

# A brief history of the UT-AEC Agricultural Research Laboratory – Introduction Part 2

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on October 27, 2009)

Before I begin this week's *Historically Speaking* article I must correct a mistake from last week. Thanks to Marcia Slagle, Executive Director of the Anderson County Health Council, who sent an e-mail telling me that the farm house pictured in the article is not the office of the Life Development Center program. The farm house and the land are actually owned by the US Dept of Education and leased to the Anderson County Schools. The farm house is occupied by an employee of the school system.

Last week we introduced Bob Reynolds and told his history and we mentioned Joe Lenhard. Both of these men were instrumental in helping me bring you this unusual and unique story of a most interesting research facility, the University of Tennessee – Atomic Energy Commission's Agricultural Research Laboratory. This was one of Oak Ridge's most historic and first-of-a-kind research facilities to study the effects of radiation exposure.

By way of introduction, we had looked at the living quarters of some of the employees of UT at the facility. Bob Reynolds and his family lived in a picturesque setting at the corner of Bethel Valley Road and Ker Hollow Road. Merrill Bird also lived in one of the four houses at this location...that is until he along with Bob Reynolds and some other employees lost their jobs there and had to move.

The new manager, H. E. Walburg, decided to move from Oak Ridge to the location where Merrill Bird had lived at 822 Bethel Valley Road. There was an "Ask Inky" column in The Oak Ridger, published on December 11, 1978, that questioned the apparently extensive work being done on the house and several other actions regarding the move.

Another indicator of the controversies obviously plaguing the CARL operation was a fable written at the time by someone who was somewhat upset by events. The fable was titled, "*The Kingdom of CARL*," written with obvious frustration at the manner in which staff reductions had been required and the transition of the program from UT to Oak Ridge Associated Universities.

A section of that fable reads, "Once upon a time not too very long ago in the country of Tanacity near the town of OLFRIDGE there was a tiny kingdom called CARL, which was ruled by a very stern king named WALFRED..."

The fable continues, "...As times became harder, an effort was made to save the kingdom by merging it with a neighboring kingdom called OLDROW. The population was led to believe that this venture would save the kingdom and good times would return once more to CARL..."

Finally the fable concludes, "...In the end some people gained but many also lost. It will take time for the scars to heal and for those who remained to see if those who left were wiser than those who stayed. King WALFRED himself became a servant to another king. And the *Kingdom of CARL* was no more..."

These beautiful old houses on this picturesque location were removed in 1982. Changes were obviously being required as this program struggled for funding and continued purpose.

Another "Ask Inky" article published in The Oak Ridger of June 16, 1983, provides further insight. The questioner wants to know the status of CARL and how it had changed since becoming a part of ORAU on October 1, 1981. The response provided states, "On March 1, 1983, the Comparative Animal Research Laboratory was made a part of ORAU's Medical and Health Sciences Division to provide closer collaboration between the CARL and MHSD staffs..."

The response continues, "...The former CARL building was renamed the ORAU Scarboro Facility...reduced funding produced forced some layoffs and a consolidation of administrative

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practices...These constraints also required selling off cattle and farm animals that were no longer needed in the scientific programs..."

Finally, the response recognizes that, "...There were 62 CARL personnel who transferred to ORAU when ORAU assumed the contract in October, 1981. Of that total, 28 persons are still working at ORAU, most of them in the Medical Division's Field Site..."

The most telling comment in the response was, "...The Scarboro Facility has been partially renovated, and now serves as home base for the Radiological Survey Program of ORAU's Manpower Education, Research and Training Division and ORAU's Office of Safety and Health as well as the MHSD Field Site."

Yep, the fable was right, the *Kingdom of CARL* was no more!

The University of Tennessee – Atomic Energy Commission Agricultural Research Laboratory, later known as the Comparative Animal Research Laboratory, was ultimately transferred from the University of Tennessee to Oak Ridge Associated Universities on October 1, 1981. Many first-of-a-kind experiments with radiation were conducted there ranging from large animal studies to smaller animal studies as well as plants and especially seeds.

The cover of the booklet titled *UT-AEC Agricultural Research Laboratory*, shows an aerial photograph of the main portion of the facility which is today's Oak Ridge Associated Universities South Campus at Scarboro. The Scarboro School building, still in use today was featured in the photograph of the UT-AEC Agricultural Research Laboratory. This historic building housed the main offices for the unique experimental laboratory.

The entire agricultural research operation included some 5,000 acres and extended from Emory Valley Road in Oak Ridge south to the Edgemoor Bridge with some small amount of acreage south of Edgemoor Road extending to the Solway Bridge as well as on the north side of the road to Highway 62 or Solway Bridge. The main portion of the acreage followed the Clinch River and included both Freels Bend and Jones Bend. It also included several hundred acres north of Bethel Valley Road.

The installation of Melton Hill Dam had an adverse impact on this agricultural research facility. The rich river bottom lands were lost to the flood plain when the dam was built between 1960 and 1963. The Tennessee Valley Authority compensated the operation by clearing 800 acres north of Bethel Valley Road (much of what is now Commerce Park was included).

The resulting rise in the water level caused the lake to come very close to some of the experimental facilities and gave Joe Lenhard, who was the AEC manager responsible for safety oversight of the program at the time, concern for assuring that proper control of access was maintained. Joe explained his memory of that concern as he pointed out to me the close proximity of the lake to the large animal radiation facility.

Now with this introduction, let me now explain how all unusual scientific study of animals came to be and how it came to be located at Oak Ridge. It is a most unusual and unique story.

It all started with the explosion of the world's first atomic device, "The Gadget," a plutonium fission device tested on July 16, 1945, identical to Fat Man, the atomic bomb that was dropped on Nagasaki, Japan, on August 9, 1945, and led to the end of World War II. Little Boy, a uranium fission device had been dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, 1945.

We will pick up the story there next...

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This modern setting of ORAU's South Campus was the home of the UT-AEC Agricultural Research Laboratory



UT-AEC Agricultural Research Laboratory headquarters was in the old Scarboro School building – photo taken from cover of pamphlet produced in middle 1960's.