

Oak Ridge jail was first a communications center

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



Window in hallway with exterior bars

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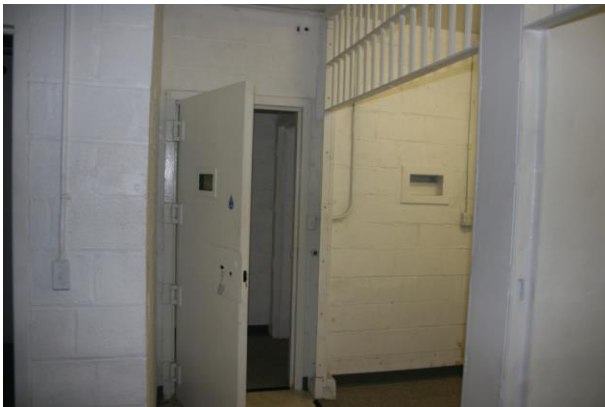
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suitable for passing mail or small items such as books or newspapers. It was in the wall between the hallway and the first cell. There was no way for such a pass through to the second cell.



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. I



Heavy door and jail cells

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

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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.