

Oak Ridge jail was first a communications center

By: D. Ray Smith | *Historically Speaking* | The Oak Ridger | November 13, 2007

A recent Historically Speaking column produced another phone call from Bill Sergeant. The column was the one where I listed structures in Oak Ridge on the Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation list of historical buildings. One of the buildings listed there was the building located at 101 Bus Terminal Road.

It is always a treat for me when Bill calls because I know I am about to learn something new about Oak Ridge history. This call was no different. I learned of a most unusual connection between a building in the heart of the city of Oak Ridge and a building way over two ridges and beyond Y-12 known as Building 9213 or the Criticality Experiment Building.

The building Bill wanted to talk about was the one listed as once housing the Oak Ridge jail. For the past several years it has been home to the Oak Ridge Utility District. ORUD has since moved out of the building and ORUD is now located at 120 South Jefferson Circle.

Ben Andrews, President of ORUD, first told me about the strange set of rooms in what is often called “the basement” of the then Oak Ridge Utility District building located at 101 Bus Terminal Road. He described the odd aspects of the two rooms there. He mentioned bars and doors that obviously make him think the place was a jail. I had intended to photograph the area before Ben and ORUD moved out, but never got around to doing it.



Special addition to the building to house communication

I called Ben recently to refresh my memory of that location and its history. He remarked that the ceiling in the rooms was made of at least one foot thick concrete. Odd, I thought, for a jail. Ben continued by telling me of the unusual door that remains that he feels is an obvious added feature to the original construction, as are the bars on the cells. Ben suggested I go see the rooms for myself. I did that.

Looking from the outside, the section obviously added on to the southeast corner of the main part of the building has one outstanding and immediately apparent feature - there are NO WINDOWS at all. There is one window in the hallway to the north of the addition and it still has bars on it on the outside. This addition is unusual to say the least.

The building at 101 Bus Terminal Road is now empty and there were no lights in the hallway going to the rooms in question. So, a flashlight was necessary just to see the way to the room. What I found when I got there was most unusual.

There is located in the addition a strange arrangement of two small rooms with bars at the top and obvious places for the jail doors on each of the small rooms. The area has a very strong and heavy door leading from the hallway to the two cells. There is a small opening that serves as a pass-through the wall that looked to me only suitable for passing mail or small items such as books or newspapers. It was in the wall between the hallway and the first cell. There was no way for such a pass through to the second cell.



Window in hallway with exterior bars



Jail cells obviously modified after the communications center was no longer used

The heavy door, mentioned by Ben Andrews as the “one remaining door” isolates the two cells from the rest of the building. The cells themselves are only about 10 feet by 10 feet each. There are two of them.



Heavy door and jail cells

I am convinced this was a jail at some time. I am equally convinced that the jail was converted later from something very different, as Bill Sergeant recalls. I am sure what Bill recalls was the reason for the addition at the southeast corner of the main building.

The additional of the bars and other jail related items came along later. The rooms commonly thought to be a “jail” was first a Communications Center and was actually constructed specifically for that purpose.

As we will see next week, and as evidenced in an excellent Ed Westcott photo, 101 Bus Terminal

Road was originally the headquarters for the Security Forces. Their concern was for something other than prisoners.

Next we will look closely at the original reason for the construction of a windowless addition to the southeast corner of the 101 Bus Terminal Road main building’s northern section.

Unusual addition to 101 Bus Terminal Road

D. Ray Smith | *Historically Speaking* | The Oak Ridger | November 20, 2007

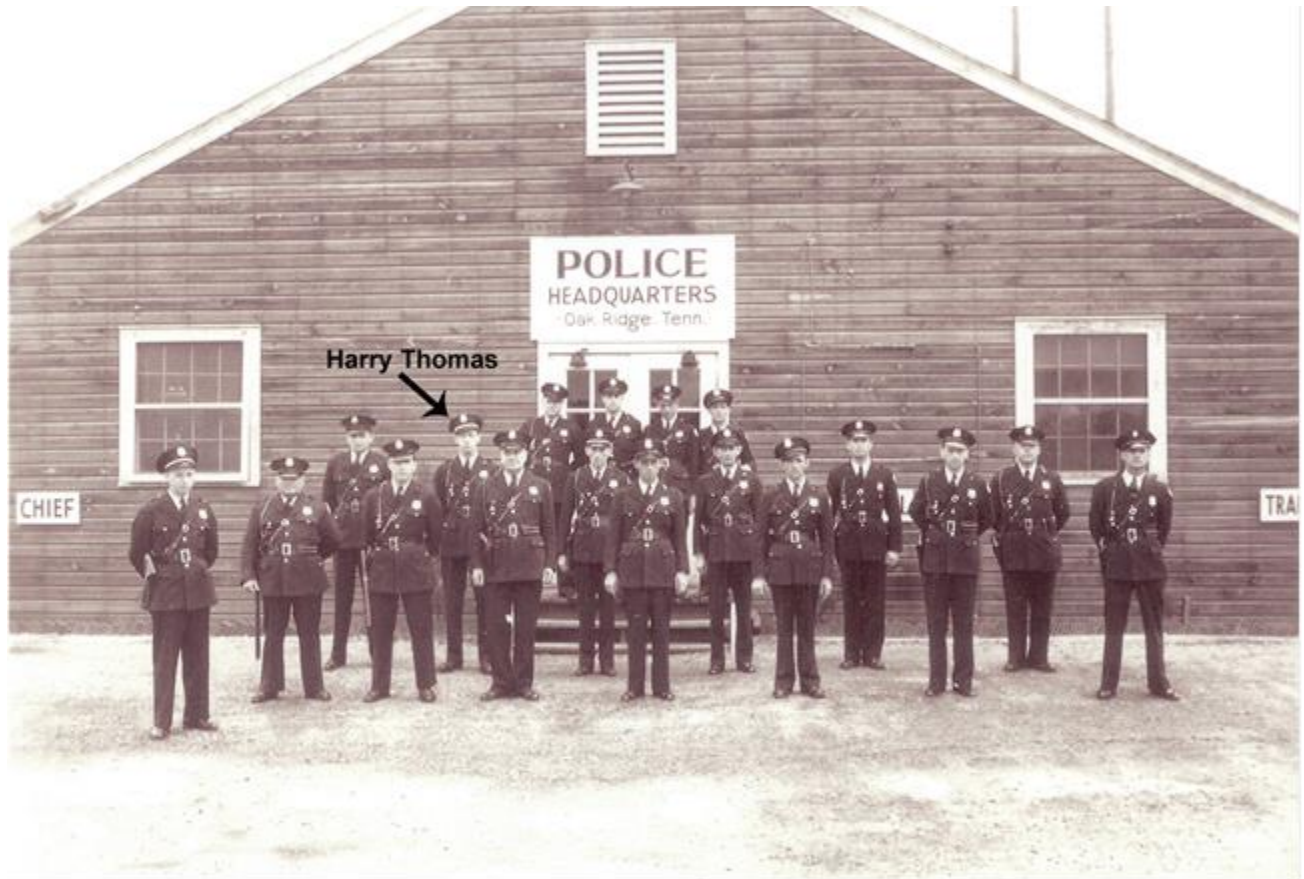


101 Bus Terminal Road was first the home of the Security Forces as noted by Bill Sergeant

Last week we looked at the existing addition to the southeast corner of the building at 101 Bus Terminal Road. We also examined the unusual arrangement of bars on one exterior window, bars at the top of two cells, a heavy door, a pass through from the hallway to one cell and the general impression of a jail. Yet, the rooms lack some of the most basic “jail” attributes.

Another phone call after last week’s column convinced me this area never was a jail at all. Harry Thomas, retired Oak Ridge policeman, began his career there in 1944. He remembers when the room was built and knew a little about what it was intended to do. He was not allowed to go there during the brief time it was used for its original intended purpose. He did not have the security clearance needed to see the equipment that was placed there. On the one occasion he did go there with escort, the equipment was covered with a cloth so he could not see what was there.

Yet, Harry knew from experience that the two “cells” were never used as a jail. He made a really good point by noting there were no toilet facilities there! I hadn’t thought of that. So, both Harry Thomas and Bill Sergeant are in agreement as to the original reason for the addition and that it never was a jail.



Oak Ridge Police officers standing in front of 101 Bus Terminal

Now we will look at Bill’s description of the original reason for the addition to the southeast corner of the main portion of the building at 101 Bus Terminal Road. It was not originally a jail, but something more important in the minds of the folks charged with protecting the uranium 235 being separated at Oak Ridge’s Y-12 Plant and K-25 Gaseous Diffusion Plant. Keeping it safe and secure was a primary responsibility at that time. This would have been in the August, 1945 through December 1946 timeframe, after the end of World War II but during the time where a high level of apprehension existed regarding the very special material being created at Oak Ridge, uranium 235.

The Y-12 Plant was the electromagnetic separation plant of the Manhattan Project and was built exclusively to separate uranium 235 from uranium 238 using Calutrons (named for **CAL**ifornia **U**niversity **Calu**TRON). 22,000 people worked on 1152 Calutrons for a year to separate enough uranium 235 for Little Boy, the first atomic bomb used in warfare and helping to bring a quick end to World War II.

After the war's end, K-25 began to produce uranium 235 at the highly enriched level. Y-12 continued to produce the highly enriched uranium for a year and a half after the war ended. The Alpha calutrons were shut down when K-25 began to produce more enriched material than the Alpha calutrons were capable of producing. The Beta calutrons were shut down, with the exception of Beta 3 calutrons, on December 1946 when K-25 became capable of producing highly enriched uranium. This precious and very specialized material needed to be stored and protected until it could be made into atomic bombs.

A specialized and unique building was located over Chestnut Ridge, the ridge south of Y-12. It was Building 9213. It was intended to store the uranium 235. A large bank vault door was installed in the building and a specialized vault was built into the heart of the building to store the uranium 235. That door is still there and it still moves on its hinges at just a touch of a person's finger!

Building 9213 was only used for a short time for its original purpose, no more than two years. A new facility was built that was designed to look like a farmer's barn and silo and in later years came to be known as "Katy's Kitchen" because a lady named Katherine Odom used to eat her lunch on a picnic table outside the building. This was during the 1950's and the nickname stuck.

The uranium 235 was moved to this more camouflaged facility because the people responsible for protecting the special material wanted the safest possible storage location. The first name for the facility, used during its design and original designation of Building 9214, was code named "Operation Dog." Interestingly, this facility was only used to store the enriched uranium from May 1948 until May 1949.

Another change that was taking place during that same timeframe was the transition from an Army controlled Manhattan Project to the civilian Atomic Energy Commission that became active on January 1947. It was during this transition that Building 9214 was designed and built. When the AEC took over from the Army, the AEC Security Patrol moved into Building 9705 on Bear Creek Road near the middle of Y-12. It was then at the time of the movement into Building 9214 and the movement of the main security responsibility from 101 Bus Terminal Road to Building 9705 that the security communications center at 101 Bus Terminal Road was deactivated. According to Harry Thomas, it was closed up and never used for anything other than maybe records storage by the Oak Ridge Police Department.

This same timeframe saw the transition from Army Security forces at 101 Bus Terminal Road to AEC Security Patrol for the three sites. The Oak Ridge Police Department relinquished the responsibility to respond to emergencies at the uranium 235 storage site, but kept the responsibility for the city of Oak Ridge. Before that transition, Harry Thomas tells of being taken to the south side of Chestnut Ridge and being made familiar with the roads to get to Building 9213. He was one of the police officers intended to be used to respond to an emergency there.

Next week we will continue this saga of 101 Bus Terminal Road and associated buildings at Y-12 and in the woods south of Chestnut Ridge.

101 Bus Terminal Road has many connections

By: D. Ray Smith | *Historically Speaking* | The Oak Ridger | November 27, 2007

Last week we introduced Harry Thomas to the story of 101 Bus Terminal Road. He confirmed that the special and unusual addition to the southeast corner of the existing building was never used as a jail. After the Oak Ridge Police Department took over the building, Harry said there were two holding cells, but they were located in the west end of the building, not in the “basement” where the unusual addition is located.

Harry recalled for me occasions when he had to go in the holding cells to gain control of a prisoner. He even gave me a hand sketched drawing of the interior of 101 Bus Terminal Road. There was a court room there as well as the offices of the Oak Ridge Police Department. I think it is good that the building is now being considered as a possible location for a courtroom as noted on the front page of The Oak Ridger of Wednesday, November 21, 2007.

Harry also pointed out that the existing roof of the special addition is of more recent vintage than the original addition. He said the original addition had a flat roof that was of very thick concrete. This agrees with Ben Andrews’ comment that the ceiling of that special addition is made of concrete that is at least a foot thick.

I have learned an interesting side note regarding the early operation of Oak Ridge Police Department. Because the state of Tennessee would not agree to release the land on which the city of Oak Ridge and the Manhattan Project sites were on to the Federal government as a Federal Reserve, the Oak Ridge Police Department actually operated as deputized members of the Anderson County Sheriff’s department.

That explains why the Anderson County Sheriff was so involved in the police operations in Oak Ridge. I have heard that the sheriff was paid by the government for all individuals who were jailed in Oak Ridge. There is more to this story, I am sure. Anyone know the details? Contact me at 482-4224 or draysmith@comcast.net and we will do a fuller story on the early relationship between the ORPD and the local sheriff’s departments.

As mentioned earlier, 101 Bus Terminal Road had a significant connection to Building 9213 at Y-12. Building 9213 has had many and varied uses over the years. The latest use of the building is as a training facility for National Guard units who are learning to identify and isolate radioactive sources in various locations as a part of their training for Homeland Security. Y-12 is uniquely qualified to provide this training.

A recent Louisiana National Guard unit’s training class took time at the end of their training program to visit the New Hope Center’s Y-12 History Exhibit Hall. They were favorably impressed with the history of Y-12. They were pleased to have the Building 9213 facility for their training but being from Louisiana, they did not know much about Oak Ridge. The few minutes spent learning Y-12’s history helped them put the whole training experience into proper perspective.

There is at least one other interesting thing about Building 9213. There is a unique escape mechanism for the second floor of the building. It is a spiral chute that was intended as an escape hatch should a criticality experiment go out of control.

If an accidental criticality were to occur, the people on the second floor were supposed to grab the handle above the chute opening, fling their feet into the opening, quickly descend to the ground and run from the building. Only one person is known for sure to have used this escape mechanism. That person is Harold Cofer, who was an electrician at the time and just decided it would be fun to slide down the chute. He said he would never try that again as the descent was not easy on one's backside!

Now let's look at the connection from Building 9213 and 101 Bus Terminal Road. Bill Sergeant said that the portion of the building commonly mistaken as a "jail" was first built as a security communications center linked by radio to Building 9213, just south of the ridge beyond Y-12. The concern they had at the time was that an attack would be made to capture the enriched uranium stored in Building 9213's vault and they wanted the security forces to know of such an attack immediately. They also wanted the security forces headquarters to be safe from attack so, the one-foot thick concrete ceiling, no windows, and heavy concrete construction of the addition to 101 Bus Terminal Road.



The first site of the Oak Ridge Jail – photo by Ed Westcott

Regarding the first Jail, according to both Bill Sergeant and Ed Westcott, it was located at Town Hall on Kentucky Avenue. Harry Thomas, retired Oak Ridge policeman corroborated the location of the original Oak Ridge Jail as being located in the building that was the first Town Hall near Jackson Square. See the accompanying Ed Westcott photo.

This series will run one more week. I have gotten much more information related to the 101 Bus Terminal Road building than I ever thought possible. It has ties to many other interesting locations and facts about Oak Ridge history. We will conclude this series next week.

More adventures at 101 Bus Terminal Road and Katy's Kitchen

By: D. Ray Smith | *Historically Speaking* | The Oak Ridger | December 4, 2007

Over the last three weeks we have explored many aspects of a most unusual addition to 101 Bus Terminal Road. It has been found to have nothing to do with a jail. Rather, it has been proven to have been a security communications center connected to Building 9213 where the enriched uranium from Y-12 and K-25 was stored.

We also noted that Building 9214 - built to resemble a farm barn and silo and known first as Operation Dog - later known as Katy's Kitchen, was the next innovation in storing enriched uranium after Building 9213. It too had a tremendous bank-type vault door similar to the one remaining at Building 9213. That vault door is now in storage at the American Museum of Science and Energy.

We learned that the Oak Ridge Police Department remained in 101 Bus Terminal Road after the Security Forces moved out. In fact, ORPD used that building until their present facilities at the Oak Ridge Municipal Building became available. However, the first Oak Ridge Jail was not located at 101 Bus Terminal Road at all. It was located at the Town Hall near Jackson Square.



Ed Westcott poses as a "jail bird"



I couldn't resist—self-portrait in first Oak Ridge jail

Ed Westcott, the official Manhattan Project photographer, was captured on film as an "inmate" in that first Oak Ridge Jail! Can't you just see Ed Westcott as a young man in his twenties clowning around getting his photograph taken "behind bars." See Ed's self portrait in the Oak Ridge jail accompanying this article. I just couldn't resist getting my photo taken in that same jail. Denise Stallions took me there and made the photo for me.

Ed also served as a reporter for the local newspaper. You may also recall that he reported the earliest record of the John Hendrix story in a 1944 Oak Ridge Journal article. Ed is an Oak Ridge treasure of the highest order. Without his photographs we would not have nearly as much of our history recorded. I am proud that we have chosen to use Ed's black and white photographs to decorate the New Hope and

the Jack Case centers at Y-12. Visitors can see some of them in the New Hope Center and also tour the Y-12 History Exhibit Hall.

Now you know the location of the original Oak Ridge Jail from three reliable sources, Bill Sergeant, Harry Thomas and Ed Westcott, all of whom speak from personal experience. You also know that the special room in the building at 101 Bus Terminal Road has absolutely nothing to do with a “jail,” but was built as a special security measure to help protect Oak Ridge’s first product, enriched uranium.

What fun this has been to ferret out the facts about that unusual section of an Oak Ridge landmark. Let’s do more of that! I still wonder about those bars? I called Bill Sergeant to see if he recalled the bars and he did not. So, I still don’t know why the bars.

There is a more recent story about Katy’s Kitchen, or Building 9214, that Gordon Fee told us at Y-12 when we were creating the Katy’s Kitchen Cookbook. The following is taken from the “Memory Lane” section of the introduction to the cook book.

In the spring of 1982, the World’s Fair officials ran a security exercise in which Gordon’s “son” (played by an FBI agent’s son) and I were captured and held hostage. Three hundred security personnel including national guards and the FBI terrorist team from Quantico, Virginia, came to Oak Ridge to play the bad guys.

Gordon’s stand-in son and he were “captured” around 6 a.m. near Bull Run Steam Plant and taken to Katy’s Kitchen. They were placed in handcuffs and hoods and held for more than 12 hours. Each hour, a psychologist came by to see if we wanted to leave the exercise.

When it came time for supper, the meal was served by Oak Ridge’s first robot – an 18-wheel truck and trailer with a small robot unit tethered by cable. The truck pulled into the woods near Katy’s Kitchen, and the robot, named Herman, climbed the hill to serve dinner to Gordon and his “son.” This robot can be seen now in the lobby of the American Museum of Science and Energy.

Ultimately, to enable Gordon to meet a commitment to be in Washington the next day, his captors simulated his execution. While he traveled to Washington, the exercise continued on to a fight at the World’s Fair Park (not yet open at the time) and then on to McGhee Tyson Airport, where Delta provided an airplane that could be stormed as part of the exercise. Gordon is one Y-12’er who can say he did actually eat dinner at Katy’s Kitchen!

So, our story of 101 Bus Terminal Road took us to several other interesting locations. It also led us to learn that at 101 Bus Terminal Road, although there is an area that looks much like it might have been a “jail,” it never was used for that purpose. We found the original jail elsewhere – at the old Town Hall building.

101 Bus Terminal Road was used as the headquarters for the Oak Ridge Police Department for a number of years. The existing location of the Oak Ridge Police Department in the Municipal Building is the location where the department moved when it left 101 Bus Terminal Road.

There is one story that I recently learned that will cause many of you who remember it to chuckle. It seems a prominent citizen of Oak Ridge actually took a shotgun and blew the glass front door to the

police station at 101 Bus Terminal Road to pieces on an occasion when he was quite inebriated and obviously mad at the police.

Lastly, I was recently contacted by Howard Rosser who worked for Bill Sergeant for a number of years. He told me that the Headquarters Security Forces moved from 101 Bus Terminal Road to Lafayette Hall on Jefferson Circle. There was a security communications center there as well. The security forces did not move to Building 9705 at Y-12 until 1949. This likely coincided with the opening of the city of Oak Ridge to public access.

Howard also told me that there was someone still living who functioned as a courier for the enriched uranium taken from Oak Ridge to Los Alamos in that "briefcase." You know that will produce yet another story, huh. He also told me he had been the radio technician on his ship when they received the coded message from President Truman at the end of World War II. Howard has a copy of his original transcript. I have to see that!

If you know other stories about 101 Bus Terminal Road, or other subjects for Historically Speaking, please contact me at 482-4224 or draysmith@comcast.net.