

Revolution, Reaction and Reform: Transformation of the Community of Wheat, by Sarah Littleton, part 1

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on August 12, 2013)

Historically Speaking has been running essentially weekly since February 2006. I am proud of the variety and substance of the articles and series that have been a part of the column thus far. However, what you are about to experience will set yet another high water mark. I am pleased to have found it.

In the past, I have delighted in the opportunity to bring stories such as the Friendship Bell series featuring Emily Mitchell and her journey of discovery to Hiroshima (her journey has been recently featured by a Japanese writer in a book he has just published). I am proud of the series on the history of Oak Ridge schools and other subjects that have interested me over the years. *Historically Speaking* has become much more to me than only a newspaper column!

This four-part series I am about to publish delves deeply into a family's experience with a current method of engaging our youth in our history...the "National History Day" competition. I am pleased to bring it to you as a means to impress on you the value of such efforts.

National History Day is a nationwide competition that engages young students in creative writing, documentary film making and other methods to communicate aspects of our history. I have been privileged to be asked to assist several students over the past few years. Many of them have chosen aspects of the Manhattan Project as subjects and have asked to interview me or for assistance in reviewing their submittals. I have done so with delight each time I have been requested. These young people are amazing!

However, the National History Day entry I am bringing you now featuring the Wheat community is not one that I was involved in creating. It came to me by email from David McMurray, a reader of *Historically Speaking* and someone who recognized a great story and wanted to share it with me. I am thankful to readers who constantly bring me stories! Thank you all who have become loyal readers and partners with me on this journey of mutual discovery of our history.

The author of the paper on Wheat is Sarah Littleton. I have enjoyed getting to know her and her father, Mark Littleton. I am sure you will enjoy reading what they have to say.

Before letting you read Sarah's entry, let me explain that she won at the local and district levels and even at the state level where she placed third. As such she was an alternate for the National History Day competition. She was selected to go to national competition when one of the top two were unable to go. Sarah did not place nationally, but she is a winner as is her family for having participated in the process.

Secondly, let me tell you that Wheat, Oak Ridge nor the Manhattan Project history of Oak Ridge was known by ANY OF THE EIGHT JUDGES who interviewed Sarah during the competition at district, state and national levels. THIS IS AMAZING and makes me SAD. It strongly suggests that we woefully need the Manhattan Project National Historical Park!

To set the stage for what Sarah wrote in the context of the competition and the family's experience, I am first bringing you Sarah's thoughts after completing the National History Day process with some commentary by her Dad, Mark Littleton. Next I will bring you what Sarah's Dad, Mark, had to say about his thoughts on the benefits of this competition for his entire family and especially Sarah. Finally, I will bring you the paper Sarah wrote, "They call it Wheat."

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Research for National History Day started in August of 2011. After several months of research and writing, my final draft was due in December. Two projects from every category were chosen to go to districts, in March 2012. Mine was one of the two chosen for papers. ([*Ray: Categories included papers, documentaries, exhibits, performances and websites. M. Littleton*](#))

At District, I was interviewed by one of the two judges who read and judged my paper. Neither had heard of Wheat. I placed second at district, which was held at the University of Tennessee. I advanced to state

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in April, where I was interviewed by three men, none of whom had ever heard of Wheat. I placed third at state, held in Nashville.

Placing third meant I was an alternate for the national competition, held in Washington, DC. About a week later, I received an email saying I was eligible to go to Nationals. I still remember my English teacher at the time, Miss Lightholder, coming into my mom's classroom looking more excited than I had ever seen her. *(Ray: Sarah was in her mom's room after school hours, not as a student. M. Littleton)*

Only one other student from Concord Christian School had ever made it to nationals, and this year, she had two going, myself and Hadley Peters, who had placed second in her website division. I was absolutely thrilled about this opportunity.

Nationals were held at the University of Maryland in June. The Welcoming ceremony was on a Sunday night. The Tennessee group went to do a Capitol visit later that week. My parents and I met with my cousin and had an after-hours tour of the Federal Reserve. We visited the Smithsonian, Georgetown Cupcakes, Union Station, and several more monuments and museums.

I was interviewed on Tuesday by three women; none of whom had heard of Wheat. Throughout the course of my interviews, especially at the state and national level, I found myself enjoying their reactions to my paper. It was as if they could not imagine such a thing, and were always astonished and surprised.

At the time, I was probably too nervous to really see it, but now I look back and think how amazing it is that so many people never heard anything of Wheat. Although I did not place, the week in DC had been priceless and something I will never forget.

While at times I would get tired of doing research, or frustrated about not knowing what to write next, all the work truly did pay off. I met many family members I might have never met under different circumstances. I learned an abundance of writing and research skills from Miss Lightholder that have helped me immensely in other English courses.

I gained knowledge about the Wheat Community and history in WWII. My dad and I met many people at the Wheat Reunion and recorded priceless stories and tales of their days in Wheat. Overall, the experience was amazing with or without a medal.

(Ray:

- 1. Regarding "did not place" and "with or without a medal", outside of a podium win at Nationals, results are not shared. The trip itself to DC, the total experience of interviews and research and some special time with mom and dad without her older siblings became quite the prize for Sarah. There were 2600 competitors at Nationals, so she was not too focused on getting a medal among that mob.*
- 2. When Sarah says that judges had not heard of Wheat, what she means is that they did not know that Oak Ridge was a clandestine government creation. I did not realize until reading Sarah's summary that not just some, but all of her judges did not know the story. Consider, in 2012, none of eight judges in three different levels of a US History competition knew of the origin of Oak Ridge. I would say it remains a "Secret City"!*

Mark Littleton)

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There you have Sarah's thoughts on National History Day along with some explanatory comments by her Dad, Mark Littleton. Next we will learn the thoughts of Mark regarding Sarah's choice to enter the competition and the impact of that process on his family.

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Sarah Littleton, author of National History Day competition paper on Wheat