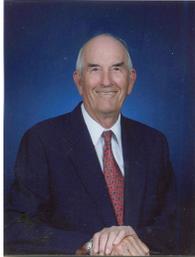


# Missouri State Society Daughters of the American Revolution



## Patriot of the Month

June 2016



*John Kohonen*

Sponsored by:

Rev. John Clark Chapter



John Kohonen's great-grandparents came from Germany between 1840 and 1850. Three of them were farmers and settled in the Florissant area. Legend has it that they arrived with a suitcase in one hand and \$20.00 in the other. At the time of their death, they all owned extensive amounts of farmland. The best known was Frank Gettemeier, the original owner and builder of the The Gettemeier House; this is now a museum and the office of the Florissant Historical Society.

John grew up on the farm of his great-grandfather, Stroer. He attended Sacred Heart Grade School, Ferguson High School, and lastly Ranken Technical College, where he received an Associate's Degree in Industrial Electricity.

He was sworn into the Army Air Corps at an air show on July 4, 1944, to the applause of several thousand attendees. He states, "That was always the highlight of my military career." He went into the Air Corps as an air cadet with the plan to become a pilot. When he completed basic training, he had grown to 6'- 2 1/2" tall, disqualifying him from pilot training.

John was sent overseas and was assigned to the 1943rd Engineers. He participated in the construction of an air base on Guam that was one of the largest supply depots west of Hawaii. "We were preparing for the invasion of Japan. After dropping the atomic bombs, the war ended very suddenly, thereby saving an estimated three more years of fighting and in excess of 250,000 casualties," said John.

John states, "All of our enlistments read 'duration plus six months.' There were 16 million of us in the military, spread all over the world. The logistics of getting all of us home and processed for discharge was a monumental task; impossible to perform in six months. A Point system was established where those with the longest service time and those credited with campaign ribbons, citations, medals or who were married received priority. I had none of the above; so I did not receive my discharge as a sergeant until October 1946."

John started his own business, Kay Bee Electrical Contractors, on March 7, 1948. His first warehouse was a barn on his father's farm. His first desk was his mother's dining room table. The business is now operated by his two sons. They have approximately 100 employees making them one of the largest electrical contractors in the metropolitan area. It is the oldest business in Florissant under the same family ownership.

1949 was a great year for John. That was the year he married the lovely Mary Lee Gerhart. They had forty-three wonderful years together and three children. They have thirteen grandchildren and fourteen great-grandchildren (and counting).

John is the last surviving charter member of the Florissant Businessmen's Association and the Florissant Chamber of Commerce, now known as "The Greater North County Chamber of Commerce." He served on the Board of Directors of both organizations. He has served on the Board of Directors of The Lindbergh Bank, The Florissant Branch of Centere Bank and The Citizen's Bank of Florissant.

He is a member of St. Angela Merici Church, American Legion Post 444, Glen Echo Country Club, The Academy of Electrical Contracting and Veteran member of the St. Louis Chapter of NECA (National Electrical Contractors Association).

John stated, "After the death of my wife; just when I felt that life was not worth living, a lovely lady, Jean Springmeier became part of my life. She has made my twilight years like a beautiful sunset. Jean is a member of the new Reverend John Clark Chapter DAR. "Thanks Jean for all the wonderful years that we have spent together. I love you."

The Daughters of the Reverend John Clark Chapter DAR are proud to nominate John Kohnen as Patriot of the Month and extend their gratitude for his patriotic service and commitment to our great nation.