

A Brief History to Mark the First 70 Years of the Oak Ridge League of Women Voters 1946 to 2016

1946—1956

In early June 1946 a meeting was held at Thelma Present's home to discuss the formation of an Oak Ridge chapter of the League of Women Voters. Members of the Knoxville League attended to help with the organization. The president of the Knoxville League brought National League President Anna L. Strauss to the meeting, which attended by 33 women. On June 17, an organizational meeting was held at the Oak Ridge High School auditorium and women interested in "good government" were invited to attend.

Temporary officers were elected including three vice presidents, a secretary, and a treasurer. An election for permanent officers was scheduled for September. At this meeting, attended by the Tennessee League President and Vice President, a fourfold program was announced: world famine relief, national and international aspects of atomic legislation, social welfare, and good government and its application to Oak Ridge.

One of the first actions taken by the League was to send a telegram to the House Military Affairs Committee and other congressional leaders to urge against further military control in the production of atomic power.

In July, the League took on the dilemma of Oak Ridge having only one polling place, with 12 booths, which was not considered sufficient to accommodate the 2100 citizens who had paid their poll tax and were qualified voters. As a result of the League's efforts 26 booths were available for the August 1 election, which was held at an Army barracks at the corner of Scarboro Road and the Oak Ridge Turnpike. Before the election the League held its first candidate forum for those seeking elective office in Anderson County.

The League held its permanent election in September. Agnes Allen was elected the first Oak Ridge League president.

In October the League held another candidate forum for the 53 people vying for 12 seats on the Oak Ridge Town Council.

A successful campaign was held from October 24 to November 7, with the goal of raising \$500 from business people in the community to be used by the League in their community efforts. At the same time, a membership drive increased the League membership to 67. At that time yearly dues were \$2.

In November the League set out to fight inflation by following a policy set by the National League in which women were urged not to pay inflated prices, to buy only

goods that were plentiful and to use substitutes for scarce foods. A Speakers Bureau was formed to present facts about selective buying to churches and other civic groups.

1956—1966

The League began the year with a meeting to discuss East-West trade. Attendees were urged to write their legislators asking for prompt passage of the bill for establishing the Organization for Trade Cooperation. In February the League mailed copies of a new 48-page pamphlet, "The Program Record," to Parents Advisory Council members of the National League. This publication described the League's concerns regarding a range of issues from public education to international cooperation.

At the March meeting, the League decided to take up problems and methods of incorporation to continue its work on the Oak Ridge Facts Advisory Council (ORFAC). A second topic covered measures to increase public understanding of county government. In April the League announced it would offer free rides to Clinton for those who wanted to register to vote in the upcoming Anderson County election primary on May 22.

As a service to voters, questionnaires were sent to the candidates for Anderson County Sheriff, and their responses were published in *The Oak Ridger*. At the end of May, the League sponsored a meeting at the City Administration Building at which ORFAC presented a progress report. In June, an editorial in *The Oak Ridger* offered enthusiastic congratulations to the League for reaching its tenth anniversary by stimulating a keen civic consciousness of good government in our city. The League celebrated with a birthday party held at the Starlight Room of the Oak Terrace. Membership had now reached 145. The history of the League was given in a series of these "minutes of the last meeting" by members of the group. An impressive list of "projects named, missions accomplished" was revealed through these ten years of minutes.

A forum was held on July 30 at the Oak Ridge High School cafeteria; each candidate had a table at which they were able to chat with voters. Some 35 local organizations were invited to attend with a bronze plaque awarded to the group having the largest number of members present. The Women's Clubs of both the Democratic and Republican parties had cakes for sale. The hot topics that came up during Q&A sessions included tax reassessment, Negro rights, labor laws, and city incorporation.

The League moved into a new office in the Girl Scout building at the corner of Tennessee Avenue and Nesper Road in August. A meeting was held to discuss and evaluate federal loyalty-security programs, with recognition of the need for safeguarding national security and protecting individual liberties. In September, meetings were devoted to a study of state tax-supported institutions for children. Reports were given about field visits to these institutions made by League representatives throughout the state. The statewide League chapters then compiled a

set of standards to be used as criteria for evaluating these institutions.

In October the League hosted Mrs. Elizabeth Daltrop of Germany, a visitor to the United States under the auspices of the State Department. She commented that the close cooperation between organizations to promote democracy impressed her the most. The League approved the entire proposed general law for a permissive Oak Ridge charter.

In November the League provided speakers to civic, church, and social organizations interested in learning more about Tennessee's state institutions for children. The effects of delinquency, emotional and physical disabilities, and ways in which these conditions affect children had been a matter of concern to the League.

In late November, a letter was sent to the editor of *The Oak Ridger* to encourage creation of a committee to plan for an evaluation and reassessment of all county property, especially since the county would soon have a large amount of revenue from Oak Ridgers' property taxes.

1966—1976

In January the League met to plan the program for the coming year. Some topics suggested for discussion were transportation and parks and recreation. Topics suggested about the county were city-county relations and the organization of county government. An editorial in *The Oak Ridger* in February commended the local League for compiling a list of women willing to do jury duty. The state had only recently given women the privilege of serving as jurors, and the Anderson County Jury Commission had been having trouble finding women jurors.

The League helped to coordinate a model session of the United Nations General Assembly at Oak Ridge High School in March. Three items were up for debate: "Should Red China be Admitted to Membership in The United Nations"; "Should The United Nations Charter be Amended to Make Mandatory the Financial Support of Peacekeeping Organizations Authorized by The General Assembly"; and "Should There be a Time Limit on Peacekeeping Operations."

The Anderson County Quarterly Court agreed to a reorganization of the Anderson County Community Action Commission. Squire William Trapp of Oak Ridge charged that the Commission had not accomplished anything in its 18-month existence. Oak Ridge Squire Clyde Claiborne moved that Planned Parenthood and the Oak Ridge League of Women Voters have representatives named to the Commission and the court approved.

The League sent a letter to the City Council outlining the following positions. The LWV favored the replacement of temporary Oak Ridge school buildings and correction of physical problems in the permanent school buildings. The League

supported the building of a permanent community-wide recreation center and the building of a new library. Strong support for a preschool program and vocational training was voiced by the League in a letter to the Anderson County Board of Education in June. The League called for public kindergarten as part of the county school system and for increasing vocational opportunities by expanding high school programs and including evening classes for adults.

A candidate rally held at Blankenship Field was sponsored by the League in anticipation of the August 4 general election. Besides candidates running for county offices, gubernatorial candidates John Jay Hooker and Buford Ellington were invited, as were U.S. Senate candidates Ross Bass, Frank Clement, Howard Baker, and Ken Roberts. U.S. Representative John Duncan and his opponent Jake Armstrong were expected to attend. The League endorsed a yes vote for the bond issue for new schools. This vote would be a show of confidence in the community. New schools would be an asset to the community and would help in attracting teachers and industry to the city. This bond issue would cost the average taxpayer less than 30 cents per week.

Land usage related to city planning was the League topic in September, including hiring a city planner and the actual development of the city as it has occurred compared to the 1948 Master Plan.

Alvin Weinberg, ORNL Director, was the featured speaker at the annual United Nations Day Dinner in October. His topic was, "Can Technology Stabilize the World Order." That month the League undertook a study of the county road situation. An interesting sidelight came out of the LWV tour of Anderson County roads when E.F. Ivens, UT Agricultural Agent for Anderson County, pointed out that the Wolf Valley area of the county used to be called "No Pone Valley" because the soil was so poor that Union soldiers could not get enough corn pone to eat from residents.

A consensus meeting on industrial water waste asked members to decide if they believe financial incentives should be offered by the federal government to private industries for reducing their water pollution.

1976—1986

The League started the year with discussions regarding existing sources of state revenue. One of the most pressing problems facing the 1976 session of the Tennessee General Assembly was raising enough revenue to meet the proposed budget. Members of the League called, wrote, and wired leaders of the Tennessee Legislature and Governor Ray Blanton urging a "full and fair hearing for legislation that could establish a broad-based personal income tax."

On March 9, the League held a luncheon to start its annual fund drive. The menu was based on a Bicentennial theme of "American All The Way" and the featured dessert was Hometown American Apple Pie. Funds raised by the League supported free events for interested Oak Ridgers such as Coffee with the Legislators and candidate forums.

Long-range land-use planning, the school budget, upcoming enforcement of regular-length days for first and second graders, and the pros and cons of citywide election of council members were some of the topics at the first "Town Meeting" sponsored by the League in April. The League also hosted a panel discussion about the impact of the Clinch River Breeder Reactor Plant on the area.

The League held a joint meeting with the National Organization of Women to discuss participation of women in local government. A recent report on minority representation on city boards found that women were the least-represented group. Also, although women comprised 51% of the Oak Ridge population, they held only 14.6% of the positions on local boards, with Jo Roe being the only councilwoman.

Officers of the League attended the National League convention in New York in June. It was decided that the name of the organization should remain The League of Women Voters even though 4 to 5% of the membership was now male. The Governor of New York, Hugh Carey, became a new member during his address to the convention.

A forum on the Tennessee Constitution was held in Knoxville sponsored by four local chapters of the League. It was designed to familiarize voters with the amending procedures of the state constitution. Some topics to be considered for revision are the organization of the judiciary and whether the governor should be allowed more than one consecutive term.

The local League was involved in the National League effort to collect at least four million signatures calling for a debate between the two major presidential candidates. The goal for the Oak Ridge group was 5500 signatures. In August, federal election officials agreed to permit LWV to finance a series of presidential debates.

A second "Town Meeting" was held in September to exchange views with City Council and Board of Education members concerning proposed changes in the City Charter, the spending of the uranium tax money, the marina, renovation vs. a new school building, high school curriculum, and vocational education.

A report by the School Booklet Committee was given at an October meeting of the League. The committee had spent a year compiling data to be published in a booklet entitled "Know Your Schools." An art contest was sponsored in the elementary schools to select entries to be used in the booklet.

The Juvenile Services Committee became very involved with the problems of juveniles in trouble. At a November meeting, three cases were selected to portray real-life problems faced in juvenile courts every day. Anderson County Juvenile Court disposed of 1377 cases involving children in 1975.

1986—1996

In January, League members met with the Oak Ridge Education Task Force to discuss issues affecting the city schools. One concern of the group was whether education programs for the gifted interfered with other students' learning. The League revised its "This Is Oak Ridge" book. A large quantity of this third edition was purchased by Martin Marietta Energy Systems to distribute to new employees to inform them about the history of Oak Ridge and provide details of all the city has to offer.

A public forum was held in March on Oak Ridge's tax options and the future of Oak Ridge in cooperation with other city organizations. Mayor Roy Pruett spoke of two contrasting options, one that called for no sales-tax increase and the other that called for extending the current sales tax and increasing it to 2.25% until 2000. At the League's annual meeting in April, three local items were proposed for study in the coming year: the "adopt-a-school" program, a study of city revenues with possible action on the use of Department of Energy "buy-out" funds and the continuation of the sales tax, and, finally, a resolution to support three changes to the city charter.

The League's Health Care Committee studied the problem of providing health care services to the medically indigent. The position of the League in agreement with the Tennessee State League was that this needed health care should be a joint financial responsibility of federal, state and local governments and providers of health services.

A candidate rally for those running in the Oak Ridge section of Roane County was held in July. Candidates for County Executive, county and circuit court clerk, sheriff, school superintendent, state representative for District 32 and Oak Ridge City Council District 4 were invited. About 20 residents attended a League forum to learn of the ten Charter Commission proposals to be on the August ballot. These included reducing City Council from 12 to 7 members, abolishing district residency requirements for Council members, raising City Council members' pay (currently \$5 per meeting), and preventing city staff members from voting on city advisory boards.

In September a debate was held between candidates for Congress: Democratic incumbent Marilyn Lloyd and her Republican opponent Jim Golden. A panel of three reporters questioned the candidates, and the debate was taped by a local cable channel. The *Oak Ridger* reported that the debate was delayed for over 20 minutes due to "childish squabbling" over whether Golden's podium would be higher than Lloyd's.

The League published a revised second edition of two juvenile service booklets, "You and the Juvenile Court" and "A Guide to the Juvenile Court System." In October the Health Care Committee held a meeting at the Oak Ridge Public Library to hear from a leader of the ORNL group studying indoor air quality of homes in East Tennessee. Their results showed that homes with attached garages had problems caused by volatile solvents often stored in garages.

A forum cosponsored by the League and the American Museum of Science and Energy, "Critical Filters," was held in November. It was intended to help students recognize subjects that are critical in determining the directions their careers may take in the future. Aimed primarily at young women, the forum consisted of a panel of professional women who were asked questions by two 12th grade girls about the role of math, science, and computers in their careers. Several 5th grade girls were interviewed on their attitudes toward math and science.

The League announced that its "adopt-a-school" program resulted in partnerships between the Jackson Square merchants and Willowbrook School, and the Boeing Corporation and Woodland School.

1996—2006

In January the League sponsored a workshop titled "Oak Ridge City Government, Past, Present, and Future." Topics ranged from a political history of Oak Ridge presented by Dick Smyser, editor of the *Oak Ridger*, to a talk on the Oak Ridge city budget by the city Finance Director and presentations on the city and county courts.

An information meeting was held in February on "Kids Voting in Tennessee," a program that involves teaching children from kindergarten through 12th grade about the political process to help fight voter apathy and get more adults to the polls through their children. In research conducted by the University of Tennessee after the 1992 elections, 44% of parents said their children were an important source of information about the candidates.

Co-Presidents Diantha Paré and Barbara Moon sent a letter to *The Oak Ridger* explaining why the League would not sponsor a forum for candidates for property assessor in the March 12 primary election. Since the only contest was between Democratic candidates, the League, as a nonpartisan organization, could not sponsor such a forum and stay within its bylaws. A free "go-see-tour" to Molten Metal Technology's joint venture waste treatment facility with Lockheed Martin Energy Systems was sponsored by the League in April. The tour enabled the public to learn about handling waste and the company's corporate commitment to Oak Ridge.

A 50th Anniversary party was held on May 31. The Oak Ridge League now had 220 members (including 44 men) and was among the most active chapters in the state.

Founding members shared memories including the League's efforts to get Anderson County to buy voting machines and being referred to as “interfering women up from the hill,” meaning Outer Drive in Oak Ridge.

Future land use for DOE property in Oak Ridge was the focus of a public meeting sponsored by the Site Specific Advisory Board. Susan Gawarecki, Chair of the League's Women Voters Environmental Committee, spoke on a citizen's view of Oak Ridge Reservation land-use issues. A letter from the League was sent to the *Oak Ridger* to urge all Tennesseans to talk to their representatives to support a strong, comprehensive, bipartisan campaign finance reform bill to be debated in Congress on July 8.

Dick Smyser wrote in his *Oak Ridger* column, Editor's License, that since new electronic voting machines would be ready for the November election, the County Election Registrar should present a couple of the old ones, preferably bronzed, to those League members responsible for the county's initial switch from paper ballots to voting machines in 1952. Lunch with the League speakers in September included Dr. Helen Vodopick, who spoke on health risks and ethical issues in health care, and Steven Richardson, DOE's Deputy Manager of Oak Ridge Operations.

In its ongoing commitment to proper waste management, the League cosponsored a household hazardous waste collection event on October 12. Also in October, the League held a standing-room-only rally for Congressional and state representative candidates including Zach Wamp and Gene Caldwell.

The first year of “Kids Voting in Oak Ridge” was deemed a success as 2216 students cast their votes for candidates in national and state races. Bill Clinton and Zach Wamp were the big winners. The League ended the year with a talk by Rick Held, Community Organizer for Tennesseans for Fair Taxation, who challenged the League to work on educating the public on this issue. At the annual holiday lunch Oak Ridge City Manager Bo McDaniel commented that, “The more I learn about Oak Ridge, the uniquer it gets.”

2006—2016

The first Lunch with the League of 2006 featured Ben Andrews, General Manager for the Oak Ridge Utility District, who informed the group that the current high price for gas had been created by panic buying and speculators keeping the price up. In February, the League hosted Skila Harris, the first woman Director of the Tennessee Valley Authority who presented “Reflections on TVA” covering its creation in 1933 to the present. Also that month, Jenny Freeman, Executive Director of the East Tennessee Environmental Business Association, spoke about the organization and its mission and economic affect on the region.

Speakers in March included Mack Bailey, Oak Ridge Fire Chief as well as Oak Ridge Emergency Management Director, who discussed the importance of emergency preparedness, and Myra Yeatman and Jessica Carrington of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of the Tennessee Valley who presented information about their organization. The League hosted two forums for Anderson County candidates for county mayor, sheriff, judges, and other offices. Susan McKay, an advocate from the Tennessee Health Care Campaign, spoke to the League in April about the TennCare Reform, Ethics, Accountability, and Transparency Bill which would improve TennCare through real reform and better management of the program without new taxes. Also in April, Fred P. McArthur, Executive Vice President of Rarity Communities, spoke of the community of Rarity Ridge as “front porch living at its best.”

Information about the Family Resource Center, volunteer tutor program, and other programs in the Oak Ridge School System was presented by Jo Bruce, Director of the Family Resource Center. Joyce Morris, Oak Ridge Schools volunteer coordinator, was the featured topic at Lunch with the League in May. The Education Committee of the League held a public information meeting that month regarding the future of pre-K programs in Tennessee presented by Bobbie Lussier, Executive Director of the state's Office of Early Learning.

An Anderson County candidate forum in June led to a violation of League policy when a candidate used material from the forum in a paid political program. Such an action jeopardized the League's nonpartisan policies and was in conflict with the Candidate Consent Agreement whereby the candidates agree to follow League policy.

The League sponsored forums in July for Roane County candidates for office since many Oak Ridge residents live in Roane County and will be voting for County Mayor, sheriff, and other offices. At the first League meeting of the 2006—2007 year in September, Tom Rogers, Founder and President of Technology 2020, spoke about the importance of growing local businesses to help the economy. Mr. Rogers said that Tech 2020 is trying to build infrastructure so that companies will want to do their research and also commercialize their businesses here. That month the League also heard from George Dials, President and General Manager of BWXT-Y12. He described a modernization program under way at Y-12 that is projected to cost about \$2 billion and take ten years to complete.

Redevelopment of the Highland View neighborhood was the topic of the October 3 Lunch with the League. The speaker was Rex Todd with the Landmark Group of North Carolina. Also in October, the League heard Gary Goff, Present of Roane State Community College, speak about current programs at RSCC. David McCoy, Director of Development for the MMC Foundation, dressed in medical garb to speak about the acquisition of the daVinci Surgical System to be used for robotic surgery. In December,

the League heard a presentation by David Reichle, President of the Coalition of Oak Ridge Retired Employees, entitled, "How DOE Shortchanges the Pension Benefits of Oak Ridge Retirees." The League ended the year with a holiday dinner at which former Tennessee Supreme Court Justice Riley Anderson was the guest speaker.

In the last ten years, our League has continued to sponsor workshops, conduct surveys, and offer Breakfasts with the Legislators and twice-monthly Lunches with the League. They have registered voters at the Oak Ridge High School and other locations. The League has held candidate forums for all elections both local and national. In 2009, the League elected its first male president, Norman Mulvenon, who was also the first male League president in Tennessee. He served two full terms and one partial term before resigning due to ill health. In 2014 the League received a \$20,000 grant used to fund an educational project for young adults on hazardous waste management.

It is expected that the good works of the Oak Ridge League of Women Voters will continue on for many years.

Maryann Mulvenon updated and compiled this history in honor of the Oak Ridge League's 70th birthday in 2016. She used previous histories, written by Diantha Paré, Miriam Kertez and others, as a foundation for this version.