

Polk Armory

By Lori Adams

The original purpose of an armory was to store weapons and ammunition and to conduct the business of the National Guard; but if there was any building in Ashland County history that was utilized for this and much more, it was the Polk Armory.

The armory was originally utilized for military purposes but was also used as government offices, a temporary school, community center, and overall meeting and party location for nearly 100 years. The armory was built by the State of Ohio in 1880 and then purchased by the village in 1900.

Local troops from Company C of the 8th Regiment trained at the Polk Armory as they prepared to serve in the Spanish-American War. They left for Cuba on April 24, 1898, where a large crowd gathered for an official sendoff.

The Lucas-Vaughn Post 219 of the American Legion was formed after World War I and met at the armory. The Post was named for Olin Vaughn and Earl Lucas, casualties of World War I.



The Polk Armory in about 1907

During World War II, an Honor Roll listing the names of local servicemen and women who lost their lives was mounted on the balcony of the building.

After the Polk school burned down in 1903, the armory was used as a classroom for upper grade classes until the new school was built.



A group photo of Company C of the 8th Regiment prior to leaving for Cuba

The village council met at the armory, and it was a voting location for many years. In its early years, the Polk fire department kept a hand-drawn, wooden-wheeled pumper in the building. When Harlow Wiltout was the postmaster, the armory also served as the post office.

The building was the headquarters when Polk celebrated its centennial celebrations in 1949. Maj. Gen. Stanley E. Reinhart, a native of Polk and Ashland County's top ranking soldier, served as the principal speaker. He spoke on the topic, "The Privilege of Being a Citizen of Polk." A history of the community was presented, and members of Ashland's Harry Higgins Post 88 of the American Legion provided music under the direction of Sidney Boyd.

POLK ARMORY

High school basketball games were played at the armory until 1962 when Mapleton Consolidated Schools were opened. Polk won four consecutive county championships from 1926 to 1930. In 1929, they won the Class B district championship under Coach Wade Stauffer. Merle and Elsworth Kiplinger, Russel Bryan, Clair Wiley, Bill Wise, John Welch, Pete McFadden, and Darrel Hartsel played on the team.

Girls' basketball teams also drew crowds at the armory. There was an annual Thanksgiving Eve game played between the alumni and current team members that was quite popular.

High school graduations, plays, and school programs were played on the armory stage. Two significant stage presentations were the comic ritual "A Womanless Wedding," and the classic "A Christmas Carol." Dances and roller skating parties were also common events.

The annual Halloween masquerade parties, Memorial Day services, and Lions Club sponsored New Year's Eve parties were held at the armory; and many clubs such as the Cub Scouts, 4-H, and Farm Bureau Council met there. Churches also enjoyed dinners there, auctions were held, and even a barbershop did business at the armory at one time.



More than 1,000 people attended the sendoff for local men who trained at the Polk Armory and served in the Spanish-American War

In 1972, the Polk Armory was razed by Amish horses as Polk natives watched the rafters being pulled down. They reminisced about the events they once attended there. Later, the Polk volunteer fire department burned the remainder of the debris.

There is no doubt that the Polk area more than got their use out of the building, which they bought from the State of Ohio for \$440. The building was located just east of the town square.



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