

T H E K N O X V I L L E S C I E N C E C L U B

Although there had been at least one previous effort to organize a science club, the Knoxville Science Club was organized during the latter part of 1933. I'm not sure that we could find the exact date, but it was almost immediately after Dr. H. A. Morgan resigned as President of the University of Tennessee so he could become one of the three Directors of T. V. A. (June 1933.)

I have been told that Dr. Morgan had succeeded in squelching a previous effort to organize a science club at U. T. Insofar as I know, he never gave a reason for his opposition to having such a club.

Those who in 1933 led the successful movement for a science club included Dr. George M. Hall, then head of the Geology Department; Dr. Kenneth L. Hertel, head of the Physics Department; Dr. Calvin Buehler, head of the Chemistry Department; H. C. Amick, in the Geography section of the Geology Department; possibly one or two other faculty members; Jack Brownlow, head of a real estate firm; and Carlos C. Campbell.

Then, as now, our club year coincided with the Autumn, Winter, and Spring quarters at U. T., with our first meeting usually being on the last Friday of September and continuing—with a few dates out for vacation periods--until the last Friday in May or the first Friday in June. Dues until a few years ago were only \$1 per year.

We are now winding up our 43rd year. Incidentally, I wonder how many of you have been members for 30 or more years? Let's see a show of hands. Then, how many for 20 or more years?

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Here's hoping that we can continue for at least another 43 years!

It was definitely an informal group, with no minutes being kept. Several reasons were cited for having such a club. Although the U. T. Faculty Club had been organized or established some two years earlier, faculty members of the science departments felt the need for a club limited to scientists or laymen with definite interests in science so they could get better acquainted with those in other branches of science, and to keep posted--at least superficially--with what was going on in all branches of science.

Realizing that scientists were often criticized for not being able to discuss their work without resorting to the use of words and phrases not familiar to the general public, they saw the opportunity of getting some experience in talking to laymen. In this respect, they realized that scientists in one field are laymen to many who are in other branches of science. This, too, was one of the reasons for letting non-scientists have membership in the club.

The original membership in the Knoxville Science Club consisted of 30 or 40 members of the U. T. faculty, a few from T.V.A. and a few laymen. All were men. The club had been functioning for a few (or several) years before there was even a suggestion to admit women as members. And, when the membership was opened to women, the decision was not unanimous. Jack Brownlow, for instance, opposed the idea.

Dr. Mary W. Peters, now retired from her position as a physicist and astronomer at U. T., was the first woman to become a member. Feb. 1948
After having given two or three excellent programs, most of the

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members realized that we had been missing a lot while we operated by and for men only. In a relatively short time a few other women became members. In a few more years, ^{May 1953} Dr. Peters was elected as the first woman president, after having served efficiently as vice-president and program chairman. By that time, Mr. Brownlow broke down and admitted that Dr. Peters had proven that he had been wrong in his opposition to having women members. *Dr. Peters, in my opinion, is a distaff version of Dr. Jack Craven.* Perhaps for no reason at all, the original membership consisted entirely of those in the basic sciences. It was several years before anyone in the applied sciences became a member. Now, as is perfectly obvious, those in the applied sciences seem to be in the majority.

Referring again to Jack Brownlow, it was he who was unintentionally responsible for an interesting innovation. During the early years, the program announcements that were sent to members were more or less routine, with the subject for the next meeting stated clearly and simply. In due course of time, it became obvious that as soon as Mr. Brownlow received his notice, he proceeded to read up on the subject, with the result that when the question and answer period was reached he was the first to ask a question, and often having interrupted the speaker by making comments or asking a question. He always asked at least one or two more questions-- thus leaving the impression that he was familiar with just about every question under the sun. This annoyed some of the members, and it soon became the general practice to use ambiguous titles in the program announcements. This made it impossible for

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Mr. Brownlow (and others) to know what the program was to be. It led to some very clever titles. For instance, Weatherman Ted Kleinsasser, who was to present a demonstration of Square Dancing, simply announced the title of "Squares and Circles."

For the first few years, the club meetings were held in a private dining room of the Andrew Johnson Hotel. If memory serves me right, we then moved to the S & W Cafeteria for a year or so, but parking problems--even in those days--led to a decision to move to a semi-private room just off from what was then the main Cafeteria at U. T., in the Sophrina Strong Hall. That, too, presented several problems, and for many years we have met at the S & W, usually in Room 3.

Shortly after the Club was formed we began to get a number of requests for funds or for endorsements of this and that project. It is fortunate, I feel, that we never subjected our members to such pleas. Had we done so, it might have driven some members to dropping out.

Feeling that any kind of group should do a little more than just eat and listen to a program, the Club decided, many years ago, to give modest cash prizes--\$25.00 for first place and \$15.00 for second place--and to give public recognition to local high school pupils who made highest grades in scientific essay contests conducted by Knoxville and Knox County high schools. The winners and their science teachers were guests at one of our regular meetings at which reporters and newspaper photographers were present. Pictures of the winners, and short news stories, were published.

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When that program was discontinued by the schools, our next, and present, project was to make modest cash contributions to the Southern Appalachian Science and Engineering Fair. In addition, to the cash awards, several of our members have devoted a lot of time in helping promote and conduct that Fair.

Even to our scientist members, but more particularly to laymen members, regular attendance to our meetings is another good way in which to expand our horizons. It has been a bit surprising to me to see that several members seldom attend unless the program of the day was in their own field of science. Another phase of this situation is that many speakers wound up talking to several of their own associates, who seldom attend otherwise. It might appear that the associates were afraid that without them the speaker might be talking mostly to a bunch of empty chairs. My own experience is that some of the most enjoyable programs that I have heard have been dealing with subjects that were the least familiar to me.

Some idea of the wide scope covered by the Club's meetings is seen in the fact that a rank layman who had attended most of the meetings held during the first 12 years of the Club's existence had picked up enough information from those programs to make a reasonably close guess about what was going on at Oak Ridge several months before that first atomic bomb was dropped on Japan. Being the layman in question, I told members of my family that I believed that I knew what they were doing at Oak Ridge. Although they pressed hard for an answer, I refused to give even a hint.

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I did, however, agree to write my answer on a slip of paper and put it in an envelope which was then sealed and held by a third party. The envelope was not opened until my 53rd birthday-- August 6, 1945!--just after the first atomic bomb was dropped.

Let me hasten to admit that I was just as surprised as anyone when I learned about the bomb. I had been thinking only as a source of tremendous power--but not as an explosive.

Some little time before the first atomic bomb was dropped, I was chatting with Dr. Hertel. For sheer mischief, I asked him if he thought it might be appropriate for the Science Club to have a program on atom splitting. With a wry smile on his face, Dr. Hertel said, "I doubt it."

Membership in the club has been so interesting and rewarding to me that I find it hard to understand why so many formerly active members have dropped out--especially those who have just served as club president. One case is particularly puzzling. A certain science department at that time had not qualified for giving a doctoral program, but was applying for that privilege. For some reason that I can't remember, I saw the application that was then being filed. The department head, in listing his own qualifications, mentioned the fact that he was then president of the Knoxville Science Club. The application for doctoral program was granted--but some two years later that department head became an ex-member of the Knoxville Science Club!

It is my guess that most of you will agree that the Knoxville Science Club has been, and still is, a constructive and useful

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organization. But, if it is to function successfully, we need to have a substantial increase in membership and attendance. We should have at least a few members from every science department on the Knoxville campus, more from T.V.A., and more from Oak Ridge. It is my suggestion that an active membership committee should be appointed, and I so move.

Carlos P. Campbell
May 28, 1976