

Manhattan Project 70th anniversary

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on August 13, 2012)

On August 13, 1942, the Manhattan Engineer District was established in New York City with Colonel James C. Marshall commanding. This was the culmination of more than three years of effort within the United States government and was nearly four years after Otto Hahn and Fritz Strassmann discover the process of fission in uranium. Albert Einstein's letter to President Roosevelt had been written three years earlier on August 2, 1939.

The following quote is from the Atomic Heritage website:

http://www.atomicheritage.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=295

"The summer of 1942 proved to be troublesome for the fledgling bomb project. Col. James C. Marshall, with the Syracuse, New York Army Corps of Engineers, was picked to direct the new Laboratory for the Development of Substitute Metals (DSM). Marshall immediately moved from Syracuse to New York City where he set up the Manhattan Engineer District, established by general order on August 13th. Marshall, like most other Army officers, knew nothing about nuclear physics.

"Furthermore, Marshall and his Army superiors were disposed to move cautiously. In one case, for instance, Marshall delayed purchase of an excellent production site in Tennessee pending further study, while the scientists who had been involved in the project from the start were pressing for immediate purchase.

"While Bush [Vannevar Bush, Director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development] had carefully managed the transition to Army control, there was not yet a mechanism to arbitrate disagreement between the S-1 Executive Committee and the military. The resulting lack of coordination complicated attempts to gain a higher priority for scarce materials and boded ill for the future of the entire bomb project.

"New decisions made in September provided administrative clarity and renewed the project's sense of urgency. Both Bush and the Army agreed that an officer other than Marshall should be given the assignment of overseeing the entire atomic project, which by now was commonly referred to as the Manhattan Project.

"On September 17, 1942, the Army appointed Colonel Leslie R. Groves (promoted to Brigadier General six days later) to head the effort. Groves was an engineer with impressive credentials, including supervising the construction of the Pentagon, and, more importantly, had strong administrative abilities. Within two days Groves acted to obtain the Tennessee site and secured a higher priority rating for project materials.

"In addition, Groves moved the Manhattan Engineer District headquarters from New York to Washington. He quickly recognized the talents of Marshall's deputy, Col. Kenneth D. Nichols, and arranged for Nichols to work as his chief aide and troubleshooter throughout the war.

That provides a great synopsis of the beginning of the Manhattan Project. What occurred in less than three years has been identified as one of the most significant scientific achievement in the history of the world. Oak Ridge played a key role in that accomplishment, as did Los Alamos, NM, and Hanford WA.

As the Manhattan Project National Historical Park legislation makes its way through the Congress all three cities are working to keep focus on the bills in the Senate and House of Representatives. The House bill (H.R. 5987) has been moved out of committee and is ready for the full House vote. The Senate bill (S 3300) is not as far along.

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In support of the movement of the bills through Congress, commemorative events are scheduled at Los Alamos and Hanford for August 13, 2012. We in Oak Ridge are planning an event for September 19, 2012 (more about that later!) Here is what is planned for Hanford:

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70th Anniversary of the Formation of the Manhattan Project

August 13, 2012 marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the Manhattan Project. Each of the Manhattan Project Cities are organizing events and activities to celebrate our shared history and the important role the Manhattan Project played in bringing World War II to an end. Many renowned scientists from the United States and Europe combined their extensive knowledge and expertise to meet the challenges of doing great work in a very short period of time. The three communities, which include the Tri-Cities; Los Alamos, NM; and Oak Ridge, TN; are now working collectively to pass legislation to establish a Manhattan Project Unit of the National Parks Service.

You are invited to participate in several activities on August 13th

8:00 to 3:30 Visit the B Reactor Tour Center at 2000 Logston Blvd in Richland, WA 99354.

The Tour Center has photos of the farming communities of Hanford and White Bluffs, the Hanford Construction Camp and construction of the B Reactor.

10:00 to 5:00 Visit the CREHST Museum at 95 Lee Blvd. to learn about Richland's alphabet houses built for the Hanford workforce. Visit the north gallery to see the special exhibit about "Hanford, the Manhattan Project and the Cold War Era."

Alphabet Houses - Take a self-guided walking tour of a neighborhood of alphabet houses in Richland. A recently published booklet about alphabet houses is available for purchase at the CREHST Museum. Maps of the walking tour are available at no charge.

70th Anniversary Celebration- 11:00 a.m. - Richland Library at 955 Northgate, 99352 - Join Congressman Hastings, Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Kelly of the US Army Corps of Engineers and other community leaders for a celebration of Hanford's contributions to the success of the Manhattan Project. Learn about legislation now making its way through Congress to establish a new Manhattan Project Unit of the National Parks Service and join us for cake and refreshments.

Atomic Ale Brewpub and Eatery at Lee Blvd in Richland - Throughout the Day Atomic Ale will be offering specials on their Reactor Core Pizza, B Reactor Brownies, handcrafted ales and other specialty dishes.

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Here is what is planned for Los Alamos:

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Join us for an afternoon at Los Alamos Historical Museum !!

A Celebration of History & Community

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You are invited to a reception at the Historical Museum and a discussion of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park

Monday, August 13, 2012

1:00 pm Remarks and introductions, Ron Wilkins, President, Los Alamos Historical Society

1:05 pm Introduction of Senator Jeff Bingaman, Michael Wheeler, Vice President, Los Alamos Historical Society

Presentation to Senator Jeff Bingaman, Sharon Stover, Chair, Los Alamos County Council

1:10 pm Update on the Manhattan Project National Historical Park, Senator Jeff Bingaman

1:20 pm The MPNHP and the Region Jason Lott, Superintendent, Bandelier National Monument

1:30 pm The MPNHP, the Creative District, and the Community, Katy Korkos, Member Services Coordinator, Los Alamos Chamber of Commerce

1:40 pm Closing remarks Heather McClenahan, Executive Director, Los Alamos Historical Society

1:45 - 3 pm Informal conversations on regional cultural issues

Please RSVP by August 6 to: historicalsociety@losalamoshistory.org

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It is good to see the cities working together. As you may know, our mayor, Tom Beehan, is the chairman of the Energy Communities Alliance which includes all three cities and the ECA has been instrumental in supporting the national park bills. Tom testified for the Senate bill in Washington, DC.

As this Manhattan Project National Historical Park is being considered, portions of the three cities and select facilities in the government installations in each of them will comprise the park. For the park to function effectively mutual support and interaction between the three cities will be required. I am pleased to see the level of coordination and mutual supportiveness developing already.

As you can see above, both Los Alamos and Hanford shared their agendas for August 13 with us. I have agreed to share our agenda for September 19, 2012, with them. The plans are being developed now for that event.

Mark your calendar now for special activities on Wednesday, September, 19, 2012. The American Museum of Science and Energy, the Oak Ridge Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Oak Ridge Heritage Preservation Association and others will help create this commemorative event for the 70th anniversary of the day when East Tennessee was selected as the first site of the Manhattan Project.

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Brochure created by the National Park Services to summarize the study that resulted in the recommendation to form the Manhattan Project National Historical Park



Mayor Beehan testifies before the Senate on Manhattan Project National Historical Park bill S 3300