

# Tom Scott's unique museum in Oak Ridge

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on October 10, 2016)

The American Museum of Science and Energy is Oak Ridge's iconic science and history museum and has been so since the beginning of the American Museum of Atomic Energy on March 19, 1949. It is the kingpin of Heritage Tourism and the launching pad for visitors to our city. I fear, as is the case all too often, Oak Ridgers may well tend to take AMSE for granted! We may have just grown accustomed to it being here and doing its job day in and day out.

When I had the opportunity to speak to a recent Department of Energy Public Tour when they stopped at the Y-12 History Center, I was able to ask two questions. First I asked the group of 35 tourists how many of them came to Oak Ridge primarily to participate in this tour starting from AMSE. 30 of them said the reason they came to Oak Ridge was to take the DOE Public Tour. I then asked the group how many of them were from out of state and 25 of them indicated they were from states other than Tennessee.

These tours begin and end at AMSE and are among the most popular activities attracting visitors to our city. The Secret City Festival is another example of how we attract a large number of visitors. The Children's Museum is also a destination attraction that regularly attracts visitors.

Of course rowing brings a very large number of people to Oak Ridge over a series of training camps and regattas. With the addition of the eighth lane this venue will take on even more significance with even larger crowds and more frequent and larger regattas. Maybe even national championships can be expected to seek out our excellent venue.

Do you know the Health Physics Society <http://hps.org/> has its official Historical Instrumentation Collection housed in a museum setting here in Oak Ridge? You can see it online here: <http://www.ornl.gov/PTP/museumdirectory.htm>. It is physically located and maintained by the Oak Ridge Associated Universities on their South Campus.

The K-25 History Center, replica equipment building, viewing tower and K-25 Building footprint will be located at the East Tennessee Technology Park. Design is being completed now and actual construction of the facilities and equipping the museum which will be on the second floor of the Fire Station should begin next year.

Do you know there are at least six other locations where historical displays are housed in Oak Ridge? As is always the case when I venture out like this, readers will let me know I have missed others! I WELCOME YOU TO DO SO AND WILL REPORT YOUR INFORMATION IN A FUTURE HISTORICALLY SPEAKING COLUMN! Call me at 865-482-4224 or email to [draysmith@comcast.net](mailto:draysmith@comcast.net).

One location is the Midtown Community Center where the Oak Ridge Heritage and Preservation Association holds its monthly meetings. There is a room decorated with furnishing which would have been found in the dormitories and plaques from some of the bridges in the area...and, of course, the Emory Road Rock Pillar Bridge is just east of the building.

A second location is the Y-12 History Center in the New Hope Center where artifacts are on public display and videos are running continuously. It is a stop on the DOE Public Tour as well. Many tour buses stop there as the location is now on several travel tour schedules.

A third location is the Alexander Guest House lobby. It is a showplace of history as much of the entrance way and lobby are original. The fireplace with Robert Oppenheimer's photo placed on the mantle near where it was originally taken by Ed Westcott. There are also many Ed Westcott images on display throughout the hallways and an excellent art display of Ed's works on the south wall of the main lobby.

The next three locations are private collections and are not open to the public, but we should consider working with the people who have these collections to make them available for viewing on occasion. Lloyd Stokes has an unparalleled and exceptionally thorough collection of Manhattan Project artifacts and

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related paraphernalia. He fills much of the Civic Center's "A" and "B" rooms during each Secret City Festival.

Jack Bailey has a wonderful sports collection of all kinds of artifacts from autographed baseballs to many other unique items. Jack is quoted from an interview as saying, "It is an eclectic collection---baseball and football cards, U. of Alabama memorabilia, baseball programs, magazines and scorecards, autographed baseballs and pictures, postcards of sports venues and places Pat and I have visited, pins, Roy Rogers comic books, movies and memorabilia, Track and Field and golf."

Jack has 1,500 pins! Again, a collection we should work with Jack to make available for viewing on occasion. Read more about Jack's collection here: <http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2009/6-23-09%20Jack%20Bailey.pdf>

Now to the unique museum quality collection I want to feature in this Historically Speaking column, Tom Scott's Fire Fighting collection ranging from three historic Fire Engines to a room filled from floor to ceiling (and it is a very tall ceiling...it must be at least 16 feet!) with books on Fire Fighting history.

He reviewed some of them with me by asking me where I grew up. I responded, "Middle Tennessee, about 50 miles south of Nashville." He proceeded to show me books on the history of Fire Service in Middle Tennessee such as the history of a Nashville fire. I believe he has books on every major fire in the nation's history!

Here is what Engine! ~ Engine! Magazine of the Society for the Preservation and Appreciation of Antique Motor Fire apparatus in America had to say about Tom. "On The Bookshelf" by Tom Scott: Tom has a vast library of fire related books and publications relating to virtually every facet of fire service literature. He writes informative reviews of new publications that are of interest to apparatus owners and admirers. Recently reviewed books included Wheels Rolling - A Pictorial History of Cleveland Fire Apparatus; The F.D.N.Y. Super Pumper System; and Hahn Fire Apparatus 1923-1990 Photo Archive." Tom has been writing a regular column named "On the Bookshelf" for Engine! ~ Engine! Magazine for 42 years!

Tom agreed to allow me to visit his home and admire his collection. I was overwhelmed. Never did I expect to experience a fully functioning fire alarm system! It is indescribable! I took photos, but they do not do it justice!!! You have to experience the sound and see the action of the various elements of the fire alarm system actually work. Even then you will be hard pressed to fully capture the magnitude of what Tom has built!

He says that kids thoroughly enjoy seeing the system work. He has configured it to where children can make it function. He has other things the kids enjoy such as the hand held fire alarm...a rattle that makes noise like nothing you have ever heard, just by spinning it in your hand.

Tom gave me a copy of a 50-page bibliography he has created, "A Fire Buff's Bibliography Revised: A Guide to the Historical Literature of the Fire Service." What a tribute to someone who saw the need to collection all the information and put it in a format that others could use. Good job Tom!

The three Fire Trucks in Tom's specially built garage are amazing. The various firefighting related equipment that fills numerous shelves around the walls represent a wide range of historic tools and apparatus used in past years. In many cases, the variety of equipment can be used to trace the evolution of firefighting techniques and tools.

An example is the fire extinguisher that dates to the Manhattan Project era and is identified as having been in Oak Ridge. Tom has many other examples of unique items that he uses to tell the history of firefighting in great detail.

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He starts with the earliest basic firefighting tool which was the leather bucket! Think about that! From that he describes how a bucket line worked where the men passed the full buckets and the women and children passed the empty buckets back to the water source. He also has examples of early lights, kerosene lanterns!

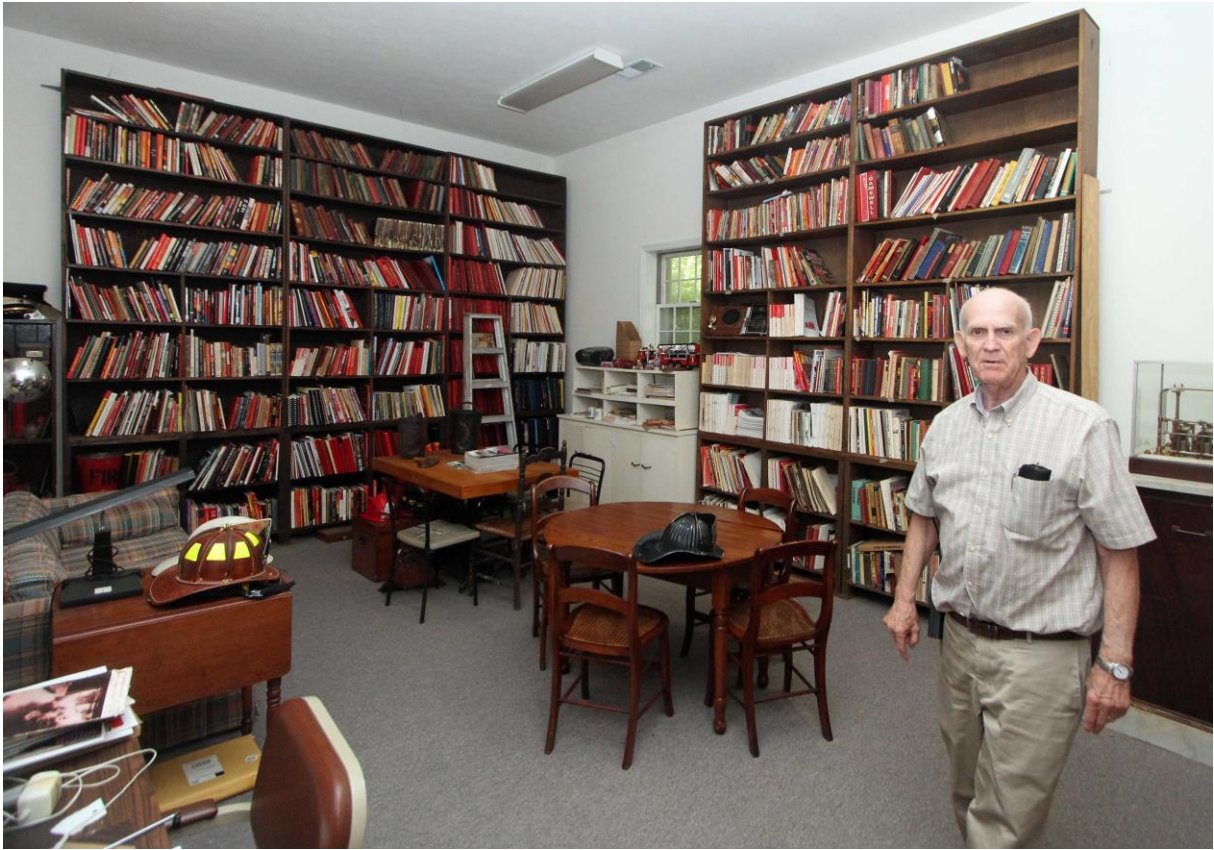
Tom's dedication to the history of firefighting equipment has led him to be respected by many people in many locations across our nation for his untiring collecting and sharing the history with all interested people, especially kids. His personal museum is certainly a jewel of Oak Ridge's crown. We should be proud of Tom and his lifelong passion for collecting firefighting equipment and educating people about the history of firefighting.



Tom Scott with one of his antique fire trucks

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Surely one of the most extensive libraries of firefighting history, right here in Oak Ridge!



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A rare and maybe unique display of a historic working fire alarm system based on some of the earliest methods – a GREAT teaching tool that excites while effectively educating kids and adults!