

## The HISTORIC Guest House/Alexander Inn – why save it? – part 3

*(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on September 10, 2012)*

Bill Wilcox, Oak Ridge City Historian, concludes his comments on why we should save the Guest House/Alexander Inn. He has shown us in previous *Historically Speaking* articles that the Guest House has been used by many renowned individuals and has been the center of historic activities and meetings as well as serving as the initial point of entrance to our city. We should take pride in our history there!

Bill continues, "We owe major thanks and are much indebted to Oak Ridge leader Jane Shelton for the excellent and valuable research she did digging out the history of the Guest House/Alexander Inn and Jackson Square's history for her 1986 'Walking Tours of the Historic Townsite.' She developed these annotated walking tours of the entire Townsite area and then led them as Chair of Oak Ridge's part in the State's 'Homecoming '86 Heritage Project.'"

"Jane tells us that the big news of September, 1950, was that the United States Atomic Energy Commission turned the Guest House title over to McKie Alexander, the successful bidder in a public offering, and that he forthwith renamed it the Alexander Hotel. A little later he further changed the name to the Alexander Motor Inn. The year before, in August 1949, the government had added the large, two-story, back wing, a concrete block building with 44 rooms.

"Another major change in ownership that Jane tells us about occurred in March, 1958, when McKie sold the Alexander to an hotelier named William W. Faw for \$34,000. The new owner added private bathrooms as well as an expanded kitchen and several dining rooms (the ballroom addition). Mr. Faw had been a cook in his early hotel days, and was anxious to provide the best food service possible.

"The Alexander Inn's Dining Room soon became THE place to eat, meet and greet, fast becoming the more permanent city's gathering place. It became the prime place for all the civic clubs to hold their meetings like the Rotary Club, Kiwanis, Optimist, and others. It also served as meeting place for the Garden Club, the Woman's Club, the '43 Club, the Sons of the Revolution and others.

"The Inn became the place to entertain distinguished visitors at small and large dinners to include even the major event when the Rev. Dr. Billy Graham came to our city.

"Dick Smyser, Oak Ridger Editor, wrote 'that a steady schedule of meetings, seminars, and special events fills its meeting rooms, and the City Club is a popular place for people to socialize and entertain.'

"Guests during the Alexander years were notables like Senator John Kennedy and Jackie, Margaret Mead, Norman Cousins, Queen Frederika of Greece and her daughter Princess Sophia, Wilma Dykeman, the French Ambassador and his wife, and the Rev. Dr. Billy Graham. (Note: The Alexander Inn was obviously at the center of the Oak Ridge visitors experience during these years and could again realize that status with the coming Manhattan Project National Historical Park— Ray).

Bill continues, "Now back to our history – Mr. Faw really improved the services offered and the environs, planting everywhere, especially azaleas. (Note: It was during these years that the beautiful azaleas were planted and cultivated. I believe the photo that shows them in full bloom is the best one I have ever seen of the hotel. – Ray)

"He kept the Alexander for seven years, and then in 1964 sold it to a group headed by Eugene Joyce, a leading lawyer in town with Dr. Dana Nance, Frank DiCarlo, and Dr. Paul Spray. In October 1978, the ownership passed to a group led by Merrill Boatman, and several others. They improved and ran it until 1992 when it was closed, and has been out of service ever since.

## The HISTORIC Guest House/Alexander Inn – why save it? – part 3

*(As published in The Oak Ridge's Historically Speaking column on September 10, 2012)*

"In December, 2009, we were all pleased to see the Oak Ridge Revitalization Effort (ORRE) take title to the old property with a promise to pay the owners a purchase price of about \$350,000 in 12 months, which date in turn was amended another six months to June, 2011. About that time ORRE regretfully announced they had to give up their dream of saving it after a long and valiant effort.

"The Oak Ridge Heritage and Preservation Association has since 2002 been looking at ways to save the place so we really applauded ORRE's courageous 2009 action and helped as we could. Our Howard Harvey recruited a fine team of volunteers and made major strides in clean-up, cleaning out 30 Dumpster loads of trash and debris, filling in the old swimming pool hazard with gravel, and cleaning up and painting the Lobby interior so that ORRE could hold several successful fund raising events there.

### **"The Third Reason - The Manhattan Project National Historical Park**

"After almost four years of intense study of the need, feasibility, and manageability of such a Park, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar in mid-2011 presented to Congress his Department's proposal to create a Manhattan Project National Historical Park (MPNHP) [in three cities, Oak Ridge, TN, Los Alamos, NM and Hanford, WA] in which the Department of Energy concurred.

"The Guest House/Alexander can be the primary place for National Park visitors to the city of Oak Ridge to see the iconic public building of the wartime town center. The National Park will not celebrate World War II, but rather the Peace the Manhattan Project brought to the aching world and all the so meaningful peacetime legacies of the Project of which Oak Ridge has had such a major part.

"The park will cover such things resulted from the legacy of the Manhattan Project as nuclear medicine, nuclear power reactors, the thousands of industrial uses like soda-pop can thickness controllers, radiation sterilization of bandages and medical supplies, and radiation killing of mold spores on vegetables and fruits that now allow us to eat fruits from Chile and New Zealand.

"Richard Rhodes, author of the Pulitzer-prize winning account, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, reflected, 'The Manhattan Project was a great work of human collaboration that has almost mythic proportions in its scale and ambition. Discovery of how to release the enormous energies latent in the nuclei of the atom has improved the quality of life and made world-scale war no longer possible - reason enough to preserve and commemorate this history.'

"The fact that Oak Ridge played such a major role in ending that terrible war is the reason why so many visitors who come here, not just at Secret City Festival time but year-round, express their thanks for what Oak Ridge did. This is because they or some dear relative was on their way to Japan for the invasion and whose life they felt we saved.

"It's a history heritage tourists are aware of and appreciate, and now the National Park Service is moving to help us show and tell our story to the public.

This concludes Bill's most elegant and impressive rationale for saving the Guest House/Alexander Inn as a primary element of Oak Ridge's history. I am proud to share his opinions and thankful that the Department of Energy has seen fit to assist in this noble effort.

## The HISTORIC Guest House/Alexander Inn – why save it? – part 3

*(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on September 10, 2012)*

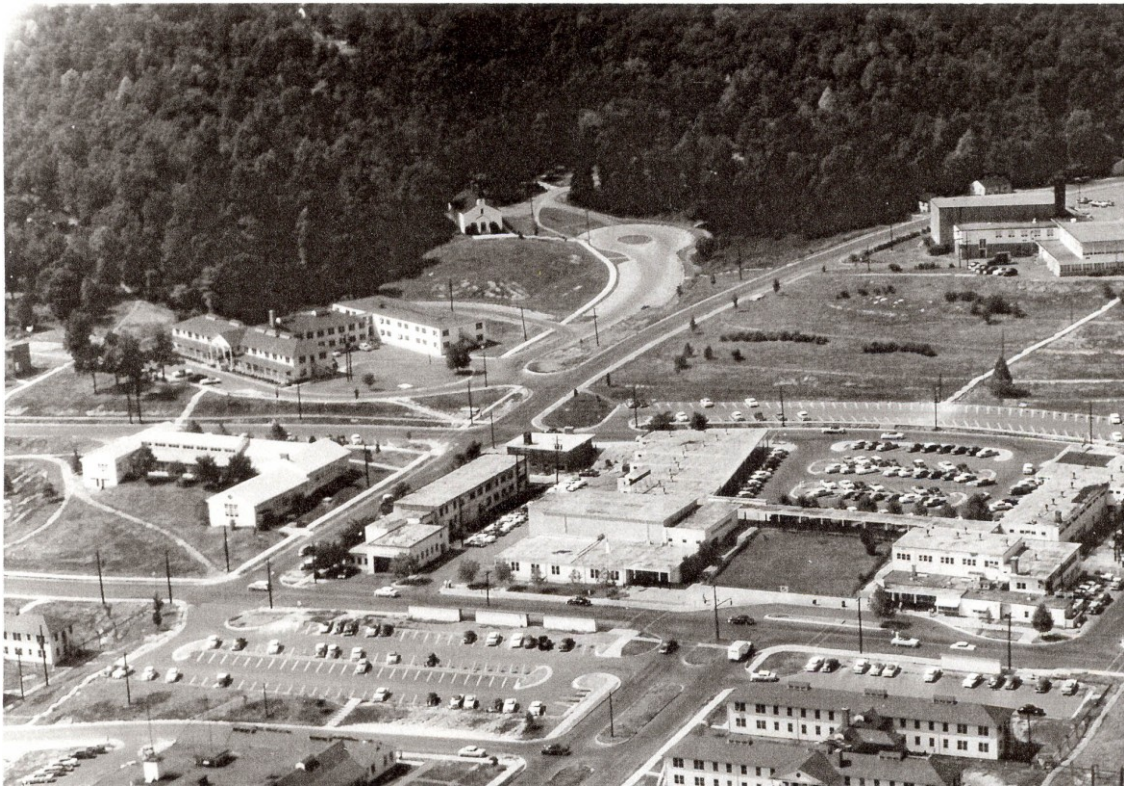
Bill and I both wish to express this acknowledgment – we are much indebted to Emily Westcott Hunnicut who graciously looked through her Father's collection for photos of people at the Guest House/Alexander Inn.



Clockwise from left: The Rev. Dr. Bill Pollard, Executive Director of Oak Ridge Institute for Nuclear Studies, Dr. Alvin Weinberg, Director, Oak Ridge National Laboratory; The Rev. Dr. Billy Graham, 3 unidentified; across table, Roger Hibbs, President, Union Carbide Nuclear Division; Sam Sapirie, United States Atomic Energy Commission Oak Ridge Operations Manager, and Paul R. Vanstrum, Executive Vice President, Union Carbide Nuclear Division

## The HISTORIC Guest House/Alexander Inn – why save it? – part 3

*(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on September 10, 2012)*



Aerial view of Guest House, Chapel on the Hill, Oak Ridge High School, Jackson Square and more



View of the Guest House/Alexander Inn with beautiful azalea blooms



## The HISTORIC Guest House/Alexander Inn – why save it? – part 3

*(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on September 10, 2012)*



Steam Automobile Club of America visits Oak Ridge and stays at the Alexander Motor Hotel