

# Jane Greer Puckett recalls early days in Oak Ridge

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

In an earlier article Jane Greer Puckett's experience at Y-12's Building 9731 and other calutron buildings was featured. This article focuses on her life in Oak Ridge.

Most of the time that Jane was in Oak Ridge (1943-1952) she worked long hours, frequently as many as seventy-two hours a week. She found time, however, to become involved in a number of activities that were provided as the population of Oak Ridge grew extremely fast.

She was a charter member of The College Woman's Club. Its chief project was to raise money by baby-sitting at twenty-five cents an hour. The purpose was to send deserving young Oak Ridge High School girl graduates to college. The members enjoyed having the opportunity to spend an evening in a residence, to be in a family atmosphere and even to bring a date or friends for a foursome and, in some cases, to use the kitchen to bake cookies. One of the priorities for the baby sitters was to be certain and remove shoes before entering. Because of the construction there was always a lot of red mud in around all the homes. In some cases extra shoes were available for wear in house!

Club members raised additional money through sponsoring dances and fashion shows. Jane recalls taking one of the girls who won a scholarship to North Carolina to a small college there and remembers returning to visit her a year later.

A special treat was to go to Knoxville to shop on Monday nights as the stores on Gay Street were kept open especially for the Oak Ridgers. It was a rarity for a young, single Oak Ridge resident to have a car; however, if the boy friend had one he used his gas coupon frequently to load his car for a shopping trip. The favorite eating spot was Regas Restaurant.

The Oak Ridge Recreation Department during the summer months provided bus trips to Big Springs Park. In addition, the Department supported the Oak Ridge Playhouse, which had excellent productions throughout the year. It was very popular and the actors excellent.

Travel to and from work was mostly by car pools and busses. Jane will never forget the very long trailer busses that were used during the cold winter months to and from Y-12, K-25 and X-10. The passengers sat with their backs to the windows on both sides. In the center was a "pot-bellied" stove with a roaring fire and, yes, a fireman!

Identification badges were a required necessity; all citizens had to have one with them at all times. However, Jane had a "badge problem" in that she often forgot to wear her badge. She can recall several occasions when she had to be taken by Security to her dorm room to get her badge or to the Security Station to be properly identified. She almost made the "Black List"!

Then there was the time when several employees were working in the "Top Secret" area and had to go through an additional gate and exchange badges for another one that detected radiation. She remembers the time she filed a very special top-secret report and needed to make a slight change but was not allowed to have the report to make it! She did not have access to the area and therefore could not get the report although she had created it originally.

There were always lines. There were lines for ivory flakes, for nylon hose (which were VERY rare), and sugar. There were lines to get tickets for the Playhouse and lines when the news got out that "Townsite" cafeteria was having a special desert, a rarity!

There were several theaters as well as an outdoor movie that were all used frequently by the young dormitory residents. If one of your friends was out on a date and you needed to locate him or her and they were not at a movie, you could usually locate the couple at the "Stump Dump!"

This "Stump Dump" was located approximately 200 yards west of the water tower that today stands just off West Outer Drive near the junction with Louisiana Avenue. At that time, West Outer ended at

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this point. Since West Outer stopped here, likely tree stumps were dumped here, hence, the name Stump Dump. There was a fairly large clearing, gravel and dirt base, where cars could park. The driver of the car could park facing back in the eastward direction, so if a Roane-Anderson police car started down the slope, the car could be seen by any occupants of a parked car and get things "in order."

There was an occasion when Jane had planned a trip to West Tennessee but had no way to get there, until she heard that there were two friends of a friend who had a trip to Nashville planned. They offered her a ride to the Nashville Greyhound Bus Station on Friday night and she accepted. She went on to her home in West Tennessee and then met them back at the Nashville Station on Sunday night. To her surprise the back seat and floor of the car was loaded with sealed cartons. She simply had to squeeze in to have a place to sit. They got as far as Oliver Springs about ten PM and stopped on the side of the road where a car was awaiting them. They hurriedly unloaded the cartons. Jane was finally comfortable for the brief ride to her dormitory! It finally dawned on her that the cartons contained liquor that was not allowed inside the gates to Oak Ridge!

Jane fondly recalls the Chapel on the Hill as the location of a non-denominational Protestant Church. The United Church met on Sunday mornings. For a period of time it was also the meeting place for the Roman Catholics and Jewish congregations as well. A number of young people participated in the services there and in a very active youth group in which Jane became active and where she met many members who became long time friends. Of course this Chapel on the Hill continues to be both a historic site in Oak Ridge and a very active and viable congregation today.

One memory that stands out in Jane's mind is when she cast her first vote. It was during November, 1944. The officials of Oak Ridge had arranged with the Anderson County officials to set up polls in the city. On the ballot were the nominees for election. One was Franklin D. Roosevelt for President with Harry S. Truman as the candidate for Vice-President. Jane still has the Instruction card published by the county's Democratic Party that was passed out at the polls requesting the voter to mark the above two candidates on the ballot as well as the other Democrat candidates. It was not only Jane's first opportunity ever to vote but provided the opportunity for Oak Ridge citizens to vote the candidates of their choice in the city of Oak Ridge.

During the early days that Jane was in Oak Ridge and prior to August 6, 1945, she was constantly being asked by her family and friends what the big project was in Oak Ridge. Her standard answer was "Making Little Red Wagons!" Soon after the announcement of the bomb, she went to see her family and with her she had a "Little Red Wagon!"

Jane's comments to me indicate that her experiences in Oak Ridge were priceless. She says there is no way that she can properly explain how she appreciates what was done here in the early days: the dedication of every one, the long hours they worked, the restrictions they had, and their determination to keep what they did and learned to themselves.

As you know, there has never been another time just like what was experienced here in Oak Ridge in the history of our country. Jane expresses her pride to have been a part of it as many an Oak Ridger also understands and appreciates the pride they share with her.

Jane went on from Oak Ridge to enjoy a full and eventful life with many honors and awards. She lives in Tullahoma, Tennessee and continues to serve as the National Registration Chair for the Amateur Athletics Union and was most appreciative of the opportunity to share her experiences in Oak Ridge. I met her at last year's Secret City Festival when she told me about working in Building 9731 and thought her story would be a good one to capture. If you know of other stories such as hers that you would like to see featured in Historically Speaking, please contact me at [draysmith@comcast.net](mailto:draysmith@comcast.net).

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Jane Greer Puckett, Oak Ridge resident from 1943 - 1952