

VOTER

JANUARY 2009

AMARILLO LEAGUE OF WOMEN

VOTERS Margaret Peebles, Editor

<http://lwvtexas.org/amarillo.htm>

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

♠Orientation for “Observer Corps”

Date: Sunday, January 25, 2009

Time: 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Place: First Christian Church at
3001 Wolflin

Northeast side on Duniven Circle across
from Freeman’s Flowers

Please call Alan Abraham 355-1637

♠Open House for League Office

Date: Wednesday, February 4, 2009

Time: 4:30 pm to 5:30 pm

Place: Habitat for Humanity
2701 Wilson

As you go East on I-40, take EXIT 71, Ross-Osage. Before the Harbor Freight Store, turn right on Wilson and go south to SE 27th. Habitat for Humanity is on the corner of Wilson and SE 27th. From the Canyon E-way, take EXIT 162A. SE 26th turns into SE 27th under the railroad viaduct. Go east past Llano Cemetery and Glenwood Park on the right. Habitat for Humanity is on the corner of Wilson and SE 27th.

♠February Board Meeting

Wednesday, February 4, 2009

Immediately after Open House

PAGE ONE

♠Water Book Discussions

Ogallala Blue by William Ashworth

Date: Sunday, February 14, 2009

Time: 2:00 pm

Place: Southwest Library

Discussion Leader: Mina Johnson

Blue Gold by Maude Barlow & Tony Clarke

Date: Saturday, April 18, 2009

Time: 2:00 pm

Place: Southwest Library

Discussion Leader: Pam Allison

♠Environment Speakers

SPEAKERS:

Environmental Flow: Laura Mabry, Texas Living Waters

Date: Tuesday, March 10, 2009

Time: 6:30-8:30 pm

Place: Southwest Library

The Ethics of Water Use: Daryl Birkenfeld, Ogallala Commons

Date: Tuesday, May 12, 2009

Time: 6:30-8:30 pm

Place: Southwest Library

Orientation for “Observer Corps”

If you would like to learn more about the League of Women Voters’ “Observer Corps,” then you should mark your calendar for Sunday, January 25, 2009, 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. In addition to introducing you to the many manifestations of government in our area, this orientation session will help you make your own decision about **if, when, and** where you might like to participate in an Amarillo version of this League program.

“Observer Corps” or monitoring programs are not new. They have existed across the country for decades as an excellent way for League members to learn about local issues and to share that information through their local newsletters and at League meetings. In addition, a LWV “public

presence” more perfectly ensures that the public’s right to know is being honored.

So, come join us! We will be meeting in a classroom at the First Christian Church, located on Wolflin. Go to the northeast side of the building, facing Duniven Circle, across the street from Freeman’s Flowers. A warm welcome awaits you!

Alan Abraham
Observer Corps

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

I’ve heard it said that you never know who your friends are until you are in need. Well, our League was definitely in a tight spot in December. We had taken for granted our free office space in the Planned Parenthood building. No one can remember exactly how long we had been there. Major changes at PP including a new director – our own Claudia Stravato had been director for 10 years- were taking place. They needed our office by Jan. 1. The minutes of a called board meeting in December reflect considerable hand-wringing. We did not know what to do.

Our first call was to Joan Levy, a former League president who has lots of contacts in Amarillo. While she was casting about for locations, Pam Allison persuaded Gary Wingate of The Farmers Insurance Group to store our filing cabinets in his office. Harry Everett and Beverly Gattis who own the building at 34th and Thornton agreed to let us use the break room in that building. Keep in mind Barbara is still calling people who own buildings with empty offices. Alan, Joyce, Barbara, Janette, and Lou Ann, like benevolent elves, are frantically sorting files and filling boxes. Remember, this is right before Christmas. Some members thought we should just put everything in storage. In the midst of all the indecision and turmoil a Christmas gift was delivered. Mary Emeny suggested we contact Habitat for Humanity. They had some office space available. Barbara and I were overjoyed when we first saw it. We now have a window,

a carpet, a built-in desk and shelves in our own private office. With our files and cabinets, it doesn’t look as big as it did when it was empty, but it is more than adequate. In fact, it is a very pleasant space. Steve Smart, the director of Habitat, has gone out of his way to make us feel welcome. I hope you will come to our open house on Feb. 4 between 4:30 and 5:30. And, I hope you will consider making a donation to Amarillo Habitat for Humanity in appreciation for their offering us shelter. Barbara Cheek is coordinating this effort.

I’m a little fuzzy on how we actually got moved because I left town on Dec. 17. My impression is that we owe Alan, Barbara, and Kay a huge thank you for getting everything moved into the new office, cleaning up the old office, and unpacking boxes at the Habitat office. In case you hadn’t noticed, the League is a great bunch of folks to work with.

Mina Johnson
President Amarillo League of Women Voters

Book Discussion of Jan 10, 2009 **The Worst Hard Time**

By Timothy Egan

The first book discussion meeting, held Saturday, January 10, 2009, was a huge success. We hosted a good group of League members as well as several visitors. To expedite and insure that all would have an opportunity to participate in the discussion, we divided into two groups. Janette Kelley led one and the other was led by Pauline Robertson. This way, we allowed everyone the chance to participate.

Here are some of the highlights of the book:

After the removal of the Indians from the High Plains, the cowboys came. The XIT Ranch became one of the largest ranches of that time. By 1887, the ranch had 150,000 head of cattle and 781 miles of fence. Windmills were erected to supply water. The cowboys were followed by sodbusters (nesters), who plowed up thousands of prairie acres. The federal government encouraged the new farmers to plough and the Federal Farm Loan Act of 1916 considered the soil to be one

indestructible, immutable asset the nation possessed. The Federal Bureau of Soils proudly proclaimed, as the grasslands were transformed, "It is the one resource that cannot be exhausted, that cannot be used up."

Tractors made their widespread appearance before the 1930's, and this made it much easier to plough up the prairie. As wheat prices headed down, more grass was torn up--nearly 50,000 acres in the South Plains alone. What had been previously prairie land in Texas and Oklahoma was peeled off. This process was quickly repeated in parts of Kansas, Nebraska and southeast Colorado.

The Stock Market crashed on October 29, 1929. By the end of 1932, nearly one fourth of all banks had closed and 9 million people had lost their savings.

On September 14, 1930, a windstorm kicked up the dust out of southwest Kansas and tumbled it to Oklahoma; then it went through the Texas Panhandle. It was considered a great curiosity and written up and filed by the weather bureau observers.

The 1930's brought a regular occurrence of dust storms, and people died from pneumonia. (The book tells heartbreaking stories of people and animals dying horrible deaths because of the hard times.) Dalhart and the Oklahoma Panhandle area were particularly hard hit.

Many people lived in dugouts, which were sod houses dug into the earth. Even in better homes, timber or brick, with windows, it was impossible to keep all of the fine dust out, in spite of all efforts. Because of the stagnant national economy, better times were slow coming. Many chose to move out and go further west.

Also during this time, tumbleweeds which were brought over by German immigrant farmers, who called them Russian thistles, rolled all over the west propelled by the wind. Tumbleweeds were salted and pickled to be used as food for people and animals alike. (I will never look at a tumbleweed the same way again.)

PAGE THREE

To make money in hard times, skunks were skinned and rabbits killed by the thousands.

In May of 1934, dust hit Chicago and dumped an estimated 6,000 tons of soil. Soil also fell on Boston, Scranton and then New York City. The storm was estimated to be 1800 miles wide. This storm got the attention of people in the north and northeast sections of the US. The worst duster of all was Black Sunday on April 14, 1935.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt was interested in environmental concerns. He was also interested in putting people back to work and repairing the broken US economy. He created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and sent hundreds of workers out to plant millions of trees to serve as windbreaks. Roosevelt believed that what had happened to this hard ground was not a weather disaster but human failure.

Roosevelt sent Hugh Bennett west to help determine what could be done. Bennett stressed the organization of community farming districts, rotating crops, fallowing land and stopping methods of plowing that tore up the earth. The legacy left by Hugh Bennett, the soil conservation districts, soon spread throughout America. They are the only New Deal grassroots operation that survives to this day.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt came to Amarillo on July 11, 1938. He spoke to hundreds of people in Ellwood Park during a HEAVY RAINSTORM.

We must continue to monitor the use of our soil and the water that we have. As the Texas Panhandle continues to grow, we must take care of the Ogallala Aquifer, the nation's biggest source of underground fresh water. It supplies 30% of water used for irrigation in the United States.

This book report could easily be twice as long. The *Worst Hard Time* is a fascinating book and relates to the Panhandle. One bonus to the discussion was that several people in the audience remember the 1930s and provided personal experiences. I am looking forward to future meetings and discussions on the very important issue of conservation of land and water.
Janette Kelley 1st Vice-President

Future League Book Discussions

The book to be discussed on Saturday, February 14 is *Ogallala Blue*, by William Ashworth. League President Mina Johnson will lead that discussion, which will begin at 2:00 P. M. at Southwest Library, 6801 West 45th. According to comments from *Booklist Review*, the aquifer that is the source of most of our groundwater “affects everything from the food we eat to the clothing we wear. Deep enough to fill Lake Erie nine times over, it is immense, but it is not infinite, and this precious aquifer is going dry. It is a question of when, not if, and the management of this essential resource will be one of the most daunting challenges of the twenty-first century.”

Pam Allison will lead the discussion on Saturday, April 18, (also at Southwest Library at 2:00 P.M.). *Blue Gold*, by Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke, “provides a sobering, in-depth look at the growing scarcity of fresh water and the increasing privatization and corporate control of this nonrenewable resource” (*Library Journal Review*).

In March and May we shall present two speakers you will not want to miss. On Tuesday, March 10, Laura Mabry of the Texas Living Water Project will speak on “Environmental Flow: The Relationship of Rivers, Playas, and Wildlife.” She will speak to the question of whether we human beings are using more than our share of the water resources necessary to sustain all life. On Tuesday, May 12, Darryl Birkenfeld of Ogallala Commons will address “The Ethics of Water Use.” Both of these events will be held at the Southwest Library, beginning at 6:30 P. M.

For April 22 (Earth Day) we are trying to arrange a one-time showing in Amarillo of an outstanding film pertaining to all these issues. Entitled *Flow: For the Love of Water*, this film deals with the global water crisis, which has been labeled “the greatest threat of our time.” The film has been showing in limited venues around the country.

PAGE FOUR

You won't want to miss it if we can arrange for it to be shown here. Further details will be given in a later issue of the *Amarillo Voter*.

You may obtain additional information by visiting our local website:

www.lwvtexas.org/amarillo.htm.

Tonya Kleuskens (806-258-7583), chair of our local environment committee, can answer any questions you may have about these upcoming events and others that will be held beginning in the fall.

Thank you for your support of our study of water-related issues. I look forward to seeing you at our February 14 book discussion of *Ogallala Blue*.

Joyce Hinsley

2nd Vice-President (Program)

BECOME A DEPUTY REGISTRAR

During our pre-election Voter Registration drives the League has a critical need for Deputy Registrars.

To become a Deputy Registrar, you must be a US citizen, a resident of the county. You may be a dual Deputy Registrar if you reside in either Randall or Potter Counties. You may not be a convicted felon (unless sentence has been completed, including probation or parole) and have never been declared mentally disabled. If you meet the above criteria, then contact the voter registrar in your county. If you are eligible, the voter registrar will issue a certificate of appointment and give you a receipt book.

The appointment lasts two years and is renewed in the years that the Voter Registrar in the county updates the Voter Cards sent to all eligible voters.

Training takes an hour, and either Potter or Randall County will waive training if the other county has trained you. You will just drop in for your materials and certificate. Contact numbers are: Potter County—(806) 379-2275 and Randall County—(806) 468-5540

New Citizen Ceremony Cancelled

The January 5, 2009 New Citizen Ceremony was a grave disappointment to both the new citizens and the League. Four League members were scheduled and two actually appeared at the Federal Courthouse but the Ceremony had been cancelled at the last minute.

I did not have a League roster in my car and so settled down to wait for the volunteers. The court clerk had called Lou Ann Garrett and she was able to intercept BJ Opperman and Laksimwati Cortes; I spoke with Isabell Thompson during my hour wait.

The Homeland Security (formerly INS) personnel could not leave Dallas due to an ice storm. A lot of the new citizens were overflow from the Dallas Federal Court and were routed to Amarillo at their own expense. Ice storm or not, they showed up on Amarillo Federal Court house steps. Most were on time but a few came late in Airport Limos. One Slavic man, probably from Eastern Europe or Russia, told the court house guard that his wife drove him until he found an airport open to fly to Amarillo. Since there were others in the Limousine, I assumed that they had done so as well.

Of course, there were many Mexican people there. Some had their entire families. If these people came from the Dallas area, they had to drive part of the night.

In the course of handing out voter registration cards at swearing-in ceremonies, League members hear many stories. At the last ceremony, Lou Ann Garrett and I met a young doctor from Iran. He worked in Abilene and drove 5 hours to be sworn in. The ceremony took place six days short of the thirty days needed to register to vote in the 2008 National election.

The new immigrants want to be citizens. They pay heavy fees and show up when and where the federal court tells them.

When homeland security doesn't come, they have to be re-scheduled. The League is drafting a letter to Congressman Thornberry in hopes that Homeland Security can set up alternate procedures to get new citizens sworn in on time.
Margaret Peebles

MISSION STATEMENT

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

The **LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS** is open for membership to all citizens (men and women) 18 years of age or older. Its purpose is to promote the informed, active participation of all citizens in their government. It does not support or oppose any political party or candidate but does take action on issues after study and consensus by its members.

JOIN THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

The hard work and dedication shown by your League is what keeps our organization strong and well respected.

Amarillo League of Women Voters
P. O. Box 19333
Amarillo TX 79114-1333
TEL: 806 372-5438

Dues are as follows:
\$60.00—single membership
\$90.00—family membership
\$35.00—student membership

To join, please send your check made out to Amarillo League of Women Voters to Kay McMinn, Treasurer.
3512 Kileen, Amarillo,
TX 79109.