

Oak Ridge – The Way It Was – by Bobby J. Copeland (As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on June 16, 2014)

Occasionally there is created a book that is an exceptionally well written masterpiece that can be appreciated by all who read it. It is often done by someone who is a skilled and experienced author. It is also often the work of someone who is not hampered by technical jargon or limited by specific and detailed training or narrow education.

Oak Ridge – The Way It Was – by Bobby Copeland is an example of such a book. I have come to appreciate Bobby and wrote a *Historically Speaking* column published on February 11, 2013, where I noted that he is a world renowned expert on western films, having written 22 books at the time on western film stars and their films and published over 200 articles for various publications. Here is a link to the archive of that article: <http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2013/2-11-13%20Bobby%20Copeland.pdf>

Add to that tremendous body of work what I believe is a book that will bring him even more respect and honor in his home town of Oak Ridge. Bobby has subtitled his 200 page book, "A non-scientific look at the first 40 years of the Secret City." It is both a look at Bobby's personal story and a fresh look at some interesting details of Oak Ridge history.

Bobby has also drawn on Ed Westcott images that I have not seen before and found very valuable additions to my visual understanding of Oak Ridge history. He entertains the reader with both insights that anyone who shares his experiences will delight to recall.

Some of the images are of early restaurants such as "Da Wabbit" Drive-in and the "Silver Diner" Drive-in restaurant at the swimming pool. Bobby said "The Da-Wabbit Restaurant had the best root beer floats."

And did you know the Jefferson Theater after it was closed was home for short period of time to the Wayne Theater? Did you know that in May 1957 the Elza railroad bridge collapsed dumping railcars of coal into the Clinch River? And that nine year old Don Dudendostel took a photo of the resulting damage?

The above incidents are found in the chronological portion of the book. One of the primary aspects of Bobby's book that is most intriguing to me is his detailed historical timeline. Starting in 1943, Bobby takes each year up through 1982 and cites significant events by date. Not only does he list the events, he gives details of several of them that are fresh and will be new information to most readers.

Of course, with Bobby's love for B-western movies ("B" standing for low budget, not low quality as many of these films are now seen as exceptionally high quality films), he focuses attention on the theaters and their history. One of the best documentations of the history of the theaters that I have seen.

He also introduces the reader to our famous alphabet houses...and he actually lived in several different types of homes across Oak Ridge communities. By moving so often early in Oak Ridge's history, Bobby may be the person in Oak Ridge who has lived in the most communities and also the one who has attended the most different schools.

His treatment of "Open Sesame" the grand opening ceremony of March 19, 1949, when the public was first allowed to see inside the city of Oak Ridge, brings to life the festivities. He includes many of the famous images of that milestone event including the exploding of the ribbon.

One photo that I had no idea existed was the image where Senator Estes Kefauver is kissing Marie "The Body" McDonald also selected as "Miss Atomic Bomb" in an event broadcast over WATO radio as part of the gate opening festivities. She also had her cigarette lit by someone manipulating mechanical hands at the American Museum of Atomic Energy.

The portion of the book after the chronology is devoted to showcasing individuals and couples who have ties to Oak Ridge and whom Bobby has chosen to include to reflect their part of our history as well as to

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show their images alongside that history. He has also included many sports images and highlighted some of Oak Ridge's sports greats.

Overall, this book is one that I believe many of you will enjoy and want to have your copy to share with others who might not appreciate our history as much as you do. It is an easy read, an enjoyable story as well as sprinkled throughout with a timeline of historical facts.

The following is found on the back cover of the book:

"Bobby Copeland came to Oak Ridge with his family when he was ten years old, and he has never left. Their first home was in Happy Valley, the secret town of 13,000 at the construction site of the huge K-25 complex.

"This book reflects his love for Oak Ridge and knowledge of its history. He brings a sense of community – remembering shared experiences and events. Who knew about or remembered the science fiction threat to security the threat by local terrorists to crash a plane into one of the local plants? The possible visit by Lee Harvey Oswald just months prior to the assassination of President Kennedy? The collapse of the east-end railroad bridge that dumped coal cars in the Clinch River? The movie that had its world premier here? The former ORHS student who starred in a 1960 movie? and there's much more.

"There's enough about Gen. Groves and Dr. Oppenheimer to remind or acquaint the reader with the roles and personalities of these gentlemen, each important and fascinating in his own right.

"Bobby's telling of his family's many moves to various wartime housing will cause many readers to reminisce. Many of us are still living happily in alphabet cemestros.

"Bobby (author of 24 Western movie books) shares his love for Western movies and Oak Ridge sports with equal detail as he discusses the old movie theaters and Oak Ridge's sports legends, along with other sport's highlights.

"The Ed Westcott family opened its vast photo library for Bobby from which he chose a large variety of early Oak Ridge pictures.

"Readers are sure to be enlightened and entertained by this nostalgic book, *Oak Ridge – The Way it Was*.

I agree that what Bobby Copeland has created is a unique look into Oak Ridge history that only he could write and he has done a great job bringing out his story of Oak Ridge. I am especially proud to be included in his dedication of the book alongside such greats as Ed Westcott and Bill Wilcox.

The book, *Oak Ridge – The Way It Was*, can be purchased by contacting Bobby Copeland at 104 Claremont Road, Oak Ridge, TN 37830, or by email at: bobbycopeland@comcast.net or phone at: 865-482-1185.

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Bobby J. Copeland, author

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first 40 years of the Secret City.**

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Oak Ridge – The Way It Was, a unique look at our history