



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on October 24, 2023

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Farewell to a Cherished Patriot: Larry O. Waters

Some may think it coincidence that God chose Columbus Day, October 12, on which to call Larry Orman Waters to his eternal reward. However, those who knew Larry would likely dub it characteristic serendipity that Providence would pick a date of such significance in American history. Larry Waters was, after all, one of his beloved country's most dedicated sons.



The New American
Larry Waters

Patriotism was in his blood. Family records reveal him to descend from Colonel William Waters, who became reputedly the first elected sheriff in America, in Northampton County, Colonial Virginia, in 1651. His third great-grandfather, William Aris Waters, served as a militia captain for his district in Tattnall County, Georgia, in the mid-1830s. And the Florida State Genealogical Society honors his great-great-grandfather, Emanuel Waters, as one of the state's pioneers. Emanuel served in Florida's 8th Regiment during the American Civil War and was injured in the 1864 Battle of the Wilderness. He spent the remainder of the conflict as a prisoner.

Larry's forefathers passed their flame of patriotism down through the generations until it burst forth on a brisk day in Florida near the end of January 1933. Christopher Orman and Marion Martis (Knight) Waters welcomed their son into the world in the midst of the Great Depression, when President Herbert Hoover was preparing to vacate the White House and hand the reins to Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

At the age of six, Larry witnessed the onset of the sovereignty-eroding Second World War, which would last until he was 12, when internationalists used the contrived conflict as an excuse to plant the seed of world government with the creation of the United Nations in 1945.

At 18, Larry entered Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas, while the Korean War raged overseas and Wisconsin Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy struggled on Capitol Hill to expose communists entrenched within our national government and institutions. By the time Larry graduated in 1957 with a degree in business administration, trouble was already brewing in Vietnam, and the USSR was preparing to launch Sputnik, scoring the first major victory in the Cold War's space race.

As he settled after college in Plano, Texas, where he started a successful printing business, Larry must have noticed how these events, coupled with disastrous U.S. national policies, were slowly whittling away at American independence and embroiling his homeland in perilous foreign entanglements.



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A Life Dedicated to JBS

Larry Waters looked for a solution, and discovered it in The John Birch Society, established in 1958 to expose the communist conspiracy threatening the United States. Inspired by founder Robert Welch's clarion call for more "pullers at the oars," Larry joined the JBS in its third year, when major media were waging a bloodthirsty smear campaign against the patriotic, educational organization.

Larry plunged into action, playing a pivotal role in the growth of the Society during the 1960s. He was first a chapter leader, then a section leader in the Dallas area, and within a few years found himself volunteering as a field coordinator in north Texas.

He also helped establish JBS's Dallas regional office and its American Opinion Bookstore, which housed a room used for meetings, programs, and presentations. Veterans of the era will remember that JBS member Julie Hays helped Larry run the office. And keeping it in the family, Larry's sister, Barbara, married Rex Westerfield, who served as JBS public relations director in the 1960s.

In January 1967, Larry joined the JBS staff as a full-time coordinator, selling his printing business so he could dedicate all his time, energy, and resources to the cause. The Society soon rewarded his talents with promotion to a regional director position, in which he covered the states of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

According to his good friend Bill Cherry, a former JBS national development officer, Larry is considered the "founding father" of the organization's "B&P" (business and professional) chapters across the country. During the 1970s he also pioneered the first JBS youth camp in the southwest, and served as its director for many years.

Birchers who attended that annual week-long event as speakers, counselors, and campers remember Larry's quick smile and affinity for dad jokes. "Fools rush in ... and get the best seats," he might quip. The daily camp newspaper took advantage of his sense of humor to throw barbs at every opportunity, with headlines such as "Investigation Shows Waters Guilty of Gross Dereliction of Duty" and "Waters Sabotaging Camp: Crisis Looms."

No one enjoyed the fun more than he, but Larry also took care of business. "I served as camp doctor 20 years, and he was my assistant one year when a camper lacerated his forehead and I sutured him," recalls physician and fellow Bircher Mike Ritze, who would later serve for 10 years in the Oklahoma House of Representatives. It was Larry who had enrolled Ritze and his wife in JBS membership in 1981.

Charlene Larsen Fanning, who at the time owned the camp host facility, the Rockin' L Guest Ranch, remembers Larry fondly as the first client who adjusted her daily menu to include more nutritious items — salad twice a day, and lots of fruits and veggies. "Larry Waters, I wish we could have visited before the Lord called you home!" she wrote via text after learning of his passing. "You are surely missed! Such a warrior for all the right reasons!"



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Eventually, Larry passed the camp torch to take on the task of JBS development officer in 1995, and 10 years later he assumed the vice presidency of the organization. CEO Emeritus Arthur R. Thompson remembers that, “mostly due to Larry’s efforts,” the Society weathered a tumultuous year in 2005, and ever since, “our influence has grown substantially.”

Larry retired in December 2012 after a 45-year tenure with JBS. But retirement could not contain him. Within two years, he contracted with the Society as a national development officer. He also served on its Board of Incorporators until declining health made it impossible for him to work further.

The Bridge Builder

Family and friends will always remember Larry as a vibrant teacher and skilled organizer. Of the memorials pouring in since his passing, many mention his honesty, patience, and sincerity, while others chuckle at his affinity for southern food, boiled peanuts, and the Dallas Cowboys. All will miss the beautiful tenor voice that graced many ensembles and quartets throughout the years, starting back in his college days.

Larry was a lifelong member of the Church of Christ and was a devoted family man. His relatives express consolation that Larry is now rejoined with his beloved wife, Yvonne, who passed away in July 2014, just shy of their 42nd anniversary. His stepdaughter, Melissa Locke, also preceded him in death. He is survived by step-daughter Becky Locke, who lovingly cared for him during his declining years, and step-son and daughter-in-law Chuck and Paige Locke.

“Larry is the most loyal member of the Society I have ever encountered,” was late JBS Vice President Tom Hill’s conclusion, as President Emeritus John F. McManus remembers and agrees.

“While Larry may not have been known to every member, every member did enjoy the fruit of Larry’s labors,” notes JBS CEO Bill Hahn. “He mightily contributed to the rock-solid foundation from which we operate today, and will be greatly missed.”



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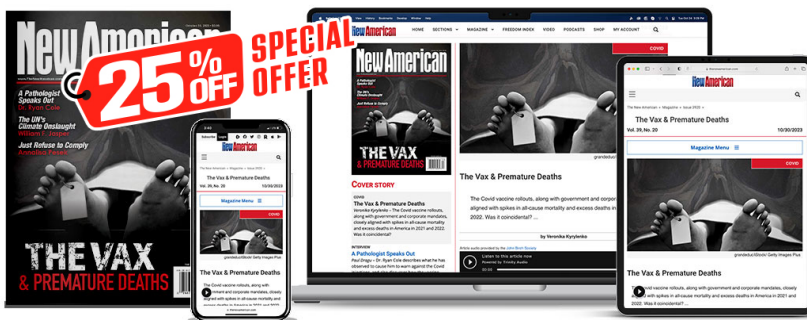
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