

## ***John Hendrix – Eyewitness to his death, provided by Ed Westcott – part 2***

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on May 9, 2006)

The following is the conclusion of reminiscences of Ed Westcott about Clay seals, a man he met in 1965 who was personally acquainted with John Hendrix, and about Ed's exploration of the Hendrix homesite and grave. The first part was published in *The Oak Ridger* on May 2, 2006. I have retained Ed's first person account and have edited it only where more recent history has shown additional information and for clarity.

Clay Seals was 87 years old and was born August 12, 1878. I changed my mind about going to Loudon and we took Seals down to the Loudon square to meet his buddies. He offered to pay me for the trip and ended up giving the two boys three pennies between them.

In the past 21 years since coming to Oak Ridge and learning from Dick Gehman about the story of John Hendrix, I had never found another grave in the area except that of John Hendrix some 200 feet beyond the house on top of the hill. After considerable research of the records I had found that the Hendrix land was last owned by Perry and Paralee Raby before the government took over the area.

The Hendrix place can plainly be seen from Oak Ridge No. 1 Fire Station. The firemen were puzzled how or when the fire that destroyed John Hendrix's house occurred and didn't realize there was even a house on the hillside clearly in view about two miles across the valley from Black Oak Ridge.

I found out about the fire one year when, as I was in the habit of doing every few years, I tramped through the briars for almost a quarter mile from the nearest road to the John Hendrix home site and found that the house had been destroyed by fire. The fire was confined to the house and no brush or trees around it showed any signs of fire damage. All that could be found was a pile of charred wood. Probing around in the ashes I found a headstone about 10 inches wide and 2 ½ feet tall that was inscribed with the name, Perry Raby.

One trip to that area was made with Mayford Huff, a photographer friend, the week before Christmas of 1948 to cut a Christmas tree for the family. What pulls me back to the Hendrix story is a puzzle to me and always leaves unanswered questions.

This time about 150 feet from the grave I found two mounds of fresh wood shavings about 24 inches in diameter and 10 inches high. I thought this unusual that there was no evidence of how they got there. None was scattered around the ground, no tire tracks and besides no road or clearing for a vehicle to enter the area on the ridge top. I kicked the shavings about and found that they were actually filling two holes in the ground about two feet square.

Thinking that something had been buried there I started removing the shavings from the hole until I lay on my stomach and as far as I could reach for 31 inches I removed nothing but wood shavings. How much deeper it went I never knew. What happened to the dirt from the holes still remains a mystery because there wasn't the slightest trace of it on the ground around the holes.

On the way home we talked about the strange story and decided to visit the Hendrix gravesite before going back to the road. Just a few scraps of wood were all that remained at the site of John Hendrix's house. No one could even find it unless they had been there before. In an open field on top of the hill overlooking the old home site still remains an area 10 foot by 10 foot square of overgrown brush where lies the memory of John Hendrix. His head stone is gone and probably will never be found again. And even though we looked and looked, nowhere in the field were we able to find the two holes in the earth filled with wood shavings.

Legends of haunted houses, caves with unusual stories and strange happenings are often passed along from one generation to another and seemingly have been found to be more common in rural communities such as were Robertsville, Scarboro, Wheat and Elza. Usually the stories have been told so many times by so many people you can never find anyone that has first hand information.

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For 21 years I have been interested in the legend of the Prophet John Hendrix and now I have found a man, Clay Seals, who knew and worked with Hendrix. He was even in the room when he drew his last breath and died.

John Hendrix - Prophet of Oak Ridge, predicted the Atomic Bomb project at Oak Ridge forty-two years before General Leslie R. Groves, commanding officer of the Manhattan Project thrust his cane into the ground and selected the site to prepare the material for the first atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, helping to win the greatest war there will ever be – as John Hendrix's prediction included.

This concludes Ed Westcott's hand-written narrative from 1965.

Clay Seals told Ed Westcott and his two young sons the story of "Uncle John" as he knew it from first-hand information. He was nervous in the telling of it. He had nothing to gain and no reason to tell less than the truth.

On a recent Sunday afternoon, I had a delightful visit with Faye Childs, a granddaughter of John Hendrix and a daughter of John's son Curtis Hendrix and his wife, Thelma Lee (Linda) Haney Hendrix. She told me of a time in late 1942 when she and her mother was taken by Martha Jane Hendrix ("Maw" Hendrix) - the widow of John Hendrix - to the spring near the home place of John and Martha Jane Hendrix and shown a huge tree. Martha Jane (Maw) said to them, "Well, it looks like Ole John Hendrix's vision is going to come true. See these stakes being placed all around here. He said the railroad would pass through here and that it would run right through the middle of that big old tree right there." Mrs. Childs went on to say that the railroad was later placed exactly where John Hendrix said it would go and did actually go right where the huge tree stood. The stump of that huge old tree was whitewashed and left standing beside the tracks for many years.

The spring she mentioned is still visible and forms the headwaters of Hendrix Creek in the Hendrix Creek Subdivision just off Lafayette Avenue and is just north of and down the hill from John Hendrix's grave. The railroad track remains and runs right along the north edge of what would have been John Hendrix's 15-acre farm. The exact location of John Hendrix's house is the spot where the *Secret City: The Oak Ridge Story – The War Years* documentary film's background visuals were shot for the John Hendrix story used to introduce the DVD.

Look for the upcoming reprint of the original November 2, 1944 Oak Ridge Journal article "John Hendrix, Prophet of Oak Ridge, Predicted Project and Railroad more than 40 years ago" coming in the next few weeks.

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