

1937-1940

TOURNAMENT CHANGES

The first National Congress was held in conjunction with the National Tournament. Debate topics included child labor laws, wages and hours, anti-lynching, and labor unions. Student Congress was declared an annual tournament event.

For the first time at the National Tournament, teams were rated in the first five rounds, instead of earning a win-loss decision. Debaters were allowed to engage in cross-examination.

Poetry, a new consolation event, was added to the National Tournament. Three major television networks carried programs featuring the champions.

▲ The National Forensic Tournament Barbecue, Beverly Hills, California, June 19, 1939

For a glimpse of what competition used to look like, scan to watch the video »
Briefcases, Pamphlets, and Cards, Oh My



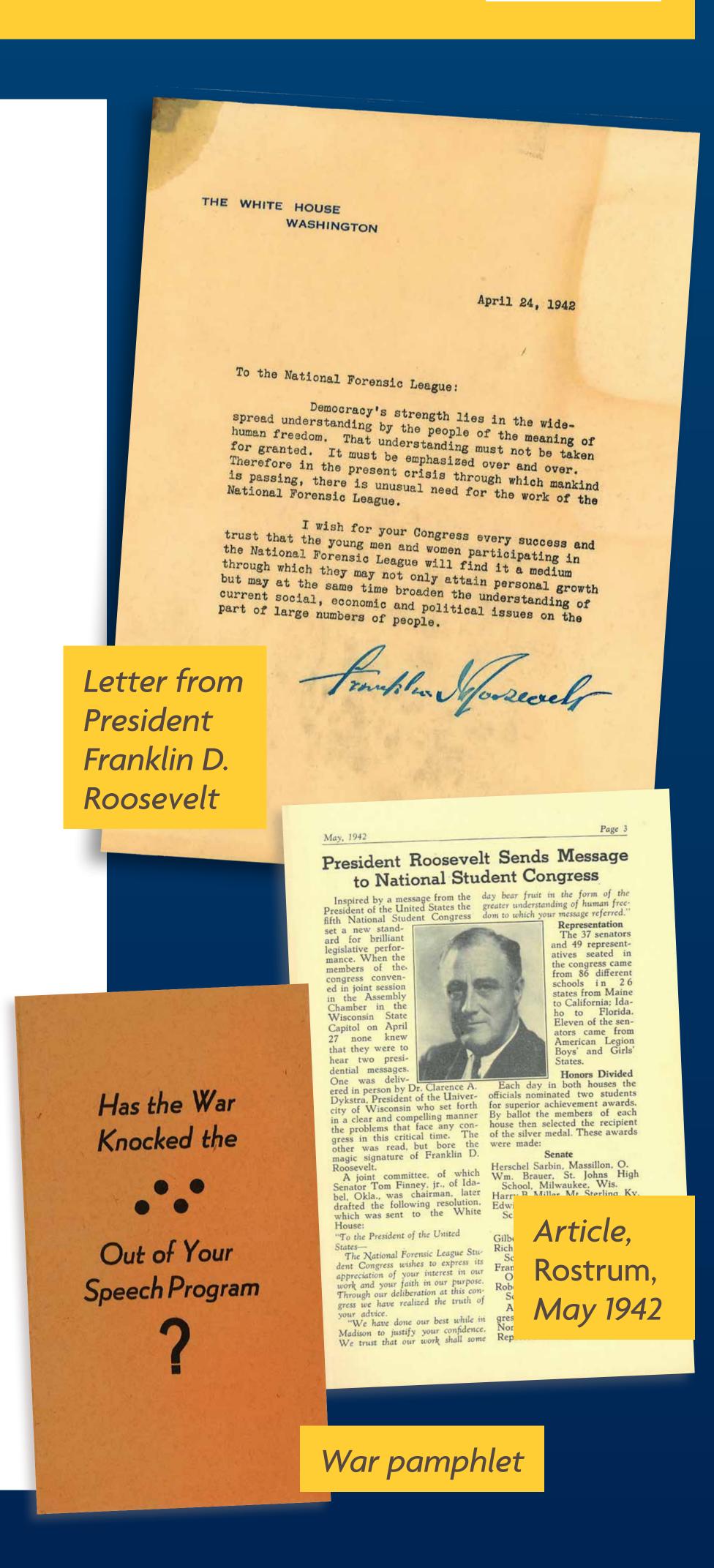
1941-1942

THE WAR YEARS

During World War II, most nonessential travel was banned, and the National Tournament was suspended for the first time in NFL history. With competitions canceled, members were awarded points for public speaking at their schools, churches, radio stations, and community. Diamond key insignia was established. Coaches could earn a diamond-set key for attaining 1,000 points.

With the support of members of the U.S. Congress, Student Congress was allowed to meet to discuss legislation at the Wisconsin State Capitol.

The popular event earned national recognition from the President of the United States. The NFL received a letter of commendation from President Franklin D. Roosevelt.



1943-1945

WARTIME ADAPTATIONS

Despite the success of the National Student Congress, it was suspended in compliance with a war-time ban on conventions. A national contest in Extemporaneous Speaking was held instead at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. This was preceded by regional contests in Denver, Colorado; Iowa City, Iowa; Nashville, Tennessee; and Washington, Pennsylvania.

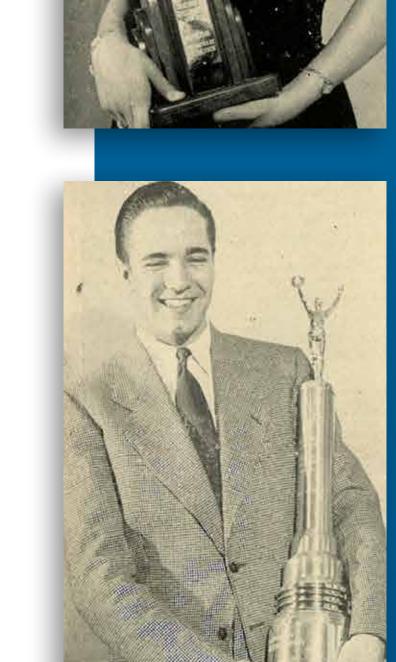
The NFL established the Leading Chapter Award, which recognized student participation and dedication to speech and debate education.

1946-1948

POST-WAR RECOVERY

Following years of uncertainty and adaptation, the National Tournament returned. A single National Speech Tournament was held with 96 contestants from 22 states across the country.

The Board updated rules to keep up with the changing landscape. To discourage marathon speaking in quest of points, points were limited to three rounds a day. In 1947, chapters began electing all District Committee members.









1948

THE NATIONAL STAGE

NFL Board President Karl E. Mundt was elected to the United States Senate representing South Dakota, further promoting speech and debate at the national level.

1950

DEBATE RETURNS

Debate was restored to the National Tournament by dropping two interpretation events. This action was necessary to secure tournament sanction from the principals' contest committee.



1951

ORGANIZATIONAL MILESTONES

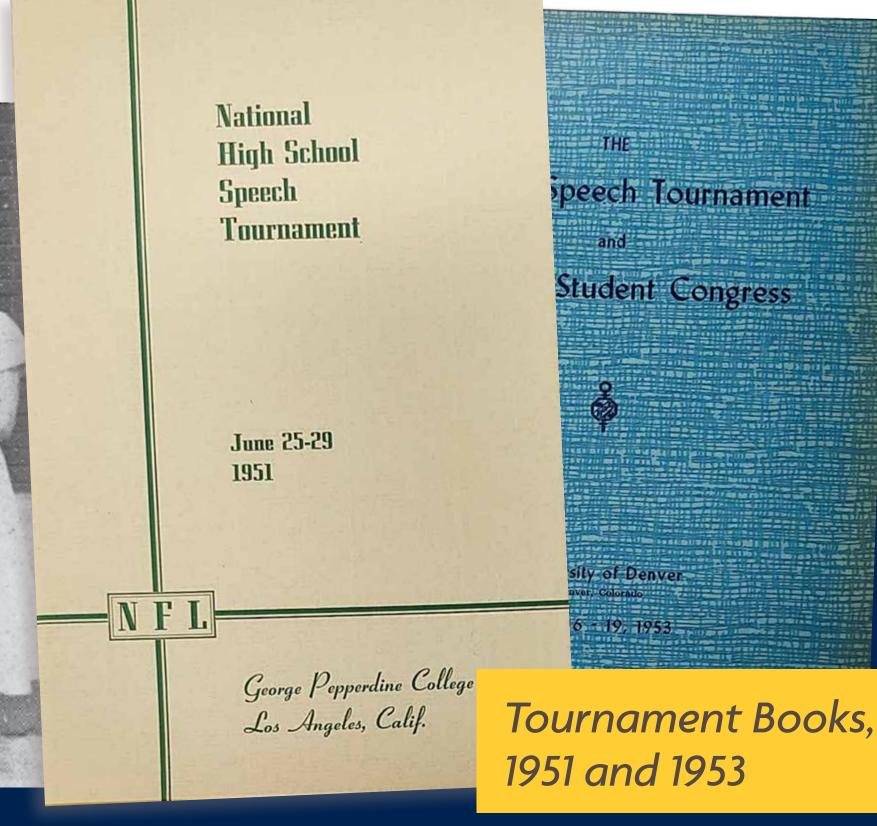
The National Forensic League underwent significant organizational changes as it incorporated and became an independent legal entity. Individual membership fees were raised to \$2 to support growth.

The National Student Congress was reinstated at the National Tournament, with one legislative session notably held in historic Faneuil Hall in downtown Boston.

To further recognize achievement, the NFL introduced new insignia for student members and authorized diploma seals for advanced degree graduates. Additionally, the Executive Director presented Leading Chapter Awards to 20 schools.

Winchester Kentucky Chapter, 1950







1951

FIRST FEMALE BOARD MEMBER

While women's rights were significantly limited during this time, the first woman was elected to the NFL Board of Directors. Helen Malseed from Pennsylvania challenged gender norms and joined the Board.

Helen Malseed

NATIONAL SPEECH & DEBATE ASSOCIATION

169 YEARS

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

NATIONAL SPEECH & DEBATE ASSOCIATION

100 YEARS

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