

Ed Westcott at 96 years old and Oak Ridge's 75th Anniversary

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on January 29, 2018)

A standing room only crowd of close to 200 people gathered in the Wildcat Den of the Midtown Community Center on Saturday, January 20, 2018, to attend a 75th Anniversary Event to celebrate Ed Westcott's 96th birthday. If you missed this you missed a great event! For photos see: <https://ray-smith.smugmug.com/Ed-Westcotts-96th-Birthday/>

Featured was a 15-minute documentary film, *Ed Westcott – Photographer*, (you can view the documentary online here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYvzw9f8M8A>) as well as proclamations from the Tennessee State Senate, presented by State Representative John Ragan, and the City of Oak Ridge, presented by Mayor Warren Gooch. The day was declared Ed Westcott day in Oak Ridge!

There were 40 of Ed's most recognized black and white photographs framed with classic black mats and black frames by the Appalachian Frame Shop on display on tables covering two of the long walls of the Den. For the two hours of the event, these photographs were constantly being viewed by the event participants. Only when the documentary film ran did the viewing pause.

While it is apparent that Ed Westcott is an Oak Ridge icon and local celebrity, who has national recognition, I was amazed at the number of people desiring to be photographed with Ed and just wanting to shake his hand. Amazing also were the children who sought him out. He loves to be around children. You can see the delight in his expression and the gleam in his eye when kids are about him.

Jim Dodson, who could not attend the event, asked me to tell Ed how much his interaction with Jim's art students at Jefferson Middle School has meant to the students and to the program. I have suggested to Jim that his students should produce a short film about their use of Ed's photographs to produce art and his interaction with the students. I hope we can do this.

Ed has also interacted with Girls, Inc. and the Manhattan Project National Historical Park's "Parks in Focus" initiative. I have been pleased to see the young girls get excited over using Ed's historic photographs to guide their selection of subjects to photograph.

Of the many cards and notes presented to Ed, I have chosen one to share with you *Historically Speaking* readers. It comes from a retiree who chose to return to Oak Ridge, much as Ed did some years ago and much as many others routinely select our city for their retirement home. This retiree is Mel Gray. Here is what Mel had to say to Ed, beginning with his introduction of the note to me:

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Mel said,

"I attended the celebration of Ed Westcott's 96th birthday at the encouragement of Michael Stallo, and I have joined the Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation Association. I left these thoughts for Ed on the table for cards and gifts, but wanted to share my thoughts with you. You may do with them what you like, reprint them, or pass them on to anyone who might be interested. To shake Ed's hand was a great honor to me. The following are the remarks I left:"

Mr. Westcott -

President John F. Kennedy was quoted as saying that "those who have children give hostages to fortune." I am one of those hostages, or perhaps more accurately, a child of the Atomic Age.

When I was born, the Second World War had been over for just a tad over three years. By the time I was four I was hearing my father and his brothers telling stories of the war that were still fresh in their minds. They were born and raised in Roswell, New Mexico. My father came east after the war, after serving in both theaters, landing on Omaha Beach on day 2 as an Atlantic Convoy security officer, and later taking part in the liberation of Luzon. The two brothers remained out West.

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We spent many summers visiting my uncle Joe, who had been in military intelligence, and he would take us to White Sands Proving Grounds to watch missile tests, to Los Alamos, and finally, to the Trinity Site, where as a child with a gift Geiger counter, I stood at ground zero.

In high school I had the great honor to meet Neils Bohr, who addressed an assembly at our school a year before he passed on. In college we befriended the son of a Manhattan Project scientist, Dr. Richard Lyon ("Stoke") and his wife Bobbi, who worked at the X-10 reactor. Stoke had come from the metallurgical lab at Chicago where he had been with one of the teams working with Enrico Fermi. We spent many evenings at the Lyons up on East Drive, again hearing stories about life in the Atomic City.

Some four months ago we decided to retire here, returning after more than a thirty-year absence. We live close to some of the original "Castle-On-The-Hill" administration buildings, near the railroad tracks that go from Elza to Y-12, near Bus Terminal Road, and so many other historic locations. Of course, many years ago we visited the Graphite Reactor.

And now we join in celebrating your birthday. I was honored and humbled to be invited by Michael Stallo, of the Oak Ridge Heritage and Preservation Association, to participate in the celebration of your 96th birthday. The events of my life have all joined together into a context that makes sense of the age I was born into, but they are also validated by your witness to history. I thank you for your witness, for your service, and the honor of shaking your hand today.

Mel Gray

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In Mel's email to me he also spoke of living near a Nike Ajax Hercules missile site near Cleveland, Ohio. So, he understands the Cold War era. It is interesting to me to see the admiration Mel holds for our beloved Ed. Sometimes those who view Oak Ridge from afar, as Mel has done for 30 years, have a more accurate perspective and more healthy respect for the history of Oak Ridge than we Oak Ridgers do. We are TOO CLOSE to it and just tend to take the great history being produced daily in Oak Ridge for granted!

I am also excited to be working on the design team for the American Museum of Science and Energy as plans are made to move into Main Street Oak Ridge. The new location is going to be a grand hub for our "hub and spoke" concept of Heritage and Science Tourism. I am pleased to see the teamwork going into this project, the professionalism of those who are working on the new designs.

Now, the building is fast being prepared. The plans are coming together. The exhibit fabricator is joining the teams this week. I expect to see the designs take practical form and the concept to begin to become reality very soon. I can't say enough positive things about what is beginning to take shape.

I also am excited to see the Oak Ridge International Friendship's Peace Pavilion construction beginning in the heart of A. K. Bissell Park. This unique structure is going to become a central focus of the beautiful park area there.

Finally, I am pleased to see the Manhattan Project National Historical Park and the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge finalizing the office space renovations and was fortunate enough to attend the joint Department of Energy, Manhattan Project National Historical Park, and Children's Museum of Oak Ridge's open house at the museum on Wednesday, 1/24/18. The joint efforts of all these elements bode well for increasing Heritage and Science Tourism in Oak Ridge.

Ed Westcott was in attendance at the Open House and, of course, was a huge hit with the crowd, especially the younger generation. The Park Rangers in attendance had their photograph made with Ed. He is certainly a local celebrity wherever he goes. I am proud to call Ed my friend.

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Ed Westcott celebrates his 96th birthday

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Ed Westcott – Photographer!