

Ed Westcott's 95th Birthday

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on February 6, 2017)

My good friend, Ed Westcott, reached yet another milestone on Friday, January 20, 2017. He turned 95 years of age! What fun it was to celebrate with him and his family the next day. Of course, Ed is a hero to all of Oak Ridge and as such he belongs to the community, so a huge crowd joined his immediate family to celebrate this significant occasion.

The Wildcat Den at the Midtown Community Center was filled to overflowing at 2:00 PM on Saturday, January 21, 2017. Don Hunnicutt, Ed's son-in-law, who is married to Ed's "favorite" daughter, Emily (actually Ed's only daughter), and Jim, David, John and William, who are Ed's sons, all had endearing remarks about Ed. Ed's grandchildren and even his great-grandchildren were there to celebrate as well. It was a FULL HOUSE!

Don began by telling, in excellent detail, the story of Ed's life. We listened as he told of Ed's parents and how he came to be a photographer, having gotten his first camera at age 11. He then went on to tell about Ed becoming the 29th person hired in Oak Ridge for the Manhattan Project effort at the Kingston Demolition Range which soon became known as the Clinton Engineer Works and finally Oak Ridge.

According to Don, Ed was born on January 20, 1922, in Chattanooga, TN. The family moved to Nashville, TN. At age 13, Ed started his first business, Centennial Photography. He was taught the darkroom techniques by a friend who was a professional photographer. Ed built his first darkroom out of an old Pie Wagon and began to process film for others.

Ed went to work as a cameraman and laboratory technician for a Nashville Art Studio. This was the beginning of the development of an artistic technique that is seen in many of his photographs. Many photographers have commented on Ed's black and white photographs regarding the clear and clean composition as well as the manner in which his photographs focus the viewer on the main subject matter of the photograph. Ed did this really well.

Amateur Radio has been an interest of Ed's most all his life. Even after his stroke which left his speech impaired, he continues even today to regularly apply his skills with a radio. His call letters are W4UVS. He was instrumental in helping with the Medical Amateur Radio Council.

Ed married Esther Seigenthaler on June 16, 1941. He then took a job with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers in Nashville where he photographed sites for dams and other projects. One of the more significant assignments was to photograph the prisoner of war camp at Crossville where German and Italian soldiers were being held.

In the fall of 1942, the Corps of Engineers office in Nashville was closing and he was offered his choice of two jobs. One was in Alaska and the other near Knoxville. We are sure glad he did not go to Alaska!

Ed was not sure of the exact nature of the assignment "near Knoxville," but he was given his choice and a car to drive to the new location. He did not know what this new assignment would be, nor did he immediately realize it as being the most important assignment of his life! Ed was 20 years old when he came to what would later be known as Oak Ridge.

And with that move began the most comprehensive collection of photographic history of the Manhattan Project in Oak Ridge and a career of photographing everything from Presidents to children shooting marbles. All photographic documentation done with unsurpassed artistic and technical skill.

Ed's photographs have formed the basis of most all the historical interpretation of early Oak Ridge history that has been done over the past several years. The documentary films, beginning with the *Secret City* documentary films created by Keith McDaniel to *A Nuclear Family* of four episodes created for East Tennessee Public Television and *Our Hidden Past* series, all contain several of Ed's photographs. All of these films have won multiple awards in major film festivals.

Ed Westcott's 95th Birthday

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on February 6, 2017)

There is a traveling exhibit of 44 of Ed's black and white matted and framed photographs that have been displayed at the National Archives of Atlanta, The U. S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, and the East Tennessee History Center in Knoxville. There is also a set of these framed photographs on display at the East Tennessee Economic Council's meeting room here in Oak Ridge.

Of course, Ed's photographs are used to decorate several businesses in Oak Ridge. Examples are the R&R Realty offices, the Secret City Café in the Methodist Medical Center and prominently displayed in the American Museum of Science and Energy's main lobby and the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge.

When Rick Dover renovated the Alexander Inn to create the Alexander Guest House, I was asked to help create the interior design by writing captions for the many Ed Westcott photographs placed on the walls as well as the collage of historic photographs just off the main entrance lobby. Recently, I have been requested to assist in the interior design of the new hotel being built in Main Street Oak Ridge. I am delighted to see people choose Ed's work as the main theme being used to decorate these new facilities in Oak Ridge.

Additionally, the New Hope Center and Jack Case Center at the Y-12 National Security Complex are both filled with hundreds of Ed's framed photographs. And finally, the Y-12 History Center contains Ed's photographs in posters, pull up displays and hanging murals.

In addition to the many locations where Ed's photographs are on display, the Kroger employees chose to honor Ed by naming the new shopping center located at the corner of South Illinois Avenue and the Oak Ridge Turnpike, *The Westcott Center*. There are displays of his photographs in the entrance lobby there as well.

Denise Kiernan saw Ed's "Calutron Girls" photograph online and decided to write the book, *Girls of Atomic City*. When Denise first came to Oak Ridge, the first person she wanted to meet was Ed. I remember well the visit we made to Ed's home to introduce them to each other. Immediately they became fast friends and each time Denise and her husband, Joe, came to Oak Ridge, they would try and connect with Ed.

Ed's recent trip to Washington, DC, on an HonorAir flight was a special opportunity to recognize his contribution along with Peggy Stuart, Virginia Coleman and Christine Higginbotham, to the Manhattan Project. Fanny and I went to McGee Tyson Airport to welcome them home and was amazed at the huge number of people who had gathered in the terminal there.

It was literally standing room only from the baggage claim escalator to the security screening barrier. You should have seen the beaming smile on Ed's face when he came down that ramp in McGee Tyson airport. I think he stopped at every child along the route and shook their hand.

Ed Westcott is more than just another person who lives in Oak Ridge and who has reached 95 years of age. He is an Oak Ridge icon and a community hero! Several people have said to me over the past few years that they would like to see us erect a statue of Ed. I agree, we should put a statue of him in a prominent location and recognize his contribution to Oak Ridge history in a most meaningful way.

Among the many people who attended the 95th birthday celebration was Mayor Warren Gooch who had really good things to say about Ed when the family finished their comments with endearing memories of their dad and granddad and opened the floor to comments from others. It was good to see our mayor take the time to attend and recognize Ed's great contribution to our history.

Also, Jim Dotson, new city councilman and art teacher at Jefferson Middle School, spoke about Ed's visits to the art classes where students used his photographs to inspire their art projects. He also presented Ed with an Oak Ridge city lapel pin, which Ed proudly accepted.

Ed Westcott's 95th Birthday

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on February 6, 2017)

So, it was a great day for Oak Ridge when Ed Westcott celebrated his 95th birthday. He is one of the crown jewels in Oak Ridge's crown and we are all so happy to say to our friend and hero, "Happy Birthday, Ed!"



Fanny with her hero and friend, Ed Westcott



Ed Westcott, famous photographer and Oak Ridge icon

Ed Westcott's 95th Birthday

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on February 6, 2017)



Ed Westcott and Jim Dodson