

## The 40&8 and Carville: A Rich Tradition

*When Tom Adams, a member of the American Legion and the 40 & 8 and the Nationale Directeur of The Star Project learned that I was writing an article on the history of Carville and the Legion, he volunteered to read my article and to offer his own reflections. The following is his more complete history of Carville, the Legion and the 40&8 from 1931 to the present.CM*

It is intriguing that 20+ veterans would vault patient concerns at Carville to national prominence through a relationship with a newly-formed American Legion. It was fortuitous that someone as politically influential as Sam Jones, Department (Louisiana State) Commander of the Legion and later Governor of Louisiana, could lead the charge on behalf of Carville patients. At their first meeting with Commander Jones, patients expressed concerns over lack of recreational activities and an inadequate hospital, both of which would be promptly addressed by the Commander.

An article Commander Jones wrote for the Legion's national magazine represented the first time someone from the "outside" advocated improvements to living conditions at Carville. The Legion wasted little time in bolstering its relationship with Carville patients and promoting legislation to affect changes at Carville. In less than one year from the initial meetings with patients in 1931, the Legion had successfully lobbied in Washington for a new hospital facility at Carville that was completed in 1935. On a smaller but no less important scale, the Legion gained state support to install the first telephone for patient use in Carville. According to Stanley Stein the Legion succeeded in lifting the ban that had prohibited the patients from returning empty Coca Cola bottles for refunds. Prior to the Legion's actions the local Coca Cola distributor

would sell the product to Carville but, fearful of repercussions from other customers, he would not accept empty bottles for refunds. .

The Legion teamed with Carville's Patient Federation to gain approval for a five million dollar project to replace wooden buildings and housing with modern, fireproof structures. These buildings opened in 1941 and featured a massive recreational facility replete with a ballroom, post office, library, canteen, and lounges.

While there were incremental changes from 1931 onward, patient reform efforts accelerated with the formation of the National Advisory Committee, formed by Legionnaires and physicians appointed by the surgeon general. The first meeting occurred in 1946 opening new and significant doors to patients. In that first year of formation the committee and patients pressed for and finally achieved voting rights. At about the same time, with assistance from the Patient Federation and *The Star*, the gates of Carville were opened to visitors to freely interact with patients. In December, patients learned that the advisory committee had acted upon many patient concerns including hiring a professional writer to assist *The Star's* editor and acquiring more liberal leave for patients.

By 1949 the American Legion Auxiliary had contributed four station wagons to transport Carville patients. They also were supportive of many patient recreational activities including baking cakes for support of golf tournaments. The American Legion Auxiliary of Bogalusa Louisiana hired a seamstress to sew for incapacitated women patients. (This latter to me is a poignant, practical, and generous offer. Many were fearful of HD patients, uncomfortable with the idea of even casual contact of touch. Yet these women and the seamstress let compassion trump fear. CM)

Stanley Stein recognized 40&8 as the third veterans' organization (following the Legion and its Auxiliary) to appear at Carville. In *Alone No Longer*, he says " I hesitate to think what the hospital would be like today if veterans had not been committed here, for it was through the vets that the national organizations became interested in Carville as a whole." Other veterans' organizations at Carville were American Veterans, Disabled American Veterans, and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

The first documented contribution of the Forty and Eight at Carville occurred in 1943 , when a voyageur from Arkansas contacted the 40&8's Grand du Louisiana regarding the need for a printing press for *The Star*. In December 1943 the Grand presented a press and all its accessories as a Christmas present to Stanley Stein and *The Star*.

In 1959 the 40&8 severed its ties with the American Legion becoming a separate and independent organization. While the Legion influence and activity at Carville waned with the passing of the years and diminished demand for advocacy of patient grievances, 40&8's support to Carville remained steadfast. The Carville Star Program is currently one of the 40&8's seven major programs. 40&8 funds publication and distribution of *The Star*, keeping alive the legacy of "radiating the truth about Hansen's disease." The Carville Star Program funds projects for the Carville Historic District, most recently installing interpretive signage throughout the District for touring visitors. The National Hansen's Disease Museum at Carville the beneficiary of 40&8 support houses displays to tell the story of 40&8 involvement at Carville.

The 40&8 is a proud organization with Carville tightly bound into its history and tradition. No other veterans' organization has as a declared mission to disseminate information

to promote understanding of a disease. My comments in the 40&8's magazine sum up my feelings about the relationship and the strong bonds that have been formed.

*Our La Societé is an organization filled with traditions incorporated into our rituals and our programs like Carville Star. In the musical Fiddler on the Roof, Tevye addresses the importance of tradition when he says "Because of our traditions, we have kept our balance for many, many years...we have traditions for everything...You may ask, how did this tradition start? I'll tell you. I don't know. But it's a tradition. And because of our traditions, every one of us knows who he is, and what God expects him to do. Traditions, traditions. Without our traditions, our lives would be as shaky as... as... as a fiddler on the roof!" And so it is with La Societé with our traditions insuring our identity - who we are and what we stand for."*