

Forty and Eight Veteran's Organization

The **Forty and Eight** is an organization of veterans of the United States Armed Forces. Its official name is "La Société des Quarante Hommes et Huit Chevaux," which is French, and translates as "The Society of Forty Men and Eight Horses."



The official emblem of the 40 & 8. The triangular shape suggests Veterans who served in the air, on land and at sea.



40 & 8 Boxcar in Independence Day Parade, Ypsilanti, Michigan

The organization (also known as "La Société") can trace its roots back to 1920, when Joseph W. Breen and 15 other members of the American Legion, who were veterans of World War I, came together and founded it as an honor society for certain Legion members. They envisioned a new and different level of elite membership and camaraderie for leaders of the American Legion.

The title "40 & 8" comes from the box cars that were used to transport troops to the front in France. Each car had the emblem 40/8 stenciled on the sides, which meant that it could carry 40 men or 8 horses. These cars were known as forty-and-eights. They were seen by the troops as a miserable way to travel, and the new organization was thus called the 40 & 8 in an attempt to make some light of the common misery they had all shared.

In 1929 it was described as "the fun-making organization of the American Legion."

In 1959 the 40 & 8 became independent of the American Legion when the Legion's National Commander, Martin McKneally, discontinued the 40 & 8 as an organization within the American Legion for having racially discriminatory membership requirements. The 40 & 8 subsequently modified their membership rules to include minorities and women and still required membership in the American Legion until 2008.

Eligibility

Membership is by invitation and open to all Honorably Discharged Veterans and all Military Personnel currently serving the United States Armed Forces, per a 2008 change to Article IV of la Société's constitution. Combat service is not required for membership.

From the beginning, La Société only allowed men into its ranks, even though many women were veterans in their own right and thus, could have been eligible. But that changed at the 2006 National Convention, when the majority of delegates present voted to allow women into the ranks for the first time.

Activities

The Forty and Eight is involved in several charitable causes.

Child Welfare

La Société's first program was designed to provide care and scholarships for the children of servicemen not returning home after World War I. Today; the Child Welfare program is mostly involved with providing help for any family with children under 18 that have been devastated by some disaster.

Nurses' Training

La Société provides scholarships to people desiring to become nurses under the Nurses' Training program. A prospective nurse need not be a military veteran to receive aid under this program.

Youth Sports

La Société also helps to finance sports programs for children who are disadvantaged in some way, such as through mental or physical challenges or lack of money. People who receive this aid need not be military veterans.

Carville Star

As one of their ongoing programs, the Voyageurs Militaire offer continuing support of the publication, "The Carville Star," which disseminates the information regarding the research into Hansen's Disease (Leprosy) taking place in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. There they have been successful in isolating, controlling and soon, through their research, the development of a vaccine to prevent Hansen's Disease. "The Star" is published at the former United States Public Health Service Hospital located in Carville, Louisiana. This patient-published publication carries the research works of not only this center, but those of the rest of the world, and is translated into and forwarded to 128 countries in addition to a circulation of more than 60,000 in the United States.

Organization

The local unit of the 40 & 8 is the Voiture (boxcar). It often covers a specific city, county, or American Legion post. Above that is the Grande (state) level. Each state has its own Grande, as well as the District of Columbia, and there are Grandes for Mexico, France, Latin America and several other locations where US military veterans make their homes abroad. 40 & 8 National Headquarters is located in Indianapolis, Indiana. 40 & 8 members refer to each other as "Voyageurs" (voyagers), in that all members have shared the demands and hardship of military service and have taken the same journey. They are also known as Forty-and-Eighters.

The 40 & 8 is down significantly in membership numbers compared to years past, but it is still very much in existence with a membership of about 21,000 in 2019.

Although the 40 & 8 is not a classical secret society, much of the ritual is a secret to non-members. Some veterans' organizations are like this. A member can disclose that he or she belongs to said organization, but not all of what goes on at its meetings. An official meeting of the 40 & 8 is known as a Promenade. It has its own set ritual.

The ceremony to initiate a new member, known as a P.G. for Poor Goof or Prisoner de Gare into the 40 & 8 is known as a wreck. Anyone wishing to enter the 40 & 8 must be wrecked, after which the initiate has earned the right to be referred to as a Voyageur Militaire and a full member of La Société.

Notable Members

- Lonnie O. Aulds (1925–1984), member of the Louisiana House of Representatives from 1968 to 1972
- Wally Barron, Governor of West Virginia
- Prescott Bush (1895–1972), U.S. Senator
- John J. Doles (1895–1970), state senator, school board member, banker, and farmer from Bossier Parish, LA
- William Pike Hall, Sr. (1896–1945), Louisiana state senator for Caddo and DeSoto parishes, 1924 to 1932, Shreveport attorney
- Don Hathaway (born 1928), sheriff of Caddo Parish, Louisiana, 1980–2000
- E. Snapper Ingram (1884–1966), Los Angeles City Council member and Chef de Chemin de Fer
- Charles A. Marvin (1929–2003), Louisiana judge
- William T. Sullivan, Wisconsin state legislator
- Roscoe Turner, Flamboyant air racing champion.
- Frank Voelker, Jr. (1921–2002), Louisiana attorney and politician
- Richard B. Wigglesworth, U.S. Representative and Ambassador to Canada
- Harry S. Truman (1884–1972), 33rd President of the United States

Forty-and-Eights

- (French: Quarante et huit, typically written 40/8 or 40&8) were French 4-wheel covered goods wagons designed to hold 40 men or eight horses. Introduced in the 1870s, they were drafted into military service by the French Army in both World Wars. They were also used by the occupying Germans during in World War II, followed by the Allies.

During World War II



- British soldiers on board a quarante et huit wagon in France in 1939. The stencilled sign in the top right of the picture says "HOMMES 40 : CHEVAUX (en long) 8". The shared experience among Allied soldiers spawned groups such as the Forty and Eight veterans organization.
 - Between 1940 and 1944 occupying German forces used Forty-and-eights to transport troops, POWs, horses, freight, and civilian prisoners to concentration camps.
- Following the Allied landing at Normandy in June, 1944, the Germans were pushed eastward towards the Rhine. Trains of Forty-and-eights were frequent targets of opportunity for Allied fighter-bombers, with carloads of prisoners occasionally being victimized. As France was liberated Forty-and-eights were used to transport Allied soldiers and materials to the shifting front through War's end in 1945.

Merci Train

- In 1949, France sent 49 Forty-and-eights to the United States laden with donations from citizens of France in thanks for the U.S.' role in the liberation of France, one for each of the then forty-eight states and one for Washington, D.C., and Hawaii to share. Called the Merci Train, it was sent in response to the Friendship Train America had created two years earlier to aid France in the dire immediate aftermath of World War II. Over 700 boxcars worth of donated supplies were collected across the U.S. and shipped across the Atlantic via donated transport.

