

# **A Washington DC trip to remember!**

**(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on February 23, 2010)**

Please allow me to interrupt the Jackson Magnolia story to insert this appeal to all readers to help us support the Manhattan Project National Historical Park in Oak Ridge. The deadline for public input is March 1, 2010. and I appeal to all readers to go online and input your comments regarding having Oak Ridge included in this national park or to write your input and mail it to Carla McConnell, 12795 west Alameda Parkway, PO box 25287, Denver, CO 80225-0287. Here is the link for online input:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/commentForm.cfm?parkID=482&projectID=14946&documentId=30977%20>

With regard to the efforts to have Oak Ridge included, last week I was fortunate enough to get to visit Washington DC during the 40 plus inch snow storms of February 2010. What a great experience and a wonderful opportunity for some unique photography. I especially appreciate the night scenes. If you are interested in seeing the photos from my trip, they are available at: <http://cid-465e8525eded80a6.skydrive.live.com/summary.aspx>

However, the essence of the trip was not the photography (while I certainly did enjoy that), but it was the opportunity for networking in support of including Oak Ridge in the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. The Los Alamos and Hanford folks there are strongly in support of our efforts!

Accomplishments of this trip included establishing and reinforcing coordination efforts for a One Park/Multiple Site Manhattan Project National Historical Park with key Los Alamos and Hanford personnel. Also, Oak Ridge and Los Alamos representatives jointly met with New Mexico and Tennessee congressional staff and presented a unified front supportive of the inclusion of Oak Ridge and Hanford in the Alternative "E" of the National Park Service's Special Resources Study DRAFT Environmental Impact Statement.

Along with the representatives from the three primary sites (Oak Ridge, Los Alamos and Hanford) who were in DC together, the Atomic Heritage Foundation was also represented. The large group of a dozen or more of us went from office to office in the Dirksen Senate Office Building and the Rayborn House Office Building to the various staff offices of New Mexico and Tennessee elected officials.

Lamar Alexander's Staff, Brent Wiles and Tom Craig, were most receptive to learning that Los Alamos and Oak Ridge were joining forces along with Hanford to support the One Park/Multiple Site approach. While the funding for parks remains a key issue with them, gaining the insight that the Department of Energy would continue to maintain the Manhattan Project Signature Facilities was a relief for them to hear and understand. Learning that a formal statement from the department was forthcoming was reassuring.

I was pleased to get to meet Brent personally and to learn that he is originally from Columbia, TN (near my hometown) and knows my son who lives there. I believe he has a more complete perspective of the effort now. His role in support of the Interior Department gives him insight into the plight of the National Parks regarding a woeful lack of adequate funding for years now, so adding yet another park to the system is a well understood question for him and for Senator Alexander.

I believe we were able to show him and Tom that the Manhattan Project National Historical Park would be much less costly than they had feared. I must thank Dale Ditmanson, Superintendent of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park for the information that enabled me to show this potential reduced cost to the senator's staff. Dale and Bob Miller came to Oak Ridge and graciously shared insights with us and I believe they found the idea of a national park in Oak Ridge something they felt could add value to the overall heritage tourism efforts in East Tennessee.

Those of us in DC last week went in mass to New Mexico Senator Tom Udall's office and met with his staff. Support there was obvious as well, but again, knowledge of the specific details were helpful to bring the staff up to speed on the facts. Much interest was shown and good questions asked.

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We visited the staff of Congressman Ben Ray Lujan of New Mexico and found significant support and understanding there as well. It was in our plans to meet with Senator Bingaman's staff, but the weather forced that meeting to have to be cancelled. I was looking forward to that meeting as that staff will obviously be instrumental in the drafting of the legislation designating the national park, if such is forthcoming.

During the severe snow storms, the underground Metro was the only method to get around. Walking was impossible in 40 inch snow, except for areas where hotel staff kept sidewalks somewhat clear. Luckily the L'Enfant Plaza Hotel is connected with the Metro and the JW Marriott is very near Metro Center. We met with the entire group in the lobby of the hotel for a strategy session where information was shared and commitments made to jointly support the One Park/Multiple Sites concept at all three sites.

The most important aspect of this visit had to be the face to face contacts and the fire in the eyes of the entire group obviously dedicated to the telling of the WHOLE STORY of the Manhattan Project. It was exciting to see and hear the Los Alamos folks express their unanimous support for an inclusive multiple-site park and their dismay at being singled out to do something they fully realized was impossible.

Susan Garawicki and I also attended the meeting of the Energy Communities Alliance with the few of us who were registered for the meeting and in DC. The rest of the sites were connected via teleconference.

The National Park Service's public meeting in DC was cancelled, so we were unable to meet with them. Skip Gosling, Department of Energy Historian, also was unavailable as the government shut down. However, as we compared notes from the National Park Service meetings at Hanford, Oak Ridge and Los Alamos, we agreed that the meetings were all very positive events with strong community support at all locations for the One Park, Multiple Sites approach.

It was also our consensus opinion that the National Park Service staff changed their perceptions through these public meetings regarding the feasibility of One Park/Multiple Sites. Their uncertainty regarding DOE's commitment to maintain ownership of the Manhattan Project Signature Facilities is unfounded and will be corrected by the DOE formal letter of intent that is being prepared.

So, this trip to DC, while extraordinary for its snow storms, which provided an exceptional opportunity for photos, was highly successful in spite of its cancelled formal meetings. The informal gatherings, dinners and time for getting to know each other likely will prove to have been more productive than any formal meetings might have been. I am glad I was able to go and believe the networking and congressional staff visits were of extreme value.

The support for an inclusive Manhattan Project National Historical Park has taken another step in the right direction. Thanks to support from committed personnel at Los Alamos, Hanford and Oak Ridge pulling together and making sure our elected officials understand the importance of properly recognizing this most significant scientific event of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and all the resulting technological achievements coming from the Nuclear Age.

The teamwork is strong, the commitment is universal, response from all from whom we have requested support has been forthcoming, including our governor, our federal officials, our state officials, our local governments, our civic organizations and all others who have been requested or who have volunteered. The most recent resolution we have is the one from the city of Clinton. We are making a huge difference!

However, a caution may well be in order. We are in a marathon, not a sprint. It is a LONG WAY from here to the legislation that creates the park and an even longer way, literally years, before the park becomes a reality.

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So, while it is exhilarating to see strong support developing for the One Park/Multiple Site concept, please know that to succeed ultimately will require enormous fortitude and constant sustained effort to keep the Manhattan Project National Historical Park in the forefront of many other items demanding attention of our elected officials and all levels of our government. Thank you for your help thus far! Let's keep the pressure on the system.

Right now the most important thing is for all of us who want a national park in Oak Ridge to provide comments to the National Park Service's online public comment form BEFORE the March 1, 2010 deadline. Again, you can do that at the National Park Service's web site:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/commentForm.cfm?parkID=482&projectID=14946&documentId=30977%20>

Thank you for your support!



Here is one of the famous John Rice Irwin Walls of artifacts that decorate Senator Alexander's office.



One of my favorite images from the visit to our nation's capital...the dusk shot that brought out the intensity of the blue sky at the magic photographer's hour after sunset and before nightfall