

# Back of Oak Ridge author, a favor and a reminder

By: D. Ray Smith | *Historically Speaking* | The Oak Ridger | August 1, 2006

This column will be a bit out of the ordinary – well maybe not so much, as these *Historically Speaking* articles have often ranged over a wide variety of subjects. I want to begin with some comments about a dear friend who just recently died. Then I want to ask you a favor and last remind you of an upcoming documentary on The History Channel.

**First, Grace Raby Crawford (1915 – 2006).** Grace was the adopted step-granddaughter of John Hendrix. Paralee Raby, John's step daughter and the person who took care of him during his last days on this earth, adopted Grace when she was an infant and she and her husband, Perry Raby, raised Grace. In her book, *Back of Oak Ridge*, Grace pays tribute to Paralee and dedicates Chapter 5 "In Memory of Paralee." Here is the first two paragraphs of her introduction to that tribute:

"Paralee's life had been saddened greatly by the passing of her two sisters and now her stepfather. The days were long and dreary for her, but this sadness was of short duration. In exactly two months and one week after the death of John Hendrix, a "ray of sunshine" came to brighten this home in the form of a little four and one-half pound baby girl, whose mother had just passed away. The father of the baby felt it would be impossible for him to care for such a small and delicate child, so he asked Paralee and Perry to take this baby and rear it as their very own. I have a copy 90f the letter from the father asking them to keep the baby."

"Paralee has said many times that this was another reason she lived through the great siege of typhoid Fever, when she had no desire to live. She had been permitted to take care of her stepfather until his death and now a tiny baby had come to share and bless their lives. From that day on the child was the center of paralee and Perry's lives. The baby was so small and undernourished it took a lot of tender loving care to keep her alive. Paralee carried her on a pillow until she was three months old. She watched anxiously for every ounce gained, hoping she would grow to be a normal-sized baby. As months passed, the baby began to thrive and grow on the home-pasteurized milk and mashed vegetables from the table. "

Grace ends her tribute by stating, "All the memories of my childhood and young adulthood are precious and centered around this dear lady. No one could have had a better mother than I had in Paralee. This chapter is dedicated to her and the precious memories I have of her as one of the Greatest." The chapter is concluded with the following, "With love, Your Daughter, Grace"

I only knew Grace for a very few years near the end of her life. However, I recall vividly the day I met her. Donald Raby, the person who located and has made available the photographs of the home places of the families who were removed from this area to make room for the Manhattan Project, introduced me to Grace. I was aware that she had written *Back of Oak Ridge* some time back and wanted to see if she would let me edit and publish her small book. She was delighted that I knew about her writing. It was a source of great pride for her.

She was sitting in her chair in the corner of her living room when I arrived. We had a great conversation about John Hendrix and her recollections of times before Oak Ridge. She was much encouraged that I wanted to edit and publish her book and allowed me to take her photograph to include in the front of the book. She showed me the original receipt where Perry Raby paid \$8 for John Hendrix's coffin and the original deed where John Hendrix signed his 15 acre farm over to Paralee and Perry Raby for taking care of him.

They later built a house on that 15 acres using a small frame house from a nearby farm that they purchased for \$20. She showed me the note for that \$20 at 6% interest. She said, "\$20 was a lot of money for Paralee and Perry and they had to borrow it to purchase the house – the first one they had ever owned." They rebuilt that small house on the 15 acres that John Hendrix gave them and Paralee still lived there in 1942 when she got a letter from the government on November 11, 1942 telling her,

"The War Department intends to take possession of your farm December 1, 1942. It will be necessary for you to move, not later than that date. In order to pay you quickly, the money for your property will be placed into the United States Court at Knoxville, Tennessee. The Court will permit you to withdraw a substantial part of this money without waiting. This may be done without impairing your right to contest

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the value fixed on your property by the War Department. It is expected that your money will be put in court within ten days and as soon as you are notified, it is suggested you get in touch with the United States Attorney to find how much can be drawn. Your fullest cooperation will be a material aid to the war effort. Very truly yours, Fred Morgan, Project Manager"

On a later visit, she pinpointed the exact house where John Hendrix was born. I used 1942 aerial photographs of Bear Creek Valley and maps showing the intersection of Mount Vernon Road and Bear Creek Road (now First Street in Y-12's protected area) to have her point to the location. I found it intriguing, in light of his prophecy that "a huge factory will be built in Bear Creek Valley that will help win the greatest war that there will ever be," that John Hendrix would have been born exactly where Y-12's most secure location is today.

On another occasion, Keith McDaniel filmed Grace talking about her recollections as part of the *Secret City: The Oak Ridge Story* documentary film. She was sure proud to be interviewed and told everyone in the nursing home that she was "going to be in a movie."

On the last occasion that I saw her, she was invited to participate in an Author's Book Signing at the American Museum of Science and Energy. It was uncertain right up to the very last if she would be well enough to participate. She did make it, even though a wheelchair was required, and thoroughly enjoyed herself - signing autographs for all comers and even signing the entire stock of books the Discovery Shop had on hand at the time. At the end of the event, all the other authors gathered around her for a photograph. She was elated and her daughters said she talked about the event for days.

What a special lady she was. How precisely she represented the gracious and kind nature of the folks who lived in this area before Oak Ridge. She left a lot more of a legacy than just the book, *Back of Oak Ridge*, in the way of children and grandchildren and their fond memories of her sweet nature, but the book is the primary connection I had with her. It was truly a blessing to my life to get the chance to meet her and her family and to help her gain a bit of recognition for her efforts to document a time that was special to her and that is good for us all to recall.

## Second - A Favor

Please help me identify individuals in the accompanying Ed Westcott photograph. The famous photograph of the shift workers (mostly women) leaving Y-12 is going to be the subject of a huge wall mural in the main lobby of the new Jack Case Center being constructed at the Y-12 National Security Complex. We would like to invite any of the individuals in the photograph who are still living to be our special guests at the grand opening of the new building. If you recognize any of the people in the photograph, please contact me at 482-4224 or [draysmith@comcast.net](mailto:draysmith@comcast.net).

## Third – A Reminder

On Monday evening, August 7, 2006, at 9:00 PM, on The History Channel there will be a program shown titled, *Secret Cities of the A-bomb*. This one-hour documentary film was made by Atlantic Productions back in March, 2006 when they filmed in Oak Ridge and features Mayor David Bradshaw, Bill Wilcox, Peggy Stuart and myself in interviews about the Manhattan Project era in Oak Ridge. The Mayor locates the "lost world" of Happy Valley! This is one of 12 episodes of the "Lost World" series being shown each Monday evening on The History Channel.

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Grace Raby Crawford (1915 – 2006) author of *Back of Oak Ridge*

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Ed Westcott photo of Shift Workers leaving Y-12 – to be a large mural in the Jack Case Center