

Dr. Googin and his early days at Y-12, conclusion and community involvement — A 'larger than life' figure at work ... and in his community

We have now looked closely at Dr. John Googin's early years at Y-12, concentrating on his first few months but including some observations made later in his career. He was immediately aware of the mission for Y-12 and understood much of the overall process. His role was first in the feed material portion of the Y-12 operation in what was called Bulk Treatment, but he eventually became the "Scientist of Y-12."

He began from day one to make a personal and positive impact on Y-12 operations. His contributions continued through the years as he became personally involved in all the major missions for Y-12 and was well known for his problem solving abilities. His career spanning nearly 50 years was dedicated to Y-12's success and grew to be recognized locally, nationally and even internationally for his scientific accomplishments.

There is much more that can be said about Dr. Googin during his career at Y-12, and much of that can be included as we progress with the chronological history of Y-12. However, in addition to his career at Y-12, John was also most active in community affairs. By special request, I would like to take an aside from the Y-12 history of Dr. John Googin to include some of that information.

Dr. Googin's community involvement

The Reverend Howard Box, retired minister of the Oak Ridge Unitarian Universalist Church, has helped immensely by providing written commentary regarding much of his good friend's involvement with human rights and especially the church over the years. He also requested Bob Stone to assist. Bob wrote the following:

John Googin is most broadly recognized for his almost supernatural ability to come up with sound technical solutions to seemingly hopeless engineering dilemmas. I knew him best for his role in the affairs of the early Oak Ridge Unitarian Church, including our later alliance with the Universalists.

John was president of the congregation for two three-year terms, taught Sunday School (where, despite his heavy responsibilities, he did imaginative and inspiring things with the kids), and was the compass and conscience of the congregation. He sat in the front row taking notes during sermons by Arthur Graham, who was our minister for 21 years, and who had a formidable intellect of his own. At the end of the sermon John was ready to comment in depth on the subject matter, to debate, to support, or a mixture of both.

John was also ready to do battle with the whole denomination, challenging them when they wandered into positions he wasn't comfortable with. Some presidents of the denomination felt that a liberal organization had by definition to be anti-nuclear power, and John was ready to rise at any annual meeting to meet antinuclear resolutions with both logic and his forceful presence.

He felt similarly about resolutions to provide sanctuary for illegal aliens. "No matter," he said, "how liberal-minded or compassionate such resolutions might be, they conspired to violate the law, and would compel him and others to resign from the denomination to preserve their security clearances.

I knew him also as an active participant in the local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, where his was a strong voice for defending not only constitutional rights, but also constitutional responsibilities."

John's was a keen mind that cut through thorny problems and plausible nonsense with equal effectiveness. He is missed in many venues.

Reverend Box also provided insight into John's involvement with his church. To him, John was a "larger than life figure" in the community and church he joined on March 2, 1958.

The reverend said, "John was much involved with the American Civil Liberties Union, the evidence of which is that at his death a memorial lecture was funded on ACLU topics." This lecture series continues as a main emphasis on individual rights.

Reverend Box continued, "John taught a children's class in Sunday School every other year alternating with his attendance in the adult service held at the same time." Among the many varied and interesting topics listed in a sample curriculum was a trip to go fossil hunting on Windrock.

Reverend Box said of his personal view of John, "I simply know no one who had anything like the breadth of mind and grasp of things and indeed of event history as it moved forward. He was a kind New England conservative and at the same time he was a good civil libertarian, ACLU member, civil rights advocate and public education advocate and critic." Reverend Box indicated that he thought John may even have been active in the Highlander Folk School, but had no written evidence of it.

John was always on the front row taking notes during sermons. Even at church, it was well known that when he began to shake his foot while sitting with his legs crossed and taking copious notes, that undoubtedly a point was being taken that he felt strongly enough about to argue over when the talk ended. Most speakers, both at work and in the community, knew and feared John's insightful, inquisitive and pointed questions.

He got right to the heart of the matter and usually knew as much or more about the subject than did the speaker! Dr. John Googin was respected in all situations where he placed himself, yet he stood alone because of his intellect and knowledge in most every subject.

I find it interesting to note that in a photograph of 37 Union Carbide Corporate Fellows taken on June 21, 1983, Dr. Googin is one of two individuals without a formal tie. The other person is the single female in the photo. His idea of a tie was a string tie loosely hanging over his trademark open collar golf-style shirt with the collar over a light colored jacket.

Dr. Googin, Y-12 Scientist, Unitarian Universalist, ACLU member, advocate for human rights and the smartest man I have ever known. He is remembered by all who knew him as an amazingly intelligent and kind man.

Dick Smyser, in his column in The Oak Ridger following John's death, in addition to his personal knowledge of Dr. Googin, chose to include a poem written by John's daughter, Jackie, and read at the close of the memorial service. He also stated that Jackie had told how appreciative her father was of any even small acknowledgment of what he had done, particularly his efforts to be helpful to others. She concluded that for all her father's science and issue contending, he was actually quite a "softie."

Jackie asked, in memory of her father, that all who were in attendance at the memorial service for John Googin to please all go home and say something nice to someone – say something nice before it is too late. John Googin, a nice man, helpful to others and a "softie" at heart. He was unique and is one of my heroes.