

Manhattan Project National Historical Park and Oak Ridge

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on May 15, 2015)

Recent visits by three groups of National Park Service representatives have resulted in Oak Ridge being provided the opportunity to showcase our history in ways we have not been able to do before. It all results from the recent decision to form a new national park.

The Manhattan Project National Historical Park was signed into law on December 19, 2014. This action establishes the Manhattan Project National Historical Park as a unit of the National Park Service no later than one year after enactment. Prior to establishing the park, the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Energy are required by the act to enter into an agreement defining the respective roles and responsibilities of the departments in administering the park. The agreement will include provisions for enhanced public access, management, interpretation, and historic preservation.

The above information is found at the Department of Energy's web site:

<http://energy.gov/management/office-management/operational-management/history/manhattan-project/manhattan-project-0>

Soon after December 19, 2015, a working group team of DOE and National Park Service staff was formed. Their first meeting was held in February, 2015, in Washington, DC. Plans were made there for site visits during March – June, 2015. Colin Colverson, DOE ORO, is the Oak Ridge DOE representative on that team and he wisely volunteered Oak Ridge as the first visit.

On March 25, the first visit was to Oak Ridge. We were fortunate to be the first location. That the National Park Service members on the team were amazed at what they found here is putting it mildly. As this was the first visit by the team, some staff members from both Los Alamos, NM, and Hanford, WA, accompanied the team on the visit. Obviously, they were looking to us to learn from experience and thus be better prepared for the team's visit to each of their sites.

During a public forum at the close of a day of tours at the three government sites, the NPS leader, Vic Knox, Associate Director, Park Planning, Facilities and Lands, expressed his amazement at what he had seen. I was fortunate to be asked to lead the three site tours. The first facility visited was Building 9731, where Martin Skinner, who worked in Building 9731 during his time at Y-12, welcomed the team. It was a treat to see the rapt attention the entire group paid to Martin's memories of his time in the historic building.

Next was Building 9204-3, where Joe Tracy, who worked for years in Beta 3, met the group. The experience of being in the high bay with the actual Calutrons that separated not only some of the uranium for Little Boy, but also the stable isotopes that helped produce nuclear medicine brought the tour group to an awed silence. As I described the history, they began to ask questions about what they were experiencing.

I was delighted to see that begin to happen. It meant that our efforts were producing the desired results, they were getting engaged in the tour, they were learning, they were absorbing information that was new to them but was being grasped.

Next we took them on top of Chestnut Ridge to provide them a bird's eye view of the Y-12 National Security Complex. If you have been on one of the Secret City Festival's Y-12 Public Tours in the past, you know the value of this overlook perspective. The entire 2 ½ miles of Bear Creek Valley containing the buildings that make up Y-12 are visible from this viewpoint.

After completing the tour of Y-12 we took them to tour the Graphite Reactor. ORNL Director, Thom Mason, provided an exceptionally interesting history lesson beginning with sharing some of the original documents regarding the decision to locate the project at the "Elza site." He also discussed with them the valuable service provided during the 20 years of operation of the Graphite Reactor which was built to prove that Plutonium could be produced from a Uranium reactor and then the production reactors were built at Hanford, WA. The Graphite Reactor continued to operate though not to produce Plutonium, rather

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it produced many isotopes that were used for nuclear medicine and other industrial and agricultural purposes.

During a working lunch, the team was presented with information on the existing efforts being used by Oak Ridge to communicate our history. Examples were the American Museum of Science and Energy, The Children's Museum of Oak Ridge, the Oak Ridge Public Library's Oak Ridge Room and the Center for Oak Ridge Oral History as well as the Secret City Commemorative Walk and the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell.

This discussion continued to show them the full balance of potential elements that might be incorporated into the "hub and spoke" concept of the portion of the national park that would be located in Oak Ridge. The exchange of ideas began to take shape during this lunch together. They were getting their feet on the ground with regard to the vast nature of our history, yet they were already seeing things that were in place that would make their job of interpreting our history more productive.

After lunch we traveled to the East Tennessee Technology Park where DOE EM's Sue Cange provided an overview of the historical preservation effort being put in place to preserve the history of the K-25 Gaseous Diffusion Plant. Then a tour of the site was provided that showed both the reindustrialization being done there through the Community Reuse Organization of East Tennessee and the demolition and cleanup of the site. Locations for the K-25 History Center on the second floor of the Oak Ridge Fire Station #4, the replica building to house the simulated gaseous diffusion equipment, the viewing tower and slab of the K-25 building footprint.

Finally we toured the City of Oak Ridge showing off the alphabet houses, the Guest House at the Alexander Inn, the Chapel on the Hill and Jackson Square and completed the long day with a public meeting at the Civic Center where an overflow crowd pressed the visitors as print, online media and TV reporters swarmed the team getting interviews and allowing the team to express their thoughts of the visit to Oak Ridge.

Eventually, Mayor Gooch, was able to squeeze his way to the podium and welcome the crowd letting them know the impact he thought the tour of the three government sites and the city of Oak Ridge had had on the visitors. He also introduced the leaders, Victor Knox of NPA and Laurie Morman of DOE. Both of them had glowing praise for what they had experienced during the day of tours.

In the weeks since, we have had two more visits that essentially replicated the above activity, with one exception. On the second round of tours which were provided for the new Great Smoky Mountain National Park Superintendent, Cassius Cash, included The Children's Museum of Oak Ridge.

The mayor, who is a member of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park Commission arranged this visit and also added the Children's Museum to the tour. A good choice as we liked to have never been able to get the group to leave the museum! A small reception was provided for this group at the Oak Ridge Chamber of Commerce.

The third visit was from Peggy O'Dell, Deputy Director of the National Park Service and Stephanie Toothman, Associate Director, National Park Service Cultural Resources, Partnerships and Science. Both of these women, as well as Laurie Morman, Chief of Staff, Office of Management, had read *The Girls of Atomic City*, by Denise Kiernan. So, we invited Denise and her husband Joe D'Agnese, to dinner the evening before the tours. Denise graciously accommodated our request and we spent a wonderful evening with the author and enjoyed a review of her experience interviewing the women who actually worked on the Manhattan Project here in Oak Ridge.

Director Toothman encouraged us to complete the submittal of National Historic Landmark status for Beta 3 and Building 9731. The Graphite Reactor already has that designation. The program is under her

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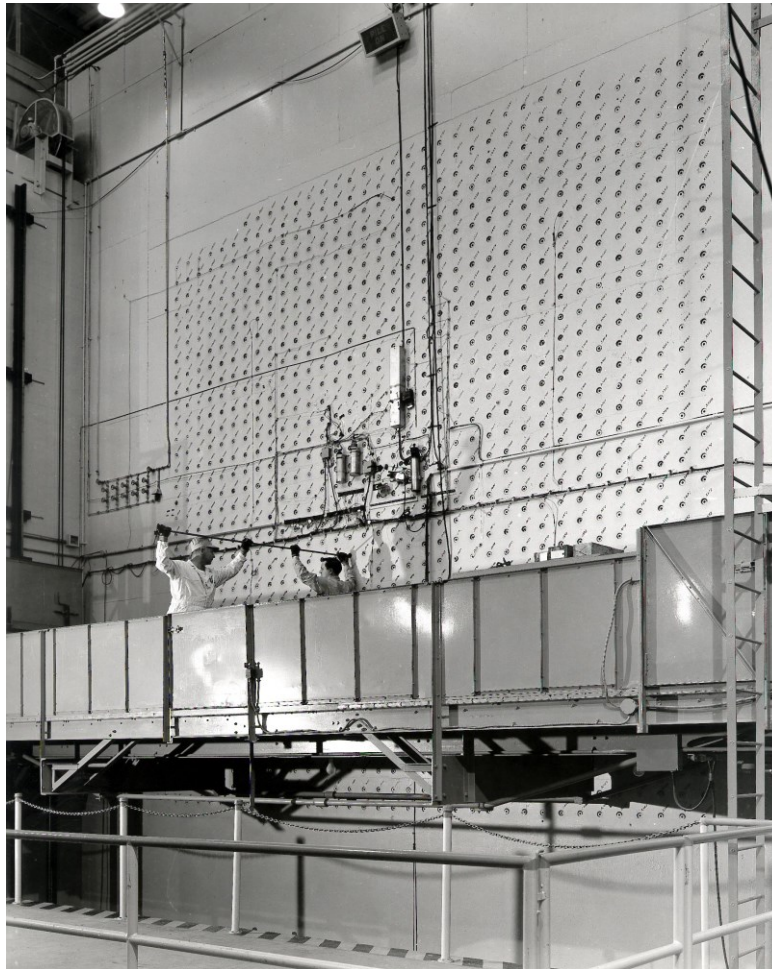
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purview. We have already started the submittal process, but now have added incentive to do it more quickly.

Two of the visiting groups enjoyed dinner at Big Ed's Pizza and left town with a smile on their faces. The relationships created and cultivated during these visits will go a long way toward assuring that Oak Ridge stays in the middle of all considerations for implementation of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. I could not be prouder of our representatives who have assisted with these visits. I think we have made a good first impression and have laid the groundwork for continued cooperative efforts as the park becomes a reality.

The first milestone is December 19, 2015, when the Memorandum of Agreement is scheduled to be completed.

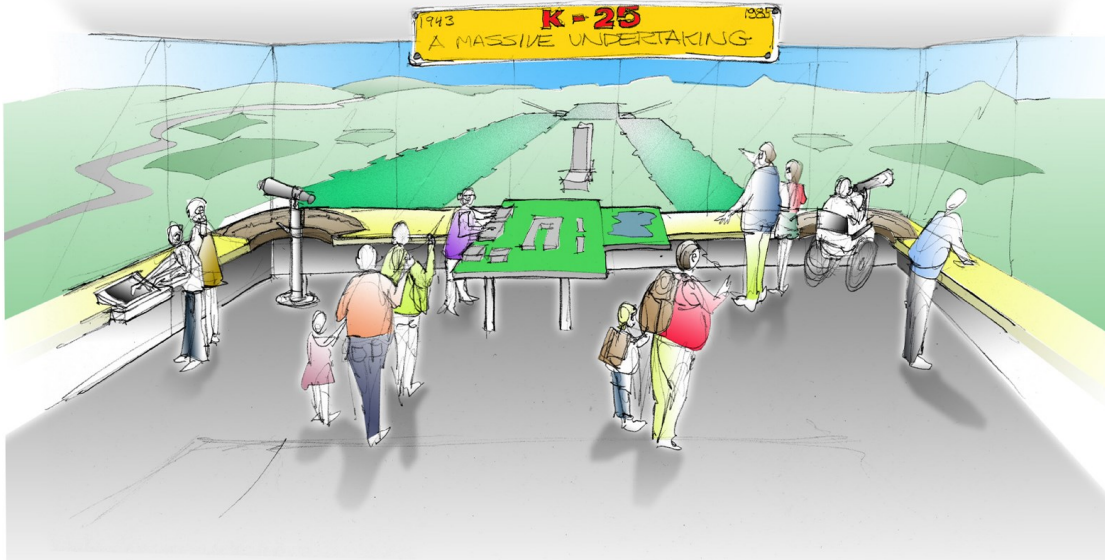
Heritage Tourism may soon be a stronger element in our economic development actions as the Oak Ridge portion of the national park begins to become a reality. The "Hub" portion of the "Hub and Spoke" concept will be better defined and agreement will have been reached on the scope of facilities that can be included in the park. We are off to a great start!



The Park Service representatives were impressed with the excellent condition of the Graphite Reactor exhibit and the historical displays already in place

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The K-25 History Center plans were presented before a driving tour of the East Tennessee Technology Park to show the K-25 Gaseous Diffusion building's footprint and location of the K-25 History Center in the Fire Hall as well as the intended locations of the replica equipment building and viewing tower



The Beta Calutrons in Building 9204-3 (Beta 3) are always a highlight for visitors as it is like stepping back into 1945 and the visitor is actually seeing the actual equipment that separated the uranium 235 for Little Boy, the first atomic bomb used in warfare, AND also the actual equipment that separated the stable isotopes that were used as targets to produce medical isotopes in the Graphite Reactor