

The Veterans Memorial Museum Newsletter



May 2015

The Museum is open Wednesday - Saturday 10 a.m. until 4 p.m.
To set up a tour call the Museum at 256-883-3737 during Museum hours.

Museum News

by Dennis Gaare



Buy a General Admission ticket to the U.S. Veterans Memorial Museum for a friend. Tickets may be obtained at the Museum office.

- The Veterans' Museum's library continues to expand into the space recently made available by The City of Huntsville. We completed cleaning and painting of the new addition. Custom shelves are built which cover the entire east and west walls of the WWII room. We are in the process of moving thousands of books to rooms that will be organized by era. Books about events before World War II will be located in the Pre WW2 room. Books about events after World War II will be located in the Post WW2 room. We will have a room for World War II books, Tanks & Vehicles, Biography and Unit History. If the public wants to do research, they can use the reference table



located in the unit room. The library and archive staff will work out of the library office.

- Elvis Presley benefit concert was held on 4-25-15. The Museum provided a jeep marked up in Elvis Presley's U.S. Army unit markings for this event to support The Huntsville Madison County Veterans Memorial Foundation. We hope everyone attended and supported this organization.
- Thanks to the hard work of John Omenski, Elvis's jeep was waiting on the aliens to return him at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center at a special event 4-23-15.
- On April 23 the Little Civil War Roundtable met at Veterans' Museum. Larry Bayer hosted the meeting and gave a special presentation on the 1865 sinking of the Sultana in the Mississippi River. It was the worst maritime disaster in U.S. history, with a loss of some 1,800 lives, mostly released Union prisoners returning home after the Civil War.



Upcoming Events

by Randy Withrow

The following events are scheduled at the Museum:

May 4th, the Board of Directors for the Madison County Military Heritage Commission meets at the Museum @ noon.
May 6th, Redstone Arsenal Community Wives Club will present a check to the Museum, time tbd.
May 13th, Madison Bible Academy group tour, 0900.
May 13th, U.S. Army Warrant Officer Association meets @ Museum, 1130
May 15th, New Hope Elementary 6th grade Museum tour, 0900
MAY 16th, Armed Forces Day. Museum/Dixie Division Historic Military Vehicle Rally @ Museum
May 20th, BBC Academy 7th & 8th grade Museum tour 10AM
May 22, Association of U.S. Army breakfast meeting @ Museum 0630
May 25th, Support and Attend Memorial Day Service @ Maple Hill Cemetery, 1100
May 30th. Provide vehicle display to Madison Public Library, 0730-1100. Provide vehicle display to Yulista/Madison County Executive Airport 10AM to 4PM

Museum Artifact

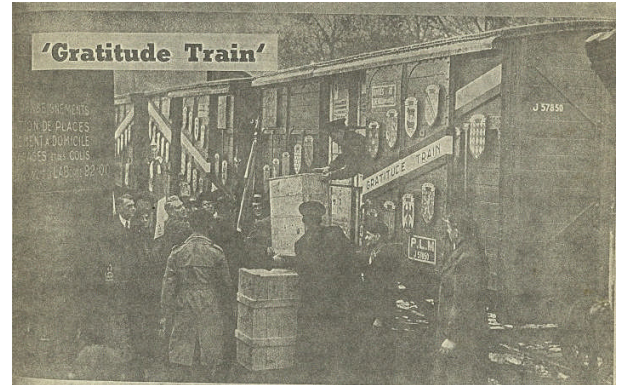
by Harlan Hurley & Eli Geher

40 & 8" boxcar

In 1948 France assembled a "Gratitude Train" consisting of 49 French railroad boxcars built between 1872 and 1885 and used up until the end of WWII. In military use during World War I, the boxcars were labeled as having a capacity of "40 horses or 8 men". The "40 & 8" boxcars were given to the United States in gratitude for the help we provided France in the post-World War II period. An estimated six million French families contributed something of value to fill the cars with over 250 tons of various personal gifts. One car would go to each of the 48 states. The District of Columbia and the territory of Hawaii would share the 49th boxcar. Congress passed a law permitting the train and its contents to enter the United States duty free. The boxcar destined

for Alabama was loaded aboard the S.S. Magellan in Le Havre, France. The ship sailed on January 13, 1949 and arrived in New York on February 3, 1949.

Since the wheels of the boxcars were design for the French gauge railroads the "40 & 8" boxcars were hoisted onto flatcars for their overland journey in the U.S The boxcars being shipped to each state had to be carried on American flat cars making the load too high in some cases to clear the tunnels and bridges.



The train being loaded with over 250 tons of gratitude in France.

The Southern Railroad carried the boxcars bound for the Southeast. The Alabama boxcar arrived in Montgomery, Alabama at 6:00 AM on February 11, 1949.

The 1879 boxcar was given to the State of Alabama on February 11, 1949. The boxcar was then given to the Huntsville's "40 & 8" Society, Voiture 1012. The "40 & 8" was a subgroup within the American Legion at that time and was designated as the official custodian of the boxcar. Voiture 1012 is located in Huntsville and at that time was the sole chapter in Alabama. The "40 & 8" boxcar was parked on an unused siding of the Norfolk & Southern Railway on American Legion Post 237 property behind the Hullabaloo Club on South Memorial Parkway. The boxcar remained on the property after the property was sold to an individual. In 1968 the Madison County Sheriff raided the "40 & 8" boxcar and destroyed 12 slot machines being stored in the old boxcar.



The "40 & 8" boxcar being loaded for its trip to Cathedral Caverns.

The American Legion Post 237 had voted to give the city of Huntsville the "40 & 8" boxcar in 1965. The city did not know that the boxcar had been given to them and did not remove the boxcar from the lot. The "40 & 8" boxcar remained where it was until approximately 1970 when it was moved by somebody to a nursery school on South Parkway. In April of 1974 the boxcar was moved to Cathedral Caverns near Grant, Alabama to mark the entrance to the national landmark. On July 17, 1980 the American Legion Post 237 requested that the boxcar be move from Cathedral Caverns to the Huntsville Depot and Museum. By this time the boxcar had been sitting at the entrance of Cathedral Caverns for over ten years and was in terrible condition due to many years of weather exposure and general neglect. In 1985 the old boxcar was finally moved from Cathedral Caverns to the Huntsville Depot and Museum. The move, and was accomplished by the Alabama National Guard through the efforts of James Record, the Chairman of the Madison County Commission.

At the Huntsville Depot, volunteers rebuilt the boxcar to the condition it was in when it arrived in Alabama. Unfortunately, the decorations carried at original delivery were no longer documented, and researcher used the markings of the North Carolina boxcar instead. The "40 & 8" Voiture 1012 requested that the restored boxcar be moved into the Round House to protect it from the weather but the Huntsville Depot declined due to space issues.



The "40 & 8" boxcar on display at the U.S. Veterans Memorial Museum.

In 2000, an agreement was reached with the Huntsville City Council, which resulted in the boxcar being moved to the U.S. Veterans Memorial Museum where it could be displayed inside the Museum building. Inside the "40 & 8" boxcar are displayed artifacts from the First World War. Voiture 1012 remains the official custodian and, now a separate organization from the American Legion; their officers make an annual visit of inspection.

Historical facts

by Harlan Hurley

U.S. Veterans Memorial Museum.

The building the U.S. Veterans Memorial Museum is in was an airplane hangar located at the old Huntsville airport located in south Huntsville.

In the 1950s the field had two 4,000' paved runways, with two small buildings located northeast of the runway intersection. This earliest photo, which has been located of the Huntsville's Airport, is a 1943 aerial view.

Runway 8/36 was extended to 5,200' in the mid-1950s. The control tower located near the airplane hangar was built in late 1956. Southern airlines came in 1958. The Huntsville office of the National Weather Service opened at the Huntsville Airport in 1958.

General aviation continued to use the old Huntsville airport until early 1968 when the FBO facility was finished at the new airport." The old control tower was being used as a police headquarters and for the police academy until the mid-1990s when the control tower itself was removed, and new roads cut through the old airport.



After 1970 the airplane hangar was converted to a work release jail for the Huntsville Police Department. The facility on the west side of the hangar became the city employee medical clinic. In 2000 the hangar became the home of the Veterans Memorial Museum.

The photo to the right is a 2001 aerial view of the hangar, just north of the terminal building. Note the tank & several other armored vehicles parked around the hangar as the Veterans Memorial Museum began to take shape.

That land is now home to the Veterans Memorial Museum with its array of surplus military equipment. By 2014 the Huntsville Fire & Rescue Station 6, relocated to Drake Avenue along with the city employee medical clinic. The city tore down the fire station and the terminal building.

The U.S. Veterans Memorial Museum now occupies both the hangar and medical clinic.



Our Volunteers

Harlan Hurley

Harlan began working at the Veterans Memorial Military Museum Library in 2010. He designed the database control program for the Museum Library and the Museum inventory program. He is also working on the Museum Newsletter.

Harlan joined the United State Air Force and worked on F4C Phantom aircraft. Upon leaving the Air Force, he earned a BSEE from Florida Institute of Technology. In 1971 he moved to Huntsville to work for Sperry Rand Corporation. In 1978 he began working for Chrysler Corporation. He retired from Chrysler in 2007.



General Information

The U.S. Veterans Memorial Museum located in Huntsville Alabama *is* a 501c3 not-for-profit organization. There are more than 30 historical military vehicles from World War I to the present as well as artifacts and other memorabilia dating back to the Revolutionary War. Displays include a "Merci" 40 et 8 boxcar from World War I, a Cobra attack helicopter, a collection of jeeps, Sherman tanks and Stuarts, a half-track and flags, maps, uniforms and other artifacts from every U.S. conflict. The Museum is located just west of Memorial Pkwy in John Hunt Park at 2060A Airport Road, Huntsville, AL 35801. The U.S. Veterans Memorial Museum is dedicated to promoting the accomplishments of American military men and women.

The Museum's web page is www.memorialmuseum.org.

The Museum email of is Info@memorialmuseum.org.

If you would like to be removed from our mailing list, send "REMOVE" to Info@memorialmuseum.org.

Follow the U.S. Veterans Memorial Museum on Facebook.

If you would like to be "ADDED" to our mailing list, send "Add to Newsletter" to Info@memorialmuseum.org.