

# Murals on Electrical Utility Boxes across Oak Ridge

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on November 30, 2015)

The Manhattan Project National Historical Park is here! Can you feel the excitement? Word is getting around. People are coming here looking for it!

You can stop by the American Museum of Science and Energy on Saturday and speak with Natasha, the Park Ranger who is stationed there. Soon there will be someone there every day!

The signing ceremony in Washington, DC, was exciting! I was honored to be included in the Oak Ridge delegation there and to photograph the ceremony.

You can see photographs here:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/109845787057992130059/20151110ManhattanProjectNationalHistoricalParkSigningCeremonyInWashingtonDC>

and the signing celebration in Oak Ridge on Thursday, November 12, 2015, was a HUGE SUCCESS!

Here are photos to that celebration:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/109845787057992130059/20151112ManhattanProjectNationalHistoricalParkOakRidgeSigningCelebration>

Additionally, being included in the Scholar's Forum was especially rewarding. The Manhattan Project National Historical Park themes are going to be exceptional! I am anxious to see them developed. The excitement is contagious. Yet, I know it will take time to get all the needed elements in place and to see the Park become an integral part of Oak Ridge and become the storyteller of our history, something the park services does so well.

I was most pleased to see the work in Jackson Square parking lot completed before the celebration and including the ribbon cutting for the fountain in the celebration was an added bonus. However, the thing that I like most about Jackson Square's new look may well be the murals on the electrical utility boxes.

When I first saw them, I was overjoyed! I could not wait to get my camera and photograph the boxes. I could not help but think, "Wow, I'll bet Ed Westcott is proud of these!" I know I sure am! The first one I saw was at the corner near Dean's Restaurant and Bakery. It has a collage of easily recognizable historic Ed Westcott photographs.

I then started looking for more and found them all around the "square." Again, Ed Westcott images abound. Many I have seen and some I had not. I immediately wondered just who was selecting these photos and where were they getting access to them. I first thought of Lynn Freeny and expected he was involved. I knew the utility boxes were electrical, so I thought of Jack Suggs, head of the Oak Ridge city electrical department.

But rather than chase that down just then, I just photographed the utility boxes with murals of historic photographs and quickly posted the photos on Facebook and Twitter. Immediate reactions were all positive and hits were amazingly frequent. Many people shared the post on Facebook and retweeted the photos on Twitter. This was September 27, 2015, and lots of things were happening in Oak Ridge, so I put this find on the back burner thinking I would talk to Jack Suggs soon.

Remarks were made on Facebook such as, "We should do this with our historic photos!" which came from Heather McClanahan, Executive Director of the Los Alamos Historical Society. She and others there in Los Alamos have contacted their electrical utility folks and they are considering how to do the same thing in Los Alamos, NM.

I was running between activities, meetings and planning for the Manhattan Project National Historical Park coming our way and then on November 1, 2015, I spotted the utility box mural at the corner of the Oak Ridge Turnpike and Tulane Avenue. I had been to an event at the Oak Ridge Chamber of Commerce. When I stopped at the red light, I saw it across the turnpike. I immediately stopped and photographed it. Another good choice of photographs.

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Next I received a call from Channel 10 wanting to meet me at Jackson Square and interview me about the utility box murals there. I told them they should talk to Jack Suggs. I still had not seen him so I only knew he must know something about them.

I called Jack as a courtesy to tell him I had turned Channel 10 on to him. He said, "Well, that must be the call I have on my desk to return." So having Jack on the phone I took the opportunity to tell him how proud I was to see the murals on the utility boxes and wondered if more were planned. He quickly said, "That project is being run by MacKenzie Wilson, you need to talk to her to learn what she has in mind." Okay, now I was getting somewhere.

Before I could find the time to call MacKenzie, I saw someone working at the corner of Scarboro Road and South Illinois Avenue. Well, the excitement took over and I could hardly wait to see what photos would be used there. I expected something about Y-12, but wondered just what had been chosen. Well, before the day ended, I saw both Y-12 and K-25 featured there by using historic photos of their respective signs.

That did it, I had to talk to MacKenzie. So I called her and asked if she had plans for more murals. She said, "Yes, we plan to do several more." I asked if she had received positive feedback on them, knowing full well she had. Jack and MacKenzie both have since told me they have gotten lots of positive feedback.

MacKenzie went on to tell me that she was working with Lynn Freeny using his online photos on Flickr. Here is the link to Lynn's DOE Oak Ridge images online: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/doe-oakridge>

She went on to tell me that Precision Printing & Graphics is doing the installations. Bentley Day is the person actually doing the work on site.

MacKenzie said she was born and raised in Oak Ridge and has worked for Jack for the last 14 years. Jack is very proud of the fact that he gave this project to MacKenzie and that she has taken the ball and is running with it. You can see it in his eyes when he is asked about it. She is a source of pride for him.

I stopped by to photograph her for this article and was much impressed by her. She is genuinely interested in Oak Ridge history. She is obviously a professional and places the needs of the electrical department at the top of her work activities. I had to wait for her to finish the payroll activities she was engaged in when I dropped in on her before she would let me make her picture.

Jack Suggs made a good decision when he delegated this project to MacKenzie! I can't wait to see what she has in mind for the rest of the murals. Not all of them will be historical as she also wants to promote and feature Oak Ridge activities today. An example is the rowing mural on the utility box at the corner of Rutgers Avenue and South Illinois Avenue.

Let's all continue to take pride in Oak Ridge! Senator Lamar Alexander is quoted in *The Oak Ridger* on Monday, 11/23/15, as saying that "In the 40 years I have been coming to Oak Ridge...there's not been better times for Oak Ridge!" He had just mentioned the Manhattan Project National Historical Park, the proposed Oak Ridge Corridor, the Uranium Processing Facility at the Y-12 National Security Complex and exascale computing at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

I agree with Senator Alexander, it is a good time to be an Oak Ridger!

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Jackson Square murals on electrical utility boxes – the first of many and a HUGE HIT!



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At the corner of Scarboro Road and South Illinois Avenue



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At the corner of Tulane Avenue and the Oak Ridge Turnpike



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MacKenzie Wilson, the person behind the installation of murals on electrical utility boxes exhibiting pride in our heritage!