

Bill Wilcox – “A ‘window’ to the Secret City”

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on November 2, 2008)

A new term has been coined by Cherie Burnett, assistant to Lynn Freeny, renowned photographer for the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge Operations. Lynn was pleased to tell me of this creative effort by Cherie. He noted that she was transitioning from a more analytical background and thoroughly enjoying her journey into an area where such creativity is relished. The visual image of Bill serving as the access point or “window” into the Secret City is surely heavy with symbolism and accurately depicts his ability to show others his unique insights into the “secret history” of our city.

On Tuesday, October 28, 2008, at the American Museum of Science and Energy, a secret was unveiled. Bill Wilcox was completely taken in by his loving wife, Jeanie and Department of Energy's Oak Ridge Operations' manager, Gerald Boyd's public relations staff. Bill was amazed and overwhelmed by the surprise gathering in his honor. The look of astonishment on his face was priceless when he entered the main entrance of the American Museum of Science and Energy to a packed audience all looking straight at him.

I am convinced he was still unaware of exactly what was in store, but he, being a quick thinker, immediately realized the “party” was in his honor. He must have known then that Jeanie had just pulled a huge one over on him. Serves him right is all I have to say! Jeanie deserves to be able to maneuver him around a bit.

The night was an excellent opportunity for well-deserved recognition for Bill and Jeanie. They are truly citizens of our city worthy of our adoration. Over the years, they have each taken on numerous responsibilities that have contributed greatly to our city. While, as on this night, Bill is the one in the center of focus, Jeanie is always right there in support of his every endeavor.

The proclamation from the City of Oak Ridge presented by Vice Mayor Jane Miller, who cited her longstanding relationship with the Wilcox family having been friends with their daughter and over the years and continuing to stay close to them through various volunteer efforts, proclaimed Tuesday, October 28, 2008 as William J. Wilcox, Jr. Day in Oak Ridge.

Among the many “whereas” statements of the proclamation are included the early arrival in 1943 of Bill as he worked at Y-12 to separate the uranium for Little Boy; his superb technical career at Y-12 and K-25 until retirement in 1986; his dedicated efforts to tell the “Secret City” story through participating in documentary films and his preeminent and superior Secret City Commemorative Walk that will undoubtedly always be known as Bill's crowning achievement for presenting our history; his dedication to preserving the history of the K-25 Gaseous Diffusion Plant; his beloved attraction to his church, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church; and finally his service on many boards of nonprofit service organizations.

The primary reason for the ultra-secret reception for Bill was the presentation of a special award by Gerald Boyd. He presented Bill with one of Secretary of Energy Samuel Bodman's highest awards, *The Secretary's Appreciation Award*.

Here is the complete text of that presentation:

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I want to thank each of you for joining us tonight to recognize a man who, in so many ways and for so many reasons, is Oak Ridge. I think you all would agree that this City could not have a better ambassador than Bill Wilcox. We have the pleasure tonight to be in his presence and to extend our most heartfelt thanks and appreciation to him. I have the honor to speak on behalf of Samuel Bodman, the Secretary of Energy, in presenting to Bill one of the Department's highest recognitions. In addition, the City of Oak Ridge will make a presentation to Bill.

Bill Wilcox – “A ‘window’ to the Secret City”

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on November 2, 2008)

For the next few minutes I'm going to reacquaint us with Mr. Bill Wilcox. One could ask is that really necessary? After all, there has been no other personality in Oak Ridge, who, for so many years has championed the history of our Secret City. That is true. What is also true is that Bill has never put himself in the spotlight. In other words, over the years and through all of his work, he has never made this the Bill Wilcox story. Well, that's what I'm going to do tonight for the next few minutes.

A career of 43 years yields the knowledge and experience of the Manhattan Project to keep history alive at the U. S. Department of Energy's Oak Ridge. Years of mastering technical operations coupled with a passion for preserving this history for future generations. This has been and continues to be the commitment of William Jenkins Wilcox Jr.

Bill's service to the DOE is above and beyond what would be expected by a former contractor employee serving from 1943-86. His service continues today as the primary advocate in Oak Ridge for historical preservation of the original Manhattan Project signature facilities that enabled the United States to produce the atomic weaponry which brought victory in World War II.

Bill came to Oak Ridge to work on the Manhattan Project in 1943 as a Chemist for Tennessee Eastman Corporation. Working at the Y-12 Plant, he became Head of the Process Control Laboratory and later the Principal Research Chemist on uranium isotope separation processes - all while working for Union Carbide's Nuclear Division. In 1949, he transferred to the Oak Ridge Gaseous Diffusion Plant, known as the K-25 Site, serving as Technical Assistant to the Plant Superintendent, Physics Department Head, and Division Superintendent for Gaseous Diffusion and Centrifuge Research and Development.

In 1969, he became Technical Director of the K-25 and Y-12 Production Plants, which encompassed Union Carbide's research and development departments along with technical service organizations that collectively employed 2,100 people. This role continued until 1981, when he was named Technical Assistant to the president of Union Carbide and subsequently Martin Marietta Energy Systems until his retirement in 1986.

This exemplary career with Oak Ridge's operating contractors is actually only the first part of a record of service to the DOE and the community of Oak Ridge. Sharing the history of the contributions of the Atomic Energy Commission and the DOE is his focus. Since 2000, he has given 106 talks to different professional and community groups on the role of Oak Ridge in winning World War II and how the men and women at the K-25, X-10, and Y-12 facilities contributed to this goal. Bill's community lectures on "Why Did the Manhattan Project Succeed?" have earned him a reputation among citizens of Oak Ridge, plant retirees, and local elected officials as the historian in residence to tell the story of Oak Ridge and the DOE's important role.

In 2003, Bill took a conceptual idea to honor the Manhattan Project and turned it into reality with the creation of the Secret City Commemorative Walk, a project to honor both the people and the facilities behind the Manhattan Project. This \$350,000 project, all funded from private donations, was sponsored through the Oak Ridge Rotary Club with concept and design spearheaded by Bill. Historic markers and commemorative plaques, with the names of founding Oak Ridge plant employees, stand today to tell the story of the DOE's K-25, X-10, and Y-12 facilities. Their dedication in a time of war is commemorated thanks to Bill's vision and perseverance.

Since 2004, Bill has built community support to establish an appropriate and fitting tribute to the technological achievement of gaseous diffusion through the historical preservation of the K-25 Site. This

Bill Wilcox – “A ‘window’ to the Secret City”

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on November 2, 2008)

includes writing a nineteen part series in the local newspaper on the history of Oak Ridge, which includes discussion of the K-25 Building as one of the Manhattan Project's signature facilities.

His work to share this history has extended beyond the boundaries of Oak Ridge. He has appeared in numerous television programs on a national scale, including the 2001 History Channel's Modern Marvel's documentary on the Manhattan Project and the 2007 FOX News "War Stories with Oliver North" program on the Manhattan Project.

Today in 2008, this work is above and beyond his responsibilities as a former DOE contractor employee who retired in 1986. I could say that this work, as well, is above and beyond the obligations of any citizen. Bill never ceases in his passion and mission to share the Oak Ridge story. His work is extensive and is rewarded by the satisfaction of telling a story that needs to be told so it is not forgotten by future generations.

It is this very work that has prompted the Secretary of Energy to recognize Bill through a Secretary of Energy Appreciation Award. It is with the greatest honor that I ask Bill to join me now to receive this well-deserved recognition from our Secretary.

Award Citation

In recognition of your contributions as a leader in the Manhattan Project and current day advocate for its history, 1943- present. Your personal commitment to tell the history of the contributions made by the people and facilities of Oak Ridge enlightens generations. The technical achievements found in atomic energy that enabled the United States to win World War II are forever being preserved through your dedicated efforts. The vital role of the Y-12, K-25, and X-10 facilities and the thousands of people who worked in them are not forgotten.

It is with appreciation, the United States Department of Energy commends your personal dedication to preserve and interpret historical facilities and the stories of the people who worked in them for generations to come.

That concludes the award presentation and award citation made by Gerald Boyd in honor of Bill Wilcox.

I want to take this opportunity to do something that Gerald Boyd would never ever do for himself. As you readers may well know from other *Historically Speaking* columns, I have stated my admiration for Gerald's leadership and for the leadership of and other key top managers Ted Sherry of the National Nuclear Security Administration and the major DOE/NNSA contractor's managers, Thom Mason of UT-Battelle, Darrell Kohlhorst of B&W Y-12, Paul Divjak of Bechtel Jacobs Company and Ron Townsend of Oak Ridge Associated Universities.

I truly believe we in Oak Ridge have now and have had for the past few years, THE most positive, proactive and supportive DOE/NNSA and contractor leadership of any city in the DOE Complex. These key managers constantly work hard to assure that their organizations support Oak Ridge.

In the case of Gerald Boyd, we have actual proof of his standing among his peers. He was recently awarded (for the second time!) a Presidential Rank Award

The Presidential Rank Award honors high-performing senior career employees for "sustained extraordinary accomplishment." Winners of the Presidential Rank Award are deemed to be strong

Bill Wilcox – “A ‘window’ to the Secret City”

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on November 2, 2008)

leaders, professionals, or scientists who achieve results and consistently demonstrate strength, integrity, industry, and a relentless commitment to excellence in public service.

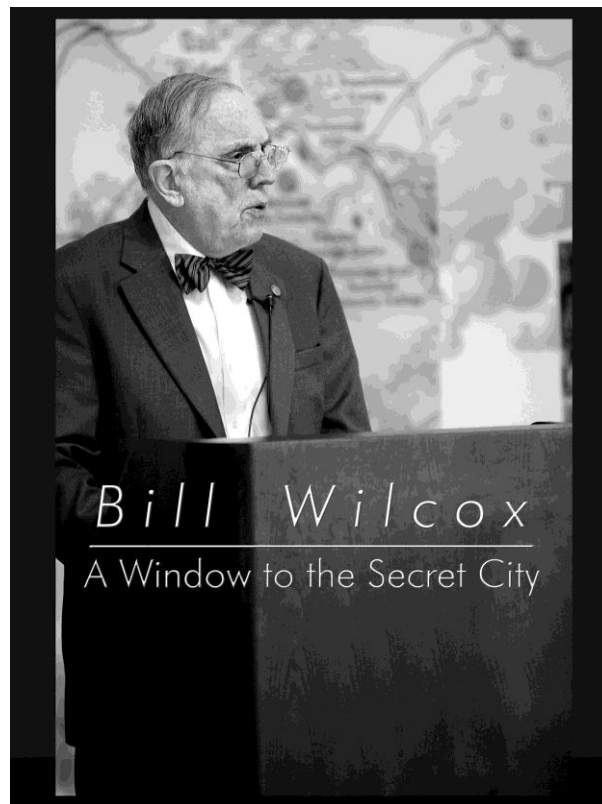
The Awards are granted to members of the Senior Executive Service and Senior Career Employees. There are 6,700 individuals who fit into this category of government service. To be selected is to be recognized as the best of the best in our government.

Executives from across Government are nominated by their agency heads, evaluated by citizen panels, and designated by the President. No small honor, huh.

Gerald received the 2008 Presidential Rank Award of Meritorious Service. This award may be given to no more than 5% of the members of the Senior Executive Service in any given year. This year 276 of these senior leaders received this award, roughly 4%.

Nineteen people in the Department of Energy received this award. As I mentioned earlier, this is Gerald's second Presidential Rank Award – he received his first such award in 2000.

So, on this night, the honoree (Bill Wilcox) was presented an award by another honoree (Gerald Boyd). Both of these men deserve our gratitude for the service they are providing to our city and our nation. We are truly blessed to have them both in our city.

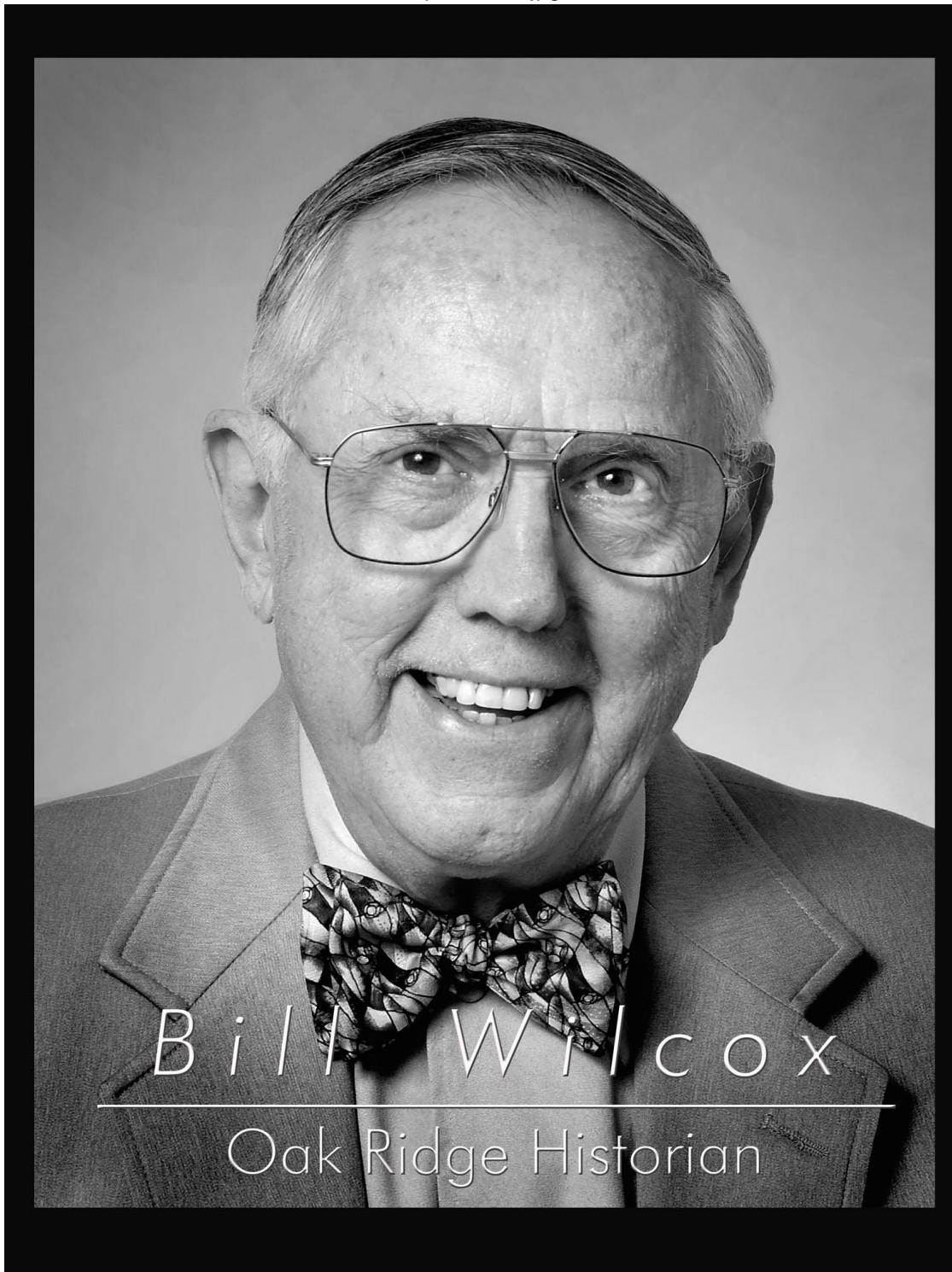


Cherie Burnett's artistic image of Bill Wilcox as a "Window to the Secret City" – Great idea!

Bill Wilcox – “A ‘window’ to the Secret City”

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on November 2, 2008)

Caption: 1aa.jpg:



Bill Wilcox - a Lynn Freeny and Cherie Burnett collaborative artistic image

Bill Wilcox – “A ‘window’ to the Secret City”

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on November 2, 2008)



Vice Mayor Jane Miller expresses her joy at being able to present the proclamation from the city of Oak Ridge designating October 28, 2008, as Bill Wilcox Day



Gerald Boyd presents the Secretary of Energy's Appreciation Award to Bill Wilcox while Jeanie enjoys the moment