

# Ignored Heroes of World War II: The Manhattan Project workers of Oak Ridge, Tennessee

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on October 5, 2015)

As we continue the series of Historically Speaking columns featuring book reviews of local authors, this one is unique. It is available as an ebook only. Richard Cook's ebook, ***Ignored Heroes of World War II: The Manhattan Project workers of Oak Ridge, Tennessee*** is an excellent example of what can be done with oral histories. The ebook is available on Amazon.com at: <http://www.amazon.com/Ignored-Heroes-World-War-Manhattan-ebook/dp/B00X4OI1E6>

Richard has a deep passion for the accuracy of the history of Oak Ridge and has long thought of early Oak Ridge as an experimental "colony" because of the pioneering aspect of its creation. He has also researched what can be learned about the atmosphere that existed among the residents when the city was formed from the farmland of East Tennessee.

I have enjoyed listening to him explain his perception of Oak Ridge and find his perspective refreshingly different from many who cite the historical facts without really understanding the relationships of Oak Ridge citizens to the rest of the world. The Manhattan Project is cited in Richard's ebook.

In February, 2013, Richard was instrumental in bringing President Harry Truman's grandson, Clifton Truman Daniel to Oak Ridge. I had known Richard before and we had discussed a screenplay he was writing, but this event allowed us to work more closely together and I grew to appreciate his dedication to Oak Ridge history. Especially, I learned he felt our history was not being represented in the best way possible and that he was personally willing to do what he could to change that.

Well, he certainly has succeeded in the ebook he has published. *Ignored Heroes of World War II* goes a long way to bring to the surface the details supporting Oak Ridge's role in winning World War II. Richard draws heavily on the oral histories that have been placed online by the Center for Oak Ridge Oral History located in the Oak Ridge Public Library and supported by the local Department of Energy.

Utilizing well over 200 interviews, Richard skillfully weaves these authentic stories as told by the people who actually lived them into a compelling sequence of personal insights into the lives of these heroes. He understands the value of such authenticity and appreciates the importance of facts told with the emotion of personal stories.

Richard is quoted by Seth Robson in a review he wrote for *Stars and Stripes*, as saying, "For the 75,000 people who lived and worked in the secret colony, the deadly toll of World War II was motivation enough." He is exactly right to observe the dedication and motivation driving the workers who were doing anything they could to help stop the awful killing that was World War II.

The review goes on to describe how the young Oak Ridge workers were excited to be doing the work, often work women had not been allowed to do before, that was both challenging and rewarding in that they knew they were working on something that was going to help win the war. They were also growing more proud of their abilities to do the tough work and often do it better than anyone else could. They learned their jobs and learned them well.

Can't you see how exciting this "secret colony," using Richard preferred reference, had to be. The young women, especially, were right out of high school and were living here independently and essentially "on their own" for the first time. The oral history interviews used in the ebook prove the truth of this idea of independence, yet they were cautious not to talk about what they were doing. It did not matter that almost all of them had no idea what was being done, they did not talk about work at all.

Richard's ebook is getting good reviews and reaching a worldwide audience. Here is an example, Phillip Duke writes in a review on Amazon.com, "After reading these peoples' stories in their own words, I would argue that is the greatest overlooked story of our World War II experience, taking place on our own soil, no less. It's as good a historical document as it is a human interest story, and I'd recommend it to young and old alike."

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Ed Westcott photographs play a huge role in the telling of Oak Ridge history. Richard draws heavily on that element of visual storytelling through the artistic expression Ed put into the large number of black and white images we have available because of his insight into what needed to be captured at the time. Without Ed's photos we could not tell our history nearly as well. Richard knows this and makes good use of some of Ed's well-known images as well as some that are not so often seen.

The ebook, *Ignored Heroes of World War II: The Manhattan Project workers of Oak Ridge, Tennessee*, is a fine example of what can be done with the words of the original workers in Oak Ridge. These Oral Histories that have been collected are a true treasure trove of real live history. You can see more of these oral history interviews at: <http://cdm16107.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15388coll1>

Again, if you have someone in your family or have friends who are among those few individuals who are still alive and who actually lived through the Manhattan Project, please, please encourage them to record their memories in oral histories. Contact the Oak Ridge Public Library and indicate that you have someone who would like to create their oral history.

And anyone who would like to do what Richard has done, create an ebook, give it a try. It is not that difficult to do and you will be rewarded by a huge sense of accomplishment, plus you will be contributing to the preservation of Oak Ridge history.

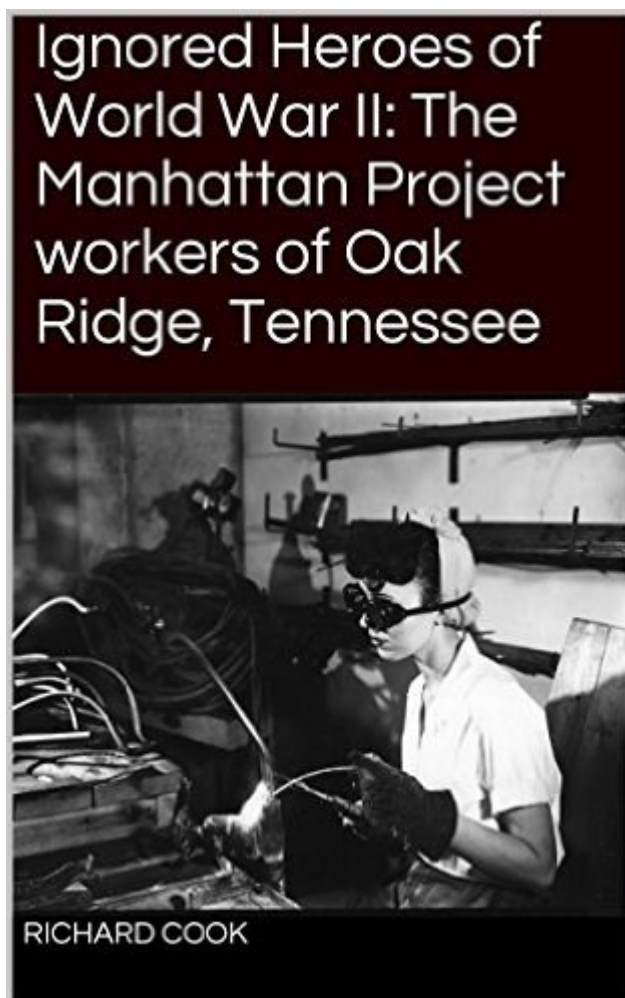
Just you wait, the Manhattan Project National Historical Park, coming to Oak Ridge on November 12, 2015, will make use of these oral histories! I am sure of it. What an exciting time for Oak Ridge. The park will be a reality before you know it! Look for arrowhead signs going up soon!

Richard has also written a screenplay titled "Forgiveness." It is mentioned on his blog: <http://forgivenessonline.blogspot.com/2010/10/forgiveness-screenplay.html> . Richard has also created a video to introduce the viewer to the screenplay: <https://vimeo.com/22193028>

Next I will review *Longing for the Bomb, Oak Ridge and Atomic Nostalgia* by Lindsey A. Freeman. While this is not a local author, I want to bring you some insights from a sociology professor. Lindsey writes about our city and how she perceives us moving from the Manhattan Project through the Cold War to the present and even takes a look at what might be in our future. It is a different look at us and I think you will enjoy learning about it.

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Richard Cook's ebook: Richard calls this lady "Wendy the Welder" and she is obviously one of the Ed Westcott images that has had a profound impact on Richard