

John Hendrix – Oak Ridge “Prophet” Part 2

(As published in *The Oak Ridger’s Historically Speaking* column on March 21, 2006)

While I will not print the whole story of the John Hendrix family here, some interesting and basic facts are included. I hope they help provide you a context for the life of John Hendrix.

John Hendrix's great-grandfather was Garrett Hendrix. He came from Wilkes County, North Carolina to Beaver Creek in Knox County before 1794. David and Samuel Hall, who had been Revolutionary War soldiers also came from Wilkes County. The Hall and the Hendrix families lived in the same neighborhoods and intermarried. Samuel Hall's wife was Letitia Hendrix. David Hall is buried in a cemetery near the Bull Run Steam Plant close to where John Hendrix lived at one time. (Remember the Historic David Hall cabin mentioned last week in the Emery Road Bridge article? This is the same David Hall and his grave is just west of the cabin.)

John Hendrix's grandfather was Morgan Hendrix, one of the first settlers in Morgan County. He moved back to Knox County by 1830 and died there in 1843. Morgan had seven children by his first wife, one being Luke S. Hendrix. Morgan married a second time to Sally Bowman. They had 10 children. Dr. E. L. Hendrix of Oak Ridge is a great-grandson of Tarleton Hendrix, a half-uncle of John Hendrix.

John Hendrix's father was Luke S. Hendrix.

John Hendrix was born November 9, 1865 in Anderson County. He was the eighth son of Luke S. and Jane (Wallace) Hendrix. His family lived in Morgan County at the times of the 1850 and 1860 census. Just prior to John's birth, his father sold the farm in Morgan County and moved to the Robertsville area (John Hendrix may have been born while his parents lived on a rented farm in Bear Creek Valley - the present location of Y-12!). In 1888, John married his first wife, Julia Ann Griffith of Morgan County. She was the daughter of Joel and Cloe J. (Hall) Griffith, and granddaughter of John and Sara Griffith. They had four children: Jessee, Elzora Elizabeth, Lela and Ethel Perrgold Hendrix. Donald L. Gray of Oak Ridge was the son of Elzora, who married Roy Lee Gray.

John and his family lived on the west side of the hill above the present-day site of the Bull Run Steam Plant. Their youngest daughter Ethel who was only two years old died of diphtheria. John's wife, Julia Ann, blamed John for her death. It seems John had spanked Ethel sometime earlier and in her mind, Julia Ann somehow blamed John. Ethel was buried in the Black Cemetery that was moved from the Bull Run Steam Plant site. Her grave is in the relocated cemetery, marked by TVA with an "unknown" marker.

Around 1900, Julia Ann took her three children and went with her brother to Arkansas. She later wrote John a letter telling him that she and the children were not returning. She later married a Mr. Bradley near Camden, Arkansas.

John took the death of his young daughter and his family leaving him very hard. It was about this time in his life that he began to think more seriously about religion and to see visions. He prayed to God to tell him the future and he heard a voice say if he would lay with his face on the ground for 40 nights and pray, it would be revealed to him. John stayed in the woods for 40 days and nights, praying and sleeping on the ground. A neighbor lady found him lying with his hair frozen to the ground and brought a quilt to cover him. She stated that hearing him pray would make your hair stand on end. The cold ground may well have contributed to his tuberculosis.

When John began to describe his visions, people thought him insane and he was imprisoned for a time at the county farm. John "dug out" and escaped but was spotted by authorities. John shouted to them from outside the fence that the farm was an evil place and that within a month God would strike the building and burn it down. When lightning did strike and burn the building, some people began to fear him as a witch. However, many of the things he said were not taken seriously by those who heard him talk about his special gift of visioning...at least not while he lived, but later they would remember and wonder at the accuracy of what he foretold.

By the way, the “county farm” known also as the “poor house” where John Hendrix was placed was located on the east side of the Clinch River just across from the Oak Ridge Marina and a bit north toward

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the railroad bridge. It was not rebuilt when it burned from a lightning strike. Its location is still noted on topographical maps.

For many years, the figure of John Hendrix sitting in a rocking chair was the featured attraction at entrance to the Oak Ridge story at the American Museum of Atomic Energy - now our American Museum of Science and Energy. This display was removed when a Washington DC bureaucrat felt the folklore had no place in a “prestigious museum of science” and the museum staff was coerced into removing the display. Judd Brown tells of remembering when the display was a often visited attraction and when visitors would ask questions after seeing the unique representation of the “Prophet of Oak Ridge” at the entrance to the Oak Ridge Story display.

Another interesting fact about John Hendrix is that for a number of years, Harry Carper – a singer, a very religious man, an amicable soul, a talented calligraphist, a gifted speaker and a dedicated supporter of the legend of John Hendrix – portrayed Hendrix at various functions. There is even a film that was made of his John Hendrix presentation.

So, now you have read the known facts regarding John Hendrix and his intriguing legend as *Prophet of Oak Ridge*. You have also read about some real people who are descended from the source of this story that is often used to introduce the history of Oak Ridge and especially Y-12. It is for you to decide if you choose to believe in such visions into the future and the telling of things to come. Regardless of your chosen path, surely you must admit that it is an intriguing story with a whole lot of appeal to our heritage tourism visitors. I chose to tell the story and leave the conclusions to the listener.



Grave marked courtesy of 1966-67 Jefferson Junior High School students of Dorothy Bruce

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Ed Westcott photo of early grave marker