

A Narrative History of the Northeast Tennessee Section of the American Chemical Society (NETS-ACS)¹

Bob Maleski, 2021 NETS Historian. April 2021

Suggestions for Additions and Corrections are welcome. Contact Bob at dbmolski@yahoo.com

The Section was established by the vote of the American Chemical Society (ACS) Council in March, 1932. The two men most responsible for its organization were Louis Figg, its first Secretary-Treasurer, and Herbert Stone, its first Chairman. There were 35 Charter Members. Its Charter territory included the Tennessee counties of Sullivan, Washington, Carter, Unicoi, and Johnson. It held its first organizational meeting in September, 1932, and its first regular meeting with an invited speaker on October 5. There were 26 visitors and 25 members in attendance at that meeting. Notable visitors were:

Dr C. E. K. Mees (speaker) of Eastman Kodak. Dr. Mees was the first Director of the Eastman Kodak Research Laboratories. He was a world expert in sensitizing dyes and was the individual most responsible for the development of color photography at Kodak.



¹ The history of the Section from 1932 to 1947 was summarized by an unknown author. The history up to 1952 was summarized by Edward M. McMahon. Contact Bob Maleski for copies of these summaries.

J. Fred Johnson, who, along with John B. Dennis, developed the modern city of Kingsport².



Notable members in attendance were:

Herbert Stone, first Section Chairman and future leader of the scale-up of the novel explosive RDX at the Wexler Bend Pilot Plant. He was also the future Works Manager of Holston Ordnance Works³.



Perley S. Wilcox, General Manager of Tennessee Eastman Corporation and Vice President of Eastman Kodak. Mr. Wilcox introduced Speaker Mees at the meeting.



² Margaret Ripley Wolfe, tennesseencyclopedia.net

³ Colin F. Baxter, "The Secret History of RDX, the Super Explosive that Helped Win World War 2", University Press of Kentucky, 2018.

James C. White, General Plant Superintendent, Tennessee Eastman Company, future head of Eastman Chemical Division, precursor to Eastman Chemical Company.



It was a grand night, indeed!

The Section grew impressively to 212 members in 1947 and 304 in 1952. The majority of the members were employees of Tennessee Eastman Corporation, but there was strong participation from many other organizations including American Glanzstoff Corporation and Bemberg Corporation (Elizabethton), King College, Emory and Henry College, Milligan College, East Tennessee State Teachers College (later East Tennessee State College), and Mathieson Alkali Company (Saltville, Va). Participation from Saltville was especially strong: in 1941 the Section elected Dr Matthew Weber, Jr. as its chairman.

In 1941 the territory of the Section was expanded to include the Virginia Counties of Scott, Smyth, and Washington without a change in the name of the Section (a source of controversy then and now). Tennessee counties of Greene and Hawkins and Wise County Virginia were added at a later date.

The Section became known for its Public Outreach, Chemical Education, and Professional Relations efforts. A College Committee was formed in the early 40's to foster interest in the Chemical Sciences in local colleges. The annual award to the outstanding senior chemistry student from each local college was begun by this committee. A weekly radio program, "Headlines in Chemistry" was broadcast over several radio stations from the early 40's until about 1975.

The Section's first Student Affiliate group was formed at King College in 1952. Others followed. ETSU's group was formed in the 1950's and had a particularly successful run of programming under the leadership of Professor Jeff Wardeska in the years 1973-1999. During those 26 years the group was granted 23 National awards: one Commendable, two Honorable Mentions, and eighteen Outstanding, one of which was a special Division Director's Award. In addition, this Student Affiliate Group organized the first Undergraduate Program at the 1994 Southeast Regional Meeting in Birmingham Al.

In 1948 the Section collaborated with the local Section of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers in staging an Intersectional Meeting. It was the largest of its kind in the Southeast:

there were 332 registrants and 256 banquet attendees. It was supported by contributions from local industries, who offered tours of their facilities to meeting registrants. In 1951 the Section hosted 50 foreign students as part of the Younger Chemists Committee International Project. They toured local industries, and attended presentations over several days. Section members opened their homes to the visitors, who were thoroughly introduced to the East Tennessee way of life.

A Section tradition was born in 1947 with the purchase of an engraved bell and a gavel, which was rung faithfully at the beginning and end of every meeting. After the initial ringing of the bell the presider announced the number of the meeting (the 100th meeting of the Section occurred on Feb 1, 1946).

The Section membership, like that of the Society, was almost exclusively male until the 1960's. An annual "Ladies Night" was begun in the 1940's to great success. General topic speakers were chosen since few of the ladies were scientists. Here are a couple of pictures from 1954's Ladies Night Meeting:



From those pictures it can be estimated that there were over 100 attendees. As more women entered the profession the meeting was renamed "Special Guest Night", which ran successfully from the mid 70's to about 1990.

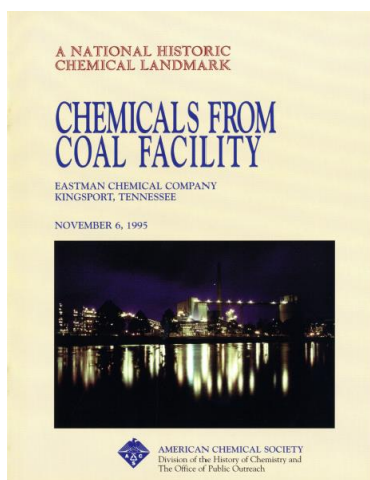
As women entered the profession they began joining the Society in larger numbers and took leadership roles. The first woman Section Chair was Jane Adams, 1975-6, shown here giving the 1976 award for Speaker of the Year to Prof. Thomas Huang (ETSU):



The Section did not have another female chair for 21 years, but female membership in the Section significantly accelerated during the 1990's. Since 1997 there have been 8 female Section Chairs: Renee' Niziurski Mann (1997), Lori Wilson (1999), Debbie Tindall (2007), Paula Moody (2009), Mary Moore Engelman (2011), and Meera Sidheswaran (2016).

The Section soon became well-known nationally for the quality and breadth of its programming. For instance, recognition of the contributions of Section Technicians began in the early 90's with the formation of a Section Technician Affiliate Group (TAG). This group helps select an annual Technician of the Year, a Section award begun in 1995. Winners are nominated for the national award, which has been won 5 times by Section winners: Rodney Bradley (1995), Dennis Marshall (1996), Randal Perry (1997), Mary Moore Engelman (1998), and Mike Salyer (2009). The NETSACS TAG was recognized with the Society Award for Outstanding Performance by a Technician Affiliate Group in 1991 and 1992. Many members of the Section made valuable contributions to the recognition of the professionalism of Chemical Technicians, including the formation of a new Division of the Society- the Division of Chemical Technicians.

The Section proposed Eastman's Chemicals from Coal Facility as a National Chemical Historical Landmark and that proposal was approved by the Committee on the History of Chemistry in 1994. Eastman and the Section hosted a formal on-site ceremony in 1995. Many senior officers of ACS attended and spoke at the ceremony. A copy of the brochure produced for the event can be found on the Section's website. Here is a copy of the cover of that brochure:



The Section hosted the 1993 Southeast Regional Meeting of the ACS (SERMACS) in 1993. Tom Huang was the Meeting Chair; John Hyatt was the Program Chair. The meeting was highly successful with over 1000 attendees and it brought the Section significant revenues which were spent almost exclusively on Public Outreach activities.

Section members have contributed to the success of the Society's mission and governance. Six current and three former members of the Section have been honored as ACS Fellows: Charles Buchanan, Mary Engelman, John Engelman, Dawn Mason, Joe Zoeller, Bob Maleski, Mark Frishberg, Kevin Edgar, and Dean Webster. Likewise, current and previous members have also received National ACS awards. The Anselme Payen Award from the Cellulose and Renewable Materials Division was presented to Charles Buchanan in 2006 and to Kevin Edgar in 2016. Joe Zoeller received the E. V. Murphree Award in Industrial and Engineering Chemistry in 2015, Ted Germroth received the ACS Award in Industrial Chemistry in 2016, and Mary Engelman received the Award for Volunteer Service from the American Chemical Society in 2021.

Many National awards have come the Section's way: it won four Phoenix Awards (Public Outreach) in 1991-1994; the Committee on Public Relations Award in 1993 and 1994, a ChemLuminary Award in 2001, 2010, and 2016, and Certificates of Excellence in Programming in 1996 and 1997. The most prestigious award, "Outstanding Section in the Medium Size Category" was awarded to the Section in 1993 (Rick Offerman, Chair), 1994 (David Allen, Chair), 1999 (Lori Wilson, Chair), and 2001 (Craig Lott, Chair).

A few Pictures from those years:

...and are involved in some way, shape, or form. All 187 local sections of the American Chemical Society participated in this year's event, says Nancy Ryan Gray, NCW program manager.

At ACS headquarters in Washington—its newly renovated building bedecked with NCW banners and balloons—the weeklong celebration began

A young visitor to the Kalamazoo Public Museum takes delight in a Cartesian diver demonstration (below); a student at Jefferson Elementary School in Kingsport, Tenn., shows hair-raising effects of a Van deGraaff generator.



C&EN Lead Story from 1993



1994 G&EN Cover, Shawn Dougherty, multi-year leader of NETSAC National Chemistry Week



Local Section Activities Committee chairman James Burke (front row, left) congratulates representatives of sections winning outstanding performance awards: (front row, from left after Burke) Robert Peoples (Pensacola Section), Judith Lund (Central Wisconsin), Earl White (Central North Carolina), Rick Offerman (Northeast Tennessee); (back row, from left) Gretchen Kohl (Midland), Sadiq Shah (St. Louis), John Backus (Pittsburgh), Patricia Redden (New York), and Ruth Wenner (Corning).

Rick Offerman accepts award for Outstanding Section in Medium Size Category in 1993



Local section public relations awards for 1994 were presented at special luncheon to (left to right) Lydia Hines (Kalamazoo) and Ruth Allen (Memphis), both honorable mention, and Cherylnlavanaugh Bradley (Chicago) and Shawn Dougherty (Northeast Tennessee).

Shawn Dougherty accepts 1994 Local Section Public Relations Award

The Section membership in the 1990's was around 450. For a variety of reasons over the next 20 years it dropped to about 250. In spite of that the Section continued to make valuable contributions to Chemical Education and Public Outreach especially in its Earth Day and its National Chemical Week activities, which are widely recognized both locally and nationally.