

## **Progress on history related projects at both local and national levels**

*(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on July 9, 2012)*

First, the local progress – The Peak Cemetery

Let me express my sincere thanks and huge appreciation to the volunteers who responded to the appeal for help expressed in *Historically Speaking* over the past two weeks. There was a good turnout to clean up the Peak Cemetery. An early start on Saturday, 6/30/12, helped beat the heat, but it was still plenty hot and humid. Sweat was evident in abundance on all of the workers.

One person made the task of clearing the cemetery so much more effective. Melvin Cotham, Larry Gipson's son-in-law, is a veteran of Desert Storm, known as the "first Gulf War," which was a "highly successful United States and Allied response to Iraq's attempt to overwhelm neighboring Kuwait," according to *United States History* web site.

Today, Melvin is the owner of *Melco Enterprise* as an independent contractor. On this Saturday, his contractor experience, high energy level and skill with a chainsaw literally led the way to the success of the volunteers who were kept busy dragging off the limbs and trees that Melvin cut with his ever-ready chainsaw. I did not realize it early on, but he had a pair of saws and when one did not handle the job, he would get the other one and use it.

Following Melvin's lead, all the trees in the cemetery that were interfering with the graves and hampering access to the cemetery were removed. The large trees shading the cemetery were left. All the brush was removed. The cemetery looks cared for.

Among the worst of the many things that might be encountered cleaning up a cemetery is to encounter a Yellow Jacket nest in the ground. I was the first one to do so and came away with at least a half-dozen stings. Eventually, we encountered no less than four such nests.

When a new nest was uncovered by a lady volunteer, she was stung on the leg. While trying to get away before being stung by any more Yellow Jackets she passed by another volunteer. He said, "There is another one on your hip." She said, "Get it." He said, "Are you sure, it is on your right hip." She said, "Hit it!" Smiling, he struck her a glancing blow on the right hip killing the Yellow Jacket before it could sting her. She said, "Thanks!" and we all went right back to work.

Some good fun, good food and a high sense of accomplishment were all experienced by this group of community volunteers, many of whom did not even know each other before the work day. Thanks to Carl Warner for taking photos and writing an excellent article covering the effort...and thanks to The Oak Ridger for putting it on the front page above the fold!

The effort to preserve the history of this seemingly non-descript cemetery has just begun. The confirmation of the historical burials there of two Revolutionary Soldiers and two Civil War Soldiers as well as the historical marker needed to assure proper recognition is still to come and will require additional work. I am sure we can get it done.

Second, the national progress – The Manhattan Project National Historical Park

H. R. 5987 and S. 3300 are the numbers assigned to the House of Representatives and Senate Bills to create a Manhattan Project National Historical Park. Subcommittee hearings were held last week on both bills. Mayor Tom Beehan testified on the Senate bill and I was privileged to be asked to testify on the House bill.

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The Mayor's testimony also represented Los Alamos, NM, and Hanford, WA, in addition to Oak Ridge through the Energy Communities Alliance as he is the Chairman of that organization. My written testimony was focused on specific details of our government sites and city assets that will be some of the key elements of the national park should it become a reality.

However, I chose to take a different approach to the summary testimony. I focused the summary time I was allotted on visual images emphasizing the added value of famous Manhattan Project Photographer, Ed Westcott, as well as a couple of human interest stories that I hoped would demonstrate the value of presenting our history to the next generation in a well prepared and professional manner.

I told the story about a presentation I made to a fourth grade class where I talked for 45 minutes until the bell rang for lunch. When that happened, a young student held up her hand and asked, "Mr. Smith, if we go get our lunch and bring it back to the room, will you keep on talking?"

Wow, you could have knocked me over with a feather...but I just calmly said, "Well, that is up to your teacher." The teacher said, "Sure," and the students did just that. When they returned with their lunches, I continued telling my stories of the history of Oak Ridge for another 45 minutes! The Congressmen seemed to quickly understand the impact of effective interaction and grasp the intense interest in our history exhibited by the next generation.

My summary also included mention of the miniseries "A Nuclear Family" created for the East TN Public Broadcasting System which has been such a huge hit that the supply of DVD's is already completely exhausted and more have been ordered. This demonstrates the intense interest in the history of Oak Ridge when well presented.

I concluded with a presentation slide of two photographs. The first one was Ed Westcott's famous "Y-12 Shift Change" photograph where the women are leaving the plant and the other was the re-make of that image used as the final visual in the "A Nuclear Family" documentary. I explained that Ed made the first image and was included in the second more recent image.

My goal was to demonstrate the value of the visual story regarding our history. I am convinced that connecting our history to the people who lived it, such as Ed Westcott, Bill Wilcox, Bill Tewes and others is the real key to effectively telling the story to assure the impression left will be retained by the visitor. From the feedback I have gotten, I think the point was well taken.

Additionally, the amazing opportunity to see our government in action was one I will not soon forget, not to mention the enormous personal impact of actually being an integral part of that prestigious process. The hearings are the heart of the legislative bill development process and the method used to get useful information to the decision makers.

I must also admit that being introduced by Congressman Chuck Fleischmann was certainly a highlight. His decision to forego his allotted time for his personal remarks and to devote that precious allocation of time to supporting me through what was an extraordinarily well crafted introduction was certainly much appreciated. His staff provided for my every need and desire while I was there to testify at his recommendation.

If the bills are to be passed this year, which is the hope of both Congressman Hastings and Senator Bingaman, they will be brought out of committee and placed before the full House of Representatives

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and Senate within the next few weeks. Each bill provides for a year to make decisions on the details of the park at each of the three locations.

Both the Mayor's and my testimony can be viewed at the following archived sites:

Senate hearing: <http://www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings-and-business-meetings?ID=a64e4f88-18d3-4489-96a0-b1a89b2b51e6>

House hearing: <http://naturalresources.house.gov/Calendar/EventSingle.aspx?EventID=300228>



Melvin Cotham using his expertise with a chainsaw

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Ray Smith sits in the testimony position for the House Bill H. R. 5987, Manhattan Project National Historical Park

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Ray Smith stands in the House of Representatives Natural Resources Subcommittee Hearing Room



Senate Hearing on Manhattan Project National Historical Park during Mayor Beehan's testimony