

# WELCOME TO PHILMONT NEW YORK

## OLD PHILMONT #17 – American Legion By Charles R. Nichols

The National American Legion was organized in Paris, France in 1919, at a meeting known as the ‘Paris Caucus’ and was attended by two representatives from Columbia County. The department of New York was created with the help of Albert S. Callan of Chatham who was very active in the organization of the first five county posts and was appointed the first County Commander.

The Philmont post was organized in August of 1919, named after two men killed in action in World War I – Guy Minkler in France, and John Seery in Belgium— and numbered as Minkler-Seery Post 252. The first meeting was held in September, and for the first early years the post was ‘homeless’ and met wherever it could. Since the World War I veterans who founded the Legion were the logical successors of the Civil War veterans’ organization – the GAR – Grand Army of the Republic, it was fitting that they used their rooms for their first post rooms.



The first photo shows the ‘Fowler Block’ on Main Street which was across the street from the High Rock Mill and was destroyed in the mill fire. On the third floor, just above the barber in the window and to the right is a shield with “GAR POST” on it, and that indicated where their meeting room was.

In 1927, the Legion contracted with William Carney for rental of post rooms at \$300 per year. The building shown in photo #2 on the left with the awning was the building, and the rooms were on the second floor, with entry from Mill Street.



In 1948, the post made its final move to the quarters it presently occupies at Main Street and Railroad Avenue. The property was purchased from Eric and Rita Seaman, doing business as Orchardlawn Co., shown as purchased in photo #3.



The building itself has had an interesting history. It was originally built as the Empire House – an hotel built next to the Harlem tracks of the New York Central System in the 1880’s to take advantage of the travel to and from Philmont when it was a very busy business community, and is shown in photo #4 looking down street toward the station. Accompanying the hotel was the Empire Opera House. This housed various entertainment acts that would utilize the railroad to cover the circuit, and of course would boost the hotel room rentals. This is shown in photo #5 looking up hill, and across Railroad Avenue above the hotel. This photo is a post card, and the owner wrote “Ida – Don’t this look like the Opera Houses in Hartford”. I’m not sure if he was kidding or not !!



After the hotel phase, the building was used for some years as a manufacturing facility – textile sewing primarily. Two of the companies were Orchardlawn Company; High-R-Mode Corporation. Both owned and operated by Eric and Rita Seaman.

Over the years the Legion has been active in raising money to support the Post, including block parties; minstrels; and outdoor carnivals.

The Legion uses the building for its meetings, storage of regalia and memorabilia, and banquets and bingo. These last required that certain changes be made to the building. In 1967 a 30' x 70' addition was created. A kitchen wing was added.

The last photos taken are the Legion as it appears today (2009)



This stone in front of post building:



This water cooled heavy .30 machine gun is one of a pair deactivated guns in front of the post building



This photo is the rear of the post building.



Legion  
activities are

not confined to the post. The members are involved in every patriotic holiday, and have taken part – in fact taken the lead – in the promotion of all the memorials in the Village. The members decorate the graves of departed veterans in the Mellenville and Sacred Heart cemetery, as well as others including a veteran of the Revolutionary War buried in Harlemville. The Legion Hall now also acts as an emergency shelter in case of disaster.

The present officers of the Post are:

Commander	Donald Sartori
Vice-Commander	Louis Hotaling
Adjutant	Jeffrey French

Philmont men also hold state office;

3 <sup>rd</sup> District Boy State Director	– Richard Morris
Co-Chair State Oratorical Committee	– Jeffrey French

The membership, unfortunately, is shrinking like every other membership organization, and for many of the same causes. As a result, the membership recently voted to put the building up for sale, citing insufficient income to carry the cost.

Charles R. Nichols,  
50 Year Legion Member