

The Secret City in the Tennessee Hills: From Dogpatch to Nuclear Power – A Symposium

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on August 20, 2012)

The National Archives at Atlanta, is the location of a treasure trove of historic documentation. It is a modern new building with excellent facilities for research and an outstanding collection of records and photographs.

Jim Campbell, Bill Wilcox and I spent a day there in the fall of 2011. We went there at the invitation of Joel Walker, Education Specialist at the National Archives at Atlanta.

Joel opened the archival storage area and gave us a tour through the tall shelves filled with boxes of files. Overwhelming is an understatement! I have never seen so many records in one place in my life. Even the shelves of Manhattan Project records from Oak Ridge were so many that just picking a few boxes to go through was extremely difficult. There was also a tremendous amount of Atomic Energy Commission records as well.

Despite the difficulty of choosing which box to look through first, we selected several throughout the day and sure hated to leave at the end of the day. We were tempted to say another day and have said since that we want to plan a return trip.

Now Joel wants to invite others to experience the vast array of historical documentation that is readily available at the archives, just a few hours' drive for many of us. He has created a symposium to encourage participants to explore the potential that exists at the National Archives at Atlanta for research.

Joel sent the following content for this article at my request:

"A quick question: Where would you go to find most of the early historical records for the City of Oak Ridge, Y-12, K-25, and X-10? First guess would be the National Archives in Washington but these records are within a few hours' drive.

"The largest holdings in the nation of the Atomic Energy Commission records are housed in the National Archives at Atlanta and the staff there is getting the word out that these records and the great stories they tell are ripe for original and new scholarship.

"On Saturday, September 15 the National Archives at Atlanta is hosting *the Secret City in the Tennessee Hills: From Dogpatch to Nuclear Power* symposium to focus attention on these riveting documents. Speakers include Denise Kiernan, author of the soon-to-be released book *The Girls of Atomic City*, Dr. James Mahaffey, author of *Atomic Awakening: The History of Nuclear Power*, Shane Bell, National Archives at Atlanta archivist, and Oak Ridge's own Ray Smith, Y-12 historian and Jim Campbell of the East Tennessee Economic Council.

"Interest in the symposium has already attracted registrants from seven states and from many regional universities but there are still registrations available. There is no fee for the symposium but prior registration is required.

"If you want to learn more about the nearly 5,000 cubic feet of Atomic Energy Commission and Manhattan Project records held in the National Archives at Atlanta or register for the symposium, contact Joel Walker at the National Archives at Atlanta: joel.walker@nara.gov or call 770-968-2530.

"The National Archive at Atlanta is located at 5780 Jonesboro Road in Morrow, Georgia.

There you have Joel's personal invitation for you to join us at the symposium. Make your plans now to attend.

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You can also view a collection of Ed Westcott framed art photographs. I have sent Joel 48 of Ed's images for display in the exhibit hall of the archives. He plans to exhibit them for several months. He wanted to be sure they were on site for the symposium, so I sent them to him last week.

Here are a couple of examples of what the National Archives at Atlanta can do for us.

First, there is an exhibit at the American Museum of Science and Energy on General Leslie Groves. Joel provided the museum with copies of a number of documents that make up the bulk of the exhibit. This exhibit is available for viewing through December 2, 2012. The very high quality of the exhibit largely results from these documents.

Secondly, several of us are working to create an event on September 19, 2012, that commemorates the 70th anniversary of the decision to locate the first Manhattan Project site here in East Tennessee. Ken Mayes, one of the Working Team (Katy Brown is the lead, Leigha Edwards, David Bradshaw, Ken and Samantha Jones form the full Working Team), sent Joel an email asking him if he could help locate any documentation of the decision.

Joel responded within a day, saying he had located a handwritten document. Joel's email read in part: "There is a hand written document that is entitled 'Manhattan District Diary.' It runs from 1942 to 1944, written on legal pad paper and is in a folder that is clearly a collection of notes, edits, and drafts of some sort of history of the sites selection process."

See the detail that is contained within the files of the National Archives at Atlanta! What an exciting prospect it is to see increased collaboration such as this interchange between Ken Mayes of the American Museum of Science and Energy and Joel Walker of the National Archives at Atlanta. It is my hope to also see collaboration increase between the archives and universities such as the University of Tennessee.

So, I am pleased to recommend this symposium and encourage participation. I have found the National Archives at Atlanta to be a great research tool and believe it will become an even greater resource as it becomes more widely known and appreciated by historians and researchers from surrounding locations.

Thanks to Joel Walker, who has visited Oak Ridge and has taken a special interest in our history.

I also want to encourage you to look for information on Denise Kiernan's book, *The Girls of Atomic City*. It has been a delight to get to know her and Joe as they have visited Oak Ridge often doing research and interviews for the book. Several of the ladies I have helped introduce to them ask me routinely when the book will be published. Well, it will be published in March, 2013.

To learn more about Denise and her work, here is the link to her web site:

http://www.denisekiernan.com/Stuff_Every_American.html

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National Archives at Atlanta



One of the many stacks of records

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Joel Walker shows a file to Bill Wilcox as Jim Campbell looks on



Jim Campbell enjoys the excellent research facilities in the Archives