

101 Bus Terminal Road has many connections

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!

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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.