

More from Los Alamos on historic sculptures
(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on October 4, 2011)

I received comments and feedback from several readers in Los Alamos on the earlier *Historically Speaking* article about the Los Alamos bronze sculptures of Robert Oppenheimer and Leslie Groves recently installed in front of Fuller Lodge. While they were appreciative of the impression the sculptures had made on me during my visit, my failure to include suitable recognition of the hard work of Nancy Bartlit was pointed out to me politely by more than one reader.

Gerry Strickfaden, Chair, Fuller Lodge/Historic Districts Advisory Board, commented, "A notable absence from the article was any mention of Nancy Bartlit's role. She long championed sculptures of historical figures and then chaired the subcommittee that produced that excellent master plan. To top that off, Nancy ramrodded the dedication ceremony, including inviting and convincing Oppenheimer and Groves relatives to attend. Her contribution to the special dedication event and her work towards a lasting centerpiece for Los Alamos' Historic District were remarkable."

Of course, I quickly apologized to Nancy and have since learned even more of her role over many years that led to the eventual installation of the sculptures. Nancy worked tirelessly to accomplish the many steps necessary that led to the May 19, 2011, dedication of the two sculptures with the Groves and Oppenheimer families represented there.

With Nancy's permission, I am reprinting an article she wrote for the Southwest Oral History Association Summer Newsletter:

"Dedication of Historic Sculptures Master Plan"

"On May 19, 2011, Los Alamos hosted two new bronze life-size sculptures of Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer and General Leslie R. Groves and their grandchildren and great-grandchildren who came to witness and comment at the dedication of the two sculptures created by the gifted artist Susanne Vertel of Santa Fe.

"The dedication of these two historic figures, who selected the Los Alamos Boys Ranch School to become the home of the Manhattan Project research during World War II, was the culmination of seven years of effort on the part of members representing the Los Alamos Historical Society Board, the Fuller Lodge/Historic Districts Advisory Board, and the Los Alamos Art in Public Places Advisory Board.

"A ten-year Master Plan for historic sculptures was prepared by an ad hoc committee, received appropriate approvals, and accepted by the Los Alamos governing body. The Plan identifies historic figures or representative figures to represent the five eras of the Los Alamos Plateau: Ancestral Pueblo, Homestead, Ranch School, Manhattan Project, and Cold War.

"Six of General Groves grandchildren and one great-grandson came from the United Kingdom, the East Coast, the Gulf, and the West, to learn more of the history of Los Alamos during World War II. Several shared their thoughts at the ceremony and agreed to give oral history interviews. Charles Oppenheimer, grandson of Dr. Oppenheimer, brought his family and sister to be present and to share his thoughts.

"Former Los Alamos National Laboratory Director John C. Browne, explained the legacy of the decision of these two wartime leaders to locate in Los Alamos, and of the research results which help to keep America secure, especially techniques to thwart terrorists identified since 9/11.

"Dr. Alan J. Hurd, in charge of Rosenfest, a symposium to honor Dr. Louis Rosen, a scientist who spanned the Manhattan Project and the Cold War by promoting the development of an accelerator which assists studies of the behavior of protons and neutrons. Isotopes are made and delivered to hospitals for medical applications from this research as a practical application.

Notice the mention of a "Ten Year Master Plan" for historic sculptures...Oh, how that makes me wish for ANY kind of plan for sculptures at Oak Ridge.

Here are the comments Nancy made at the dedication of the sculptures on May 19, 2011:

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"Comments by Nancy R. Bartlit, Author/Historian, Historic Sculptures Master Plan Chair

"Today we are dedicating the legacy of two men who represent The Manhattan Project Era on the Pajarito Plateau.

"Why are these men standing together in New Mexico? We expect future visitors to our town to keep asking this question. One man was from New York and took his Ph.D. in Germany. The other graduated from West Point, then supervised the building of the Pentagon. These two gifted leaders worked in unusual partnership to develop and test the world's first atomic weapons. Their use brought an abrupt end to World War II.

"General Leslie R. Groves in his autobiography said, "That we were successful was due entirely to the hard work and dedication of the more than 600,000 Americans who comprised and directly supported the Manhattan Project." [Now it can be told, General Leslie R. Groves, p. 414.]

"In 1942 General Groves became the commanding general of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Manhattan Engineer Project, named after its initial headquarters in New York City. He selected Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, an outstanding scientist and teacher of nuclear research--beloved by this community--to be the wartime laboratory director of Project Y.

"Together they selected the Los Alamos Ranch School to begin American and Allied joint secret nuclear research. Their rare efficiency was driven by the dire circumstances of America fighting two simultaneous wars: one against Nazism in Europe and one against Japanese Imperialism in Asia. Both were very formidable foes.

"The consequences of these actions are still debated, but let me share some of my experiences. Only 13 years after World War II ended, I taught school in Japan. The scars of the war were still evident in Sendai as I traveled to work. I was told, "We [Japan] started the war; you [America] ended it."

"Later, for my Masters' thesis at the University of New Mexico, I analyzed the comments written fifty years after the war in the ledger placed beside the Public Forum Wall in the Bradbury Science Museum. Visitors wrote their thoughts about the dilemmas of using the new weapon. The comments from all over the world were very diverse, but none disputed that "War is Hell." And veterans pledged to fight again to defend the right to disagree. One entry spoke to me, "Neat and sad."

"Last fall Los Alamos dedicated, on the south side of Ashley Pond, an Historic Marker for two highly-regarded women who lived at different eras of Los Alamos history—one during the Ranch School Era, and the other during the Cold War Era. Today's dedication of the first two bronze historic figures is the culmination of hours, no, years, of commitment.

"Many shared the vision of re-stirring history and its scenes, through this art form. Members of the Historic District Master Plan Committee built on the ideas which went before them to nudge the Art in Public Places Board to begin with The Manhattan Project Era.

"Former, and present County Councils, especially our council liaison Ralph Phelps, encouraged our efforts and trusted us to recommend the best site for these sculptures and a ten-year master plan.

"To start the work at Los Alamos, bulldozers began leveling the local landscape in the spring of 1943. A little more than two years later, the atomic weapons were delivered for use in the summer of 1945. It took longer to approve and execute these sculptures than it took to produce the first atomic bombs! But, we did not face such dire times.

"Yet, now we are under way.

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"You should have watched the alacrity of Parks Manager Dick McIntyre to design--and his Los Alamos county crews to prepare--the appropriate base for the Oppenheimer and Groves sculptures; and indeed, the sculptor Susanne Vertel made sure that her second statue was finished just in time for the Rosenfest dedication!

"We all applaud our Santa Fe sculptor, whose works for Los Alamos stimulate the imagination, Susanne Vertel!

That completes Nancy's remarks.

Do you get the feeling of satisfaction and successful completion of a major effort from Nancy's words? I am reminded of Bill Wilcox, saying some of those same type things about Oak Ridge monuments we have chosen to erect. Sadly we have not chosen to recognize individuals as has Los Alamos. May we consider following their lead and recognizing some heroes of our own!

I dream of sculptures placed near a renovated Guest House/Alexander Inn, lots of them! I dream of sculptures placed inside the airy and spacious newly proposed Manhattan Project National Historical Park interpretive History Center. I dream of a statue of John Googin at Y-12's New Hope Center, Alvin Weinberg at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory's Graphite Reactor, Bill Wilcox at East Tennessee Technological Park's Heritage Center at the entrance to the conference room named in his honor. I dream of a statue of Waldo Cohn at the entrance to the City Council meeting room. I dream of a statue of Al Bissell in Al Bissell Park. There are others I am overlooking.

But surely you get the idea. Bill Wilcox is creating a list of Oak Ridge "heroes." Send me your ideas for "heroes" and I will see that he gets them. Send them to draysmith@comcast.net.



Left to right: Members of the Los Alamos Historic Sculptures Master Plan Committee and the sculptor: Brian Hurshman, Linda Deck, Susanne Vertel -Sculptor, Ron Wilkins, Nancy Bartlit - Chair, Hedy Dunn, and Ellen McGehee. Missing from photo are: Helen Baran, Katy Korkos, John Hofmann, and Pat Walls.