

The Camera Club of Oak Ridge – A History 1946 – 2016, part 1

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on October 31, 2016)

This Historically Speaking series in two parts will review a book on the history of camera clubs in Oak Ridge and part one will focus on the various camera clubs in Oak Ridge during the early years. The second part will continue the history of the camera clubs and will feature the current Camera Club of Oak Ridge.

Among the long-lasting organizations formed during the Manhattan Project here in Oak Ridge is what is now known as The Camera Club of Oak Ridge. Although the exact date when the first camera club was formed is uncertain, there are indications of at least one very early club and maybe even more than one. The best evidence exists to show that both the Oak Ridge Camera Club and the Tennessee Eastman Company Camera Club were started in early 1946.

The current club president, Yvonne Dalschen, has just finished extensive research into the history of camera clubs in Oak Ridge and has published The Camera Club of Oak Ridge - A History 1946-2016. I am proud to have encouraged her in this task and am even more proud of the fine product she has produced. She provided two copies to the Oak Ridge Public Library for the Oak Ridge Room. I am pleased to review the book for you in this Historically Speaking.

Yvonne begins with a Preface that credits those people she found helpful in her research and I am pleased to see that she quickly recognized Ed Westcott, our own famous Manhattan Project photographer, figured prominently in the early days of the camera club. He was instrumental in the formation of the clubs and played a central role in the early years as the employee clubs seemed to change names according to the circumstances with the various contractors.

There was mention in a 1967 of "The Clinton Engineer Works Camera Club" constituted under the auspices of the Tennessee Eastman Company for Y-12 employees, also known as the Tennessee Eastman Company Camera Club (actually more often TEC Camera Club). However, Yvonne did not find any official record of a club named "The Clinton Engineer Works Camera Club."

There was the Carbide Camera Club formed first for the K-25 employees and later existed for employees of all three sites as Carbide & Carbon Chemical Company assumed contractor responsibility for all sites on May 4, 1947. This club was an active club with many members and much support for several years.

While camera clubs existed for employees, they were not permitted to bring their cameras inside the plants. The Clinton Engineer Works Employees' Guidebook of 1944 stated, "Government regulations forbid your bringing a camera into the plant or making photographs on the property. If cameras are brought on the Town Site, they must be registered with the Police Department."

I have copies of photographs made on personal cameras showing Oak Ridge housing during the Manhattan Project. Cameras could be purchased at the Happy Valley store and likely at other places. Yvonne turned up a comment in Charles E. Rice's autobiographical sketch, Oak Ridge, 1944, where he said, "Oak Ridge was full of photographers." He even cited his ability to help furnish film for the school camera club because he worked at the Pine Valley drugstore.

So, it is hard to tell just what restrictions were placed on photography within the gated city of Oak Ridge during the Manhattan Project and until the gates were opened. There were restrictions limiting the photographs which could be taken on the government plant sites to ONLY the official photographers.

Ed Westcott was the official photographer for the Army during the Manhattan Project, therefore his access was broad and his amazing photography left us with a grand historical record. Without those black and white images, we would not be nearly as able to present the stories of our history.

Ed was also a member and vice-president of the Oak Ridge Camera Club as he was not employed at any of the plants. He was also one of the first judges of the Salons that started in 1948 and have been one of Oak Ridge's premiere community events for the past 68 years!

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Yvonne's research also found Popular Photography had published the following in June 1946: "H. B. Smith was head of the United States Engineering Department's Photograph and reproduction Section at Oak Ridge, and he was assisted by Dan Morehouse and Lynn W. Jones." The article went on to say, "Emil Sienknecht worked with Tennessee Eastman Corporation; F. R. Williams was with the Monsanto Chemical Company; and C. E. Jones took pictures for the Carbide and Carbon Chemical Corporation."

I can't help but wish these photographers had done what Ed did and archive those images they took at the sites. There are over 15,000 negatives of Ed's photographs on cold storage in the National Archives! What a treasure!!!

After the city was opened to the public on March 19, 1949, and the three gatehouses were placed in operation to isolate the three government sites, the following information regarding cameras was announced in the Carbide Courier on August 18, 1949, "Cameras may be used without restriction outside the Controlled Area of Oak Ridge." So, early on the photographs Oak Ridgers used in salons and camera club meetings likely were photographs of locations other than Oak Ridge.

The names continued to change according to the contractor with Martin Marietta Camera Club replacing Carbide Camera Club when Union Carbide Nuclear Division was replaced by Martin Marietta Energy Systems in 1984. The name changed again when Lockheed Martin Energy Systems became the name of the contractor as Lockheed became a partner in the company. It was known as the Lockheed Martin Camera Club.

This Historically Speaking column has brought us to 1984 in the history of camera clubs in Oak Ridge. Next we will look at changes starting in 1999 and continue to the present.

You may want to join the excitement of all things related to photography by attending a monthly club meeting. There you will enjoy the fellowship and encouragement while learning more about many aspects of photography. **Meetings are held every second Tuesday at 7:30 PM in the City Room of the Roane State Community College, Oak Ridge Campus. More information can be found at www.cameraclubofOakRidge.org**

And the annual salon, held from October 31 to November 10, 2016, is open to the public from 7AM – 4:30 PM Monday through Thursday at the Y-12 New Hope Center. Just speak into the intercom for entry. No badges are required and everyone is welcome.

A special "Gallery Walk and Reception" is scheduled for November 4, 2016, from 5:30 PM – 9PM at the Y-12 New Hope Center at 602 Scarboro Road. The public is invited and everyone is welcome to come join us to see this year's excellent selection of over 200 quality images and an exciting slide show of digital images.

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Doug Hubbard showing winning entries from the 2010 Camera Club of Oak Ridge Salon, the first one held in the Y-12 New Hope Center



The Gallery Walk evening brings huge crowds to the New Hope Center to view the display of a wide variety of high quality images