Gene Bishop Sr. built the fireplace while John Lowe and Jim Churchill donated kitchen needs (washing machine and helped build the first pavilion). Mary and Bill Wade pitched in with needed AC and electrical work and Mitch Napier assisted with duct work for the effective use of the AC throughout the canteen.

On August 8, 1988, the structure of the Front Hall began to take shape. Indeed, if one looks at the northernmost front piling, you will see the name, M.L. Cox etched in cement to document the initial building project. No pun intended, the date is set in stone

Outside Fran and Charlie Perkins ensured that the pavilion was completed while donating to many other projects. Indeed, ultimately by virtue of the amount of work contributed by both, the pavilion was dedicated to Charlie in 2019.

Fortunate were we that we had the erstwhile Canadian on hand in the person of Maurice Reed who could always be counted on for remodeling and updating ceilings, bathrooms, or anything electric. He was not only a "Jack of all trades," he was also a master of many.

While all this was going on, Danny Geer was in the kitchen, the canteen, and cleaning business ensuring people were fed and cared for in a clean environment.

Along the Way

As our Post gained members, several Legionnaires stepped forward to improve the facility and the services rendered. Craig Ortwerth held many positions on the Executive Board and, as in civilian life, provided engineering services to improve the Front Hall. Dwight Cargile a long time Commander for 9 years provided labor and financial support for numerous projects. SAL members were also contributors as evidenced by Tim Gonzalos's granite work on the bar top and bathrooms in the Front Hall.

About 20 years ago (**citation needed**), Sam Brown, Pat Clute, and Mike Garvin began the Weenie Boys who unfailingly produced the best Friday seafood lunches in all of Charleston. No citation needed here. This group, which had an eclectic cast of characters over the years is now named the Seafood Crew, but to the diehards, they will always be the "Weenie Boys." This group had a profound impact on kitchen and canteen improvements. In 2018, with his passing, the kitchen was dedicated to Pat Clute and a short-lived fishing tournament was dedicated to Mike Garvin in (**citation needed**). We are fortunate to still have the good consul of Sam Brown.

As the canteen and Front Hall continued to be upgraded, many individuals pitched in to improve the aesthetics of both rooms. Bruce Harshman of the SAL was always available for labor, Bob Beatlecomb (**citation needed**) installed footrails, while Mike Powers and Rick Hollar were always available to contribute their construction talent. Sadly, in the process, we have held Post Everlasting for so many of our contributors.

The Journey Continues

In 2015, Dwight Cargile, after a nine-year tour of duty, passed the mantle of leadership to Chuck Blankin. Chuck in turn passed it along to Howie Caines and then on to Leonard Tant.

Moving forward, under the present Executive Board leadership, we have emerged from restrictions of the Covid Pandemic and have a fully operational facility with the strong support of the DAV, SAL, Auxiliary, Riders, and 40 & 8 organizations. We have also had the benefit for the last ten years of an exemplary Canteen Manager, Ms. Tina Baugh, who has provided much needed stability through the leadership changes.

We have also been represented in fine fashion by our Honor Guard begun by Vic Attaya who, over the years, has been involved in more than 1,300 (**citation needed**) functions which include ceremonies, funerals, and parades. Our Honor Guard not only serves the needs of our Post but has been called to action by many other American Legion and VFW Posts in the tri-county area.

Currently, under the command of Joe Yantorn, our Honor Guard is the only District 2 unit of the American Legion.

Up until August of 2020, we were proudly known as American Legion Post 147 of James Island. After a two-year process begun by Bill Wade and Ike Gethers and marshalled by Joe Lysaght, we received our requested proclamation as The PFC Ralph H Johnson, USMC, American Legion Post 147. On March 24, 2021, we held the Dedication Ceremony to rename the Post. PFC Johnson is a Medal of Honor Recipient (posthumously) who gallantly gave his life in Vietnam to save his fellow Marines. The dedication was attended by local, state, and national dignitaries and we were fortunate to have 17 members of Ralph's family on hand to pay homage to him. Foremost was Ralph's sister, Ms. Helen Richards, who is now the proud matriarch of the family and remains a dear friend of our Post. The event was made even more poignant because the keynote speaker was Major General James Livingston, USMC, himself a Medal of Honor Recipient and a member of Post 147.

Our future remains to be defined by those of us who must carry on. It has been said in hyperbole, "We stand on the shoulders of giants" and this is so true when we look at the men and women who persevered and sacrificed to gift us with what we have today – a Post dedicated to service to Legionnaires, their families, all other constituencies, and our community. We would be disloyal if we didn't cherish this legacy and build on it.

Epilogue

It is recognized that there are gaps and omissions in this presentation. It is hoped that those who read this will take the time reflect on people and events who were missed. In turn, let us know, for any shortcomings are unintentional and we look forward to all editorial suggestions, recommendations, or artifacts you may want to contribute as we further define the Ralph H Johnson, USMC, American Legion Post 147.

Thank you!

Jerry Huhn, Post Historian
Steve Driscoll, Commander

