

John Hancock house and Oak Ridge historic structure Part 2

D. Ray Smith | *Historically Speaking* | The Oak Ridger | October 23, 2007



The Guest House is deteriorated and in danger of being lost to our history, just as the Hancock House was lost to Boston's history.

Editor's note: This is the second in a two-part article about the failure of Bostonians to save the John Hancock house, and the structures in Oak Ridge that are important to preserve.

Last week, I gave you the history of the John Hancock house and showed what can happen when members of the community forget their historically significant structures. After only 70 years, the Boston community had forgotten John Hancock's contribution to the American Revolution to the extent that they allowed his mansion to be demolished. In the early 1900s a replica of the house was erected, but the original structure is lost to history forever.

Will we eventually see a replica of The Guest House? Will we allow it to deteriorate to the point where demolition is the only option? It seems a shame to allow the original structure to deteriorate to the point that it must be demolished, and then, as happened with the original John Hancock House, wish something had been done to save it. What about other Oak Ridge structures that could hold potential historic significance? What is being done to identify and preserve them?

Here are the buildings in Oak Ridge presently on the National Register of Historic Places:

1. Bear Creek Road Checking Station (although it is located on Scarboro Road, and when built in 1949 was originally known as a "Gatehouse" not a "checking station"!);
2. Bethel Valley Road Checking Station (also originally known as a Gatehouse);

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3. Oak Ridge Turnpike Checking Station (also originally known as a Gatehouse);
4. George Jones Memorial Baptist Church (at Wheat);
5. New Bethel Baptist Church (across Bethel Valley Road from the Oak Ridge National Laboratory);
6. Freels Bend Cabin (Freels Bend near Clark Center Park);
7. The Graphite Reactor (ORNL);
8. Jones, J.B., House (near Haw Ridge);
9. Brannon, Luther House (also known as Hackworth, Owen house — south of Oak Ridge Turnpike on east end of town);
10. Oak Ridge Historic District (Clinton Engineer Works townsite area, roughly bounded by East Drive, West Outer Drive, Louisiana Avenue, and Tennessee Avenue); and
11. Woodland-Scarboro Historic District (roughly bounded by Rutgers Avenue, Lafayette Drive, Benedict, Wilberforce and Illinois avenues).

Are there other important structures to Oak Ridge history that should be added? Of course! That should be a primary mission of those of us who are attempting to capture our history.

Here is the list of structures that Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation Association has identified as the most important buildings to preserve:

1. The Guest House (Can you imagine why this structure is NOT already on the National Register of Historic Places?);
2. K-25 North End (Landmark Facility of the American Nuclear Society 1990, DOE Manhattan Project Signature Facility);
3. National Oceanographic Atmospheric Administration building;
4. Building 9706-2 (Y-12);
5. Building 9204-3 (Y-12 — Landmark Facility of the American Nuclear Society 2002, DOE Manhattan Project Signature Facility);
6. Building 9731 (Y-12 — Calutron magnets are DOE Manhattan Project Signature Artifacts);
7. Graphite Reactor (ORNL — Landmark Facility of the American Nuclear Society 1991, DOE Manhattan Project Signature Facility);
8. African Burial Grounds;
9. Red Cross Building (Housing Management Office);
10. Jackson Square (part of the Oak Ridge Historic District, listed in NRHP);
11. Oak Ridge School Administration Building (formerly Pine Valley School);
12. Grove Center Shopping Center;
13. Midtown Community Center (Wildcat Den);
14. Stone Pillar Bridge of Emery Road (early American site, east of Wildcat Den);
15. Oak Ridge Swimming Pool (spring-fed outdoor pool, former farm pond);
16. Glenwood Church Community Building (half of early Oak Ridge dorm);
17. Tyrone Road Apartments; Union Hall (red brick, near Ridge Greenhouse);
18. Calvary Lighthouse Church (formerly East Village Chapel);
19. Railroad Maintenance Building (Warehouse Road);
20. Elm Grove Shopping Center;
21. Ogden Shopping Center (at Outer Drive);
22. Martin Funeral Home;
23. Oak Ridge Motel (major renovation going on now);
24. Oak Ridge Jail Building (formerly Oak Ridge Utility District); and
25. Building 2714 (south of DOE Federal Office Building).

Do you know of other buildings that should be considered for historic recognition and preservation?

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Other buildings in Oak Ridge, in addition to Beta 3, The Graphite Reactor and K-25, that have been recognized by the American Nuclear Society as Landmark Facilities:

1. Radiochemical Development Facility, Building 3019, ORNL, Landmark Facility 1992;
2. Molten Salt Reactor, Landmark Facility 1994;
3. Tower Shielding Facility, Landmark Facility 1994; and
4. Oak Ridge Electron Linear Accelerator, Landmark Facility 2006.

On a related note, the following Tennessee State Historical Markers exist in Oak Ridge:

1. Oak Ridge (two signs, one located at the Oak Ridge Turnpike Checking Station and one located at the University of Tennessee Arboretum);
2. Castle on the Hill (on Oak Ridge Turnpike near the Department of Energy's Federal Office Building);
3. The Chapel on the Hill;
4. The Elza Gate;
5. The Emery Road;
6. The Guest House;
7. The Scarboro Community;
8. The Wheat Community;
9. X-10;
10. K-25; and
11. Y-12

I understand there are also Tennessee State Historical Markers for the Robertsville Community and Freels Bend Cabin, but I do not know where they are located. If you know, please contact me at draysmith@comcast.net or (865) 482-4224. These two historic markers are NOT mounted near the sites they are intended to commemorate. I would like to see them located and placed near the historic sites.

The ORHPA list of 25 structures is not all-inclusive, but is thought to cover the structures that are most important to consider saving. It will take support from all Oak Ridgers interested in our history to assure these structures are preserved.

Remember the Hancock House and how soon they forgot. We are likely no different, so we must consider how to save our own historically significant structures!