

## Ed Westcott: His Story Continues

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on March 28, 2006)

In an earlier article: *Ed Westcott: Photographer Extraordinaire*, I featured Ed's relationship with Lynn Freeny, official DOE photographer. I also cited Ed's accomplishments over the years as he single-handedly documented the Manhattan Project history through his images as well as noting the artistic side of his work as recognized by Baldwin Lee.

In this article, I would like to remind our readers of his more recent activities to show that he is still very much a part of Oak Ridge history in the making. Truly, Ed Westcott IS Oak Ridge's Manhattan Project history photographer, yes, but more so, Ed Westcott and especially his epic photographs are major elements in Oak Ridge's potential future for heritage tourism! Can you imagine trying to tell our story WITHOUT Ed's photos?

In 2001 before "Mayfest" morphed into "Secret City Festival" there was an Ed Westcott Day in Oak Ridge – Saturday, May 19, 2001. Ed's photographic work was displayed for all to see. He shared his original Speed Graphic camera and 16mm film projector from the 1940's. Bobbie Martin was the Oak Ridge Heritage Preservation Association chair for the event.

Letters of recognition were read from Congressman Zach Wamp, Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham, and other notable figures wishing Ed well. Many television stations and other news media sent congratulatory notes. A special "Insight" authored by Dick Smyser was printed in *The Oak Ridger* on May 17, 2001 noting that Ed would be formally honored on Saturday, May 21, at the Civic Center. One aspect of Symser's article is especially worthy of note here. He stated that *The Oak Ridger* often used Ed's photos and further stated that they were often used without credit being given to Ed and always without pay. This is commonplace with Ed. His photos are so entrenched in Oak Ridge's history that we all take them fully for granted. They have become Oak Ridge's history in many respects and as such have become community property, no longer Ed's alone and certainly no longer thought of as "DOE" or "AEC" property. We are unique here. No other Manhattan Project site has our Ed Westcott images!

In 2002 on Ed's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, in a contrary move, he gave a gift to the city of Oak Ridge – his exhibit of "EYE ON AN ERA: MIDTOWN" opened on January 19, 2002, in the Midtown Community Center. All of Ed's friends were invited to attend the party and a huge crowd did so. This exhibit shows a part of Oak Ridge that only existed as such for three years – 1943 through 1945. At one time there were 4,000 trailers, 1,300 hutments, perhaps 20,000 people, a movie theater, grocery store, recreation hall, cafeteria, filling station, hardware store and even a ball field. Roads were named for birds and animals – roads named Badger and Raccoon still remain. Without Ed's photos all memories of this Midtown area would be lost. As a result of Ed's gift to us, anyone can go to the Midtown Community Center and see the exhibit. Here is Ed's draft dedication statement

*"These pictures are dedicated to the memory of the men and women who built Oak Ridge. They came singly or with their families, from near and far – soldiers, laborers, craftsmen, scientists, tradesmen, and teachers – to suffer the privations and separation of a frontier town. They were part of an enterprise that won a great war and kept the peace for half a century more. Like the Midtown construction camp, some came and left in the space of a few years. Others stayed to form a community. Many have been my friends. I have been privileged to witness and record the history of a town that I love." - Ed Westcott*

In the years between then and now, Ed has gone through health problems and has had the steady support of his family and of his special friend – Ethel Steinhauer. Ethel is a photographer in her own right and her favorite subject is Ed. She has an uncanny ability to assist Ed as he communicates and to know what he wants and how he thinks. Ed continues to enjoy life to the fullest and is often seen at events "at the town that he loves!" One example is the 57<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Opening of the Gates Ceremony held on March 19, 2006 at the American Museum of Science and Energy. It comes as no surprise that Ed Westcott should be chosen to cut the ribbon. Of course he was pleased to do so and in his humble manner he was the star of the show!

Another insight into Ed's character is seen in the way he encourages others. I have been the recipient of his encouragement more than once and I sincerely appreciate it. This trait of Ed's is best understood by reading a personal note he wrote to an assistant, Helen Rogers, in 1947. The occasion was when Ed was going to be away

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from his job for a few days to attend a professional photographer's convention and she was going to be left to cover the events in Oak Ridge. His note said,

*"Just remember you are about to photograph some famous men. The Press has made them famous. If it weren't for the Press no one would know them. Each and every one of them think in their own minds when they see a photographer 'Here is my chance to get my picture in the paper and maybe my buddies who are not as important will see me in the paper. Maybe I can get a copy for my scrapbook and maybe one for my Mom. I've got to act "big" and maybe that will impress the photographer and get more shots made'. You are doing them a favor and you have the right to direct them toward making a better picture. You hold the camera and they are here for you as a favor to them. They will do anything you say so don't be afraid to say it. You are free to order them around because a camera is like a gun. Here is your big chance, so don't be afraid of it. I know you can do a darn good job of it. If I didn't think so I would say better try and get Dan. I'll be thinking of you as you read this. Don't let them confuse you. Ed.*

I talked to Helen Rogers before writing this article and she had glowing praise for Ed Westcott and attributed much of her later success to his encouragement early in her career. She even told me of the incident when the gates opened on March 19, 1949 where she was assigned to photograph the event and the Associated Press photographer lost his negatives of the famous "explosion" that cut the ribbon. He was in a fix as the deadline was fast approaching. She provided him one of her images of the event and it was sent to all major newspapers as the official "AP photo" and appeared in the New York Times. She went on to work at area newspapers and to enter and win photography competitions later in her career, maybe thanks to the start she got working for Ed Westcott.

To give you further evidence of just how intertwined Ed's photos are with Oak Ridge Manhattan Project history, the Atlantic Production director, Jessica Taylor - with whom I spent the largest part of over a week recently as she filmed The History Channel "Lost Worlds" Manhattan Project documentary planned to show in June 2006 - already knew of Ed Westcott before coming to Oak Ridge. Her research online had provided her that information. What is more interesting is the awe and respect she had for Ed and his work (I hope to be able to tell you more about that later...). She wanted to meet Ed while she was here, but the filming literally took ALL her time. We did eat lunch in "Ed's booth" at the Jefferson Diner! She requested and got many digital file copies of his photos from the Oak Ridge Library's Oak Ridge Room! So, I am sure they will be included on The History Channel in June - look for them and be proud for Ed and all of us.

In addition to the Oak Ridge Story room in the American Museum of Science and Energy an extensive exhibit of Ed's photos are on display in the main lobby. It is truly a grand display of his work.

There is a public display of his work in the Oak Ridge Children's Museum's Ed Westcott Room - opened June 19, 2005 - where a visitor can see a broad array of images from Oak Ridge's past. The main hallway just off the main entrance of the Children's Museum is covered with historic images that Ed created. Children and parents who visit here cannot help but learn our history visually, which is perhaps and maybe by far the most effective medium. His images contain whole stories in one photo - a quality I much admire.

There is a beautiful mural or collage of Ed's photos on the wall in Mayor David Bradshaw's office. This mural was designed by Tom Walker and commemorates the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Oak Ridge. It is 30 inches high by 96 inches wide and includes captioned photos by Ed Westcott.

The Secret City Café in Methodist Medical Center's newly renovated main entrance features Ed's work displayed in excellent taste. This most recent exhibit of Ed's work was just opened in February 2006. It makes for a truly relaxing yet educational atmosphere that is exactly what Oak Ridge - World War II's Secret City - is striving for.

There was a Heartland Series special "Celebrating the Work of Ed Westcott" where Bill Landry featured Ed's photographic work on WATE Channel 10. Bill is also one of our area's treasures and of course he recognized the greatness in Ed's visual work.

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You can see 35 of Ed Westcott's images online at: <http://sunsite.utk.edu/westcott/>. We should use every opportunity available to explore our history through Ed Westcott photographs. Ours is a story worth telling and one that the world is anxious to know and SEEING is the most effective communication medium. Ed Westcott images let us SEE the history of Oak Ridge in a wonderful and unique way. Thank you Ed Westcott!



Ed Westcott



Ed cuts ribbon for 57th Anniversary Gate Opening Ceremony State Representative Jim Hackworth, left, Ed Westcott, and Oak Ridge Mayor, David Bradshaw cut the ribbon for the 57th anniversary on 3/19/06 of the Oak Ridge Gate Opening Ceremony (Photo by Scott Fraker)

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Collage of early photos of Ed Westcott, Manhattan Project Photographer

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Ed and Ray at permanent art display of Ed's photos in Secret City Café at Methodist Medical Center  
(photo by Scott Fraker)