

John Hendrix Prophecy Article – Earliest documented account known to exist, part 1

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on May 30, 2006)

The article being featured here was found while browsing through an original set of books containing *The Oak Ridge Journal/The Oak Ridger* beginning in 1943. They were donated to the Elm Grove School and are now in the possession of Dave Miller owner of www.SecretCityStore.com.

Imagine my delight when I found an article dated November 2, 1944 and titled "*John Hendrix, Prophet of Oak Ridge, Predicted Project and Railroad more than 40 years ago!*" Until then the earliest documented account of the John Hendrix story had been in George Robinson's *The Oak Ridge Story* published in 1950.

The article is included below exactly as published in November 2, 1944:

...

FROM THE TIME the first cave dweller threw together a few sticks and bits of fur and announced that by stirring them in a stew he could tell what the weather would be like the next Tuesday, right down through the Hebrew fathers, Greek oracles, Roman augurs, medieval philosophers, Victorian mystics, right up to modern international experts who pretend to know where our armies will be next month, men have been forecasting the future and other men have been listening. Some have been laughed at and forgotten; others have been laughed at, then remembered later when certain predictions came overwhelmingly true. Well, forty years ago, folk who lived in this valley laughed at a lonely, eccentric old man named John Hendrix. He traveled from house to house, telling of visions he had been shown, predicting a railroad that would cut across his homeland. They laughed at him. Later he went one better. He said a city would arise on Black Oak Ridge, and factory buildings. They laughed at that, too, and today the ones who remember those prognostications are laughing out of the other sides of their mouths.

There is no written proof that John Hendrix actually made these predictions, no Hagiographa, no Domesday book, no local book of Mormon. He never bothered to write them down, but simply told them to everyone he knew and met. They have survived until they now constitute a local legend.

Sgt. Abe Levitt said to me one day, 'You oughta go see a guard lieutenant named Braden, over at the Guard Force. He's got a good story.' Further inquiry revealed that Braden knew all about the prophet. I asked a few others about it, and some knew about it and some didn't. They were all pretty vague. Columnist Bert Vincent had touched vaguely on the story in a Knoxville newspaper. The Clinton Courier-News had reprinted Vincent's piece. But no one save Braden, seemed to know the whole tale. So I went around to see him.

I found James W. Braden in the supply room at the Main Guard Headquarters. By coincidence he was telling his story to Shirley Lee Ashburn and another auxiliary military policeman who happened to be there. Braden has told his story a good many times, of late. It's such an astonishing one that he can always find an audience.

A tall, well-built man, James Braden lives in E-441, near Scarboro School. He was born in 1891 and knows this country as intimately as the birds and rabbits. He knew old John Hendrix well. "I got the last whipping I ever got from my mother for believin' John Hendrix's prophesyin'," Braden told me. "That was when I was bout nine."

MOST PROPHETS AND MYSTICS have been simple, ascetic souls who lived by themselves most of the time and communicated with the world only to tell of their findings. Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Hagai, Zachariah, Malachi, The Hebrew prophets were men of this sort. So was Michael de Notredame who has gathered some vogue in the past few years as Nostradamus (although he lived and wrote his predictions around 1550), by predicting (so they say) the war and certain

John Hendrix Prophecy Article – Earliest documented account known to exist, part 1

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on May 30, 2006)

recent happenings. Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, was a frugal, thrifty, intensely religious man. John Hendrix, the Jeremiah of Oak Ridge, resembled traditional seers to this extent, at least around the time he began making his predictions.

Hendrix, who lived in a farmhouse just off Pine Ridge between Emory Valley Road and Union Valley Road directly east of Midtown warehouse area (the house is still standing), and who lies buried on the hill just behind the house, was a farmer. He never had too much money, just enough to keep his wife and family alive. Until his later years, he gave no indication that he would some day be regarded by the local citizenry as a man accorded particular divine favor.

"In his later years," James Braden told me, "old John became very religious. He just about quit work and put in all his time out in the woods, prayin'. When he got home in the evenin' he'd set and read the Bible all the time. He got so much religion his wife decided he was crazy. He was lettin' the farm go and wasn't payin' any attention to anythin' but religion."

"Well, his wife decided he was crazy an' she had him put up. They put him up in the asylum, but he tore out. He tore out and he come home. He went home to his farm and he got eight rocks and put them in a row in his front yard. He said the Lord had told him to put them there to smite his enemies. Well, old John stood there with his eight rocks in a row, and when the commissioners came after him to put him back up they decided not."

The second half of "John Hendrix, Prophet of Oak Ridge" and D. Ray Smith's concluding comments will be published next week.



This photograph of the early gravestone for John Hendrix's grave was provided to me by Ed Westcott when I first published any information on John Hendrix (Photo by Westcott)

***John Hendrix Prophecy Article – Earliest documented account
known to exist, part 1***

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on May 30, 2006)



Guard Force Lt. James Braden, whose mother once spanked him for listening to the prophecies of John Hendrix (U.S.E.D. Photo)