

Some highlights of my recent trip to Washington, DC

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on July 17, 2012)

As many of you know, I was privileged to be asked to testify regarding for the U. S. House of Representatives' Natural Resources Committee on **H. R. 5987, A BILL TO ESTABLISH THE MANHATTAN PROJECT NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK IN OAK RIDGE, TENNESSEE, LOS ALAMOS, NEW MEXICO, AND HANFORD, WASHINGTON.**

I have shared a summary of my written testimony in the *Y-12 National Resource and Local Treasure* column The Oak Ridger publishes each Friday. Here in *Historically Speaking* I want to share some of the historical aspects of the trip.

The same time as my trip, the Supreme Court was addressing the healthcare issue. That brought a huge number of people to the city and they gathered precisely where I had to pass by on my way to the Senate hearing on the National Park bill. Wow, what a sight.

There were so many people there that I chose to avoid the crowded street and go through the Supreme Court building the day before the event as I was on my way to the Senate hearing. I did photograph the massive crowd from a distance. More importantly, I was able to photograph the historic oval staircases in the Supreme Court!

Thanks to arrangements made by Congressman Fleischmann's staff, I was able to join a special group that went to the dome of the Library of Congress. The amazing thing about this opportunity was that it placed me on an elevated surface as we were outside the dome and could walk around the circumference of the dome's base getting an elevated 360 degree view of Washington, DC.

Being an avid photographer, I saw immediately the view of the Capital dome as being unique from this elevated perspective and took a number of photographs. Other directions offered good photo opportunities as well.

Inside the Library of Congress, a beautiful building with unique painting and quotes everywhere, I was taken to the research library, but asked not to take photos there. That area is beneath the dome and in the dome is a painting of a beautiful female figure representing Human Understanding that can only be seen when in the research room. I had to take a photograph of a picture of the image.

However, when we went into the storage vault of the research room, in the index system of 3 X 5 cards, we were shown the index card for J. Edgar Hoover with its handwritten notations. I was able to photograph it! He worked there early in his career and took the knowledge of the file system with him to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and created exactly the same type system there to keep record of the many files he kept on various individuals.

I enjoy night photography and used this opportunity to take some images outside the Botanical Gardens including a beautifully lit fountain. I learned from a person who was walking in the area and stopped to talk to me that the fountain has just recently been turned on again after extensive work on it. The lighting around the outside of the Botanical Gardens is beautiful and makes for some interesting shots.

The Capital building is also beautiful at night, especially the well lit dome. The Mall was torn up with construction and I learned the reflecting pool near the Capital had just been refilled within the past few days after construction work there. Some night scenes using the water to reflect the Capital dome were exciting to create.

The Senate hearing was held in the Dirksen Senate Office Building and the House hearing was held in the Longworth House Office Building. Both are beautiful structures and I made photographs of each.

Also arranged by Congressman Fleischmann's office was a guided tour of the Capital. Immediately after the House hearing, I was escorted through the tunnel from the Longworth House Office Building to the

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Capital. What a great adventure. The tunnel is lined with art from high schools students. I photographed the art from Tennessee!

Because of the staff member taking me there, I was given an expedited entry in to the tour that was just beginning, so I lost no time waiting in line. Among the interesting things that caught my attention was the location of John Quincy Adams' seat in the House of Representatives in what was once the House chamber and is now a rotunda.

The tour guide demonstrated how Adams may have had a distinct advantage over his representatives of the opposite party in that when she moved to the space where they sat and spoke at a normal level. Even with other tours going on around us, we could easily hear and understand everything she said. It is a feature of the shape of the dome that sound is reflected so strongly from one position to another.

Another really interesting aspect of my trip was a most unusual tour of the "behind the scenes" areas of the Capital building. This unusual tour occurred because, at the request of a member of Congressman Fleischmann's staff, I had provided a tour of the Y-12 History Center on a Saturday to Congresswoman Virginia Foxx's husband and grandson.

I was pleased to do this as I have a standing offer to anyone that I will meet them at anytime they bring family or visitors to Oak Ridge and want a tour of the Y-12 History Center, regardless of the day or time. All that is required is to contact me and I will arrange to meet them there.

Congresswoman Foxx's husband was so impressed with the Y-12 History Center that he sent me a personal handwritten note of thanks. What astounded me even more was that Congresswoman Foxx sent me her own handwritten note on House of Representatives stationary, offering, "If you are ever in Washington, DC, please come by my office and I will give you a 'behind the scenes' tour of the Capital."

At the time, I dismissed that as a thoughtful gesture that I would not likely get to accept. However, when I was selected to go to Washington, DC, to testify, Congressman Fleischmann's staff contacted Congresswoman Foxx to see if she would want to give me that tour. Before we could get the details worked out, I was in the House office building and just left my business card at Congresswoman Foxx's office and as she was busy, I just asked her staff to let her know I had stopped by.

Within 10 minutes of leaving her office, I got a call from her staff. When I answered, I was told, "The Congresswoman wants to talk to you." Well, how about that! She told me that when the Senate hearing was over that day at 4:00 PM, I should go to the House of Representatives side of the Capital and she would have a staff member meet me there. Of course, I said, "Okay!"

What followed was a MOST unusual tour! I was given a "gallery pass" and allowed to watch the House in action voting on several bills. What a mixture of organized chaos and structured voting. I would never have imagined it. Representatives were moving about constantly talking among themselves, and at the same time voting on small boxes spread out around the room on each row of representatives' seats.

A huge lighted display showed who voted and how they voted. I never could find Congressman Fleischmann, but saw that he was voting right along with everyone else. I found Congresswoman Foxx and she was roaming the floor constantly talking with other representatives. That is how it is done, organized chaos, but a well oiled voting machine when the time comes to cast their ballots.

When the day's voting ended, Congresswoman Foxx came to the gallery and took me on that "behind the scenes" tour she promised. Wow, was that exciting. We were moving through the Capital and going places that were NOT on any tour route. That is when she took me to the Speaker's Balcony...what a view of the Mall, the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial! I created a panoramic image of that scene!

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But the best of all parts of the most unusual tour was a visit to The Lindy Claiborne Boggs' Congressional Women's Reading Room (that is the lady's restroom!). However, it has been several other things in the past and the most historic event to take place there was the death of John Quincy Adams.

I photographed the couch on which he died in 1848. He had been speaking in the House when he suffered a stroke in the Chamber and was carried to the Speaker's Office (now the Women's Reading Room) and placed on the historic couch.

He refused to be moved and explained that he preferred to die there. A plaque beneath a commemorative bust of Adams reads, "John Quincy Adams who, after fifty years of public service, the last sixteen in yonder Hall, was summoned thence to die in this room, 23 February 1848."

Photographs from the above described events can be seen at: <https://picasaweb.google.com/smithdray>



Capital dome as seen from the Library of Congress dome

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Couch on which John Quincy Adams died in 1848



Spiral Stairway in Supreme Court