



Aubrey J. Bragman

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1912-1990

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Submitted By The Nae Home Secretary

AUBREY J. "RED" WAGNER, who served the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) for forty-four years, a record seventeen years on its board of directors and sixteen of those years as its chairman, died July 14, 1990, in Knoxville, Tennessee, at the age of seventy-eight.

Wagner was born January 12, 1912, in Hillsboro, Wisconsin. He received his B.S. degree, magna cum laude, in civil engineering in 1933 from the University of Wisconsin. It was also in that year that he married the former Dorothea J. Huber of Sioux City, Iowa.

In 1934 he began his long and distinguished career with TVA, which had been created a year earlier. His first assignment was as an engineering aide in the General Engineering and Geology Division, where he worked in the navigation program and assisted with the planning and construction of Tennessee River navigation facilities. Later he also worked on transportation economics studies that were intended to develop the fullest possible contribution of low-cost transportation to TVA's total program for integrated resource development.

In 1948 he was named chief of the Navigation and Transportation Branch, where he was responsible for general planning of TVA's navigation program, including both engineering matters and economic studies involved in the growing commercial use of the newly improved Tennessee waterway. Wagner was appointed

TVA assistant general manager in 1951 and general manager in 1954. In this capacity he was the agency's chief administrative officer.

In 1961 President John F. Kennedy appointed Wagner to the TVA board of directors. When Chairman Herbert D. Vogel resigned the following year, Kennedy designated Wagner as chairman. When Wagner's first term neared an end in 1969 without a reappointment, he prepared to leave. However, President Richard Nixon reappointed him at the last minute, and he returned to serve another nine years—longer than anyone else who had been chairman.

During his tenure, Wagner gained a degree of respect and personal loyalty among rank-and-file TVA employees that was almost unprecedented for a large organization. He was called "Mr. TVA" by many, and historians say his influence on TVA's direction and programs is equaled only by that of the first board of directors. He is remembered for his tireless energy, never letting up until he accomplished what he was trying to do. Although he could be very stubborn when he was convinced he was right, he would listen to others and worked hard to gain broader perspectives. He was a builder who always kept the big picture in mind. He never saw TVA's projects as ends in themselves but as tools to create good jobs and build a better quality of life for the Tennessee Valley.

Wagner was a special friend of the small towns and rural areas of the Tennessee Valley, and he made sure that TVA worked closely with the people of these areas to increase their economic opportunities. Because he was disturbed by the migration of many of the area's young people, who often had to leave their homes and families to find work outside the Tennessee Valley, he was proud of TVA's role in reversing that flow by stimulating economic expansion and helping to create good jobs for the people of this region.

Elected a member of the National Academy of Engineering in 1973, Wagner was a member of the President's Appalachian Regional Commission, President's Council on Recreation and Natural Beauty, President's Council on Cost Reduction in Government, Engineering Advisory Committee of the Tennessee

Technological University, the Tennessee Governor's Science Advisory Committee, National Advisory Council for the 1974 World Energy Conference, Advisory Committee for the 1972 United Nations Conference on Human Environment, Atomic Energy Commission's Senior Utility Steering Committee, and member and vice-chairman of the Breeder Reactor Corporation.

Wagner traveled extensively overseas as a consultant and adviser on resource problems. For example, in 1964 he participated in a river development conference at Aswan in the United Arab Republic. The conference was sponsored by the Ford Foundation and concerned the multipurpose applications of the Aswan High Dam. He was the keynote speaker and a participant in the Lahore, Pakistan, Seminar on Problems of Public Enterprise, which was sponsored by the Pakistan National Institute of Public Administration. He also served as a lecturer for the Agriculture and Natural Resources Session at the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies.

Wagner received an honorary doctor of laws degree from Newberry College in 1978 and an honorary doctor of Public Administration from Lenoir Rhyne College in 1970. He received the N. W. Daugherty Award from the University of Tennessee in 1969, the Distinguished Service Citation from the University of Wisconsin in 1962, the Lambda Chi Alpha Order of Achievement in 1970, and the Walter H. Zinn Award of the American Nuclear Society in 1978. In 1979 Wagner was named Chapter Honor Member of Chi Epsilon, in 1981 Engineer of Distinction by the Tennessee Technological University, and in 1978 a Honorary Lifetime Member of the American Public Power Association. He was the author of more than thirty-five publications.

After his retirement in 1978, Wagner's keen interest in the work of TVA continued, and on many occasions TVA and countless other organizations called on him to share the benefits of his experience. Today people who travel the Valley can see the legacy he left behind. Yet his legacy resides in more than TVA's concrete and steel. It lives on in the hearts and minds of the TVA employees. He challenged them as individuals and as an organization to build a TVA that would mean great things to the region.

He had confidence in TVA, and he instilled that confidence in others. That attitude of confidence and a "can-do" spirit still serves TVA well today.

On September 13, 1991, the towboat "Red Wagner" was christened. That boat was chosen to carry his name because it is a workhorse for TVA, day-in and day-out, like Red was for TVA. As John B. Waters, TVA director, said at the christening ceremony, "I know what this boat can do ... because last summer it served as the 'flagship' for my river inspection tour. That 'Voyage for the Valley' took me the full 650-mile length of the Tennessee River... and this boat never missed a beat. Red was like that from the time he joined TVA. Some of his earliest work at TVA involved surveying the river banks for the dams that would follow, so it is appropriate that his name travel the river system that he helped build."

Red Wagner is missed by everyone who knew and admired him. But his legacy continues to be a vital force throughout the Tennessee Valley.

