

# John Rice Irwin remembers Frank Hoffman

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of June 18, 2018)

John Rice Irwin is the person who introduced me to my interest in history. In the mid 1970's he asked me to take a photograph for him of a statue of Nancy Ward, Cherokee Beloved Woman, that was on a white woman's grave in the Arnwine Cemetery of Grainger County. From that adventure (there was no road to that cemetery) and his request for me to also write a short description of the history of the statue, I became interested in the Revolutionary War period.

If you would like to read more about the Nancy Ward Statue:

<http://smithdray.tripod.com/nancyward-index-5.html>  
<http://www.oakridger.com/article/20081223/NEWS/312239985>

From that early introduction to history to stories about the Jackson Magnolia trees at the White House and at the Museum of Appalachia, to the crosses of Harrison Mayes, to introducing a documentary film about Y-12 history, John Rice has become a hero of mine. He invited me to the museum for lunch on numerous occasions and I thoroughly enjoyed every visit.

Many times, he would have saved some details of history that he wanted to share with me. Over the years, I have grown to enjoy the wonderful grasp of history John Rice has and to relish the time I spend with him talking about the old times in East Tennessee and even surrounding mountains in adjacent states.

Do you know he can almost always tell you what part of Tennessee you grew up in by just listening to you talk? AND he can likely tell you who you are descended from by the county in which you grew up.

Recently, he said to me, "You didn't grow up in East Tennessee, you are from Middle Tennessee, right?" I said, "Yes, how did you know?" He replied, "You 'carry' things or people, that is what people in Middle Tennessee often say. In East Tennessee we 'take' things or people somewhere, we never say we 'carry' them." Amazing man! My friend, John Rice Irwin.

A few days ago, he surprised me again when he called me to say he had known Frank Hoffman. Frank was the photographer who followed Ed Westcott here in Oak Ridge. He is also the person who first recognized the importance of preserving Ed's negatives.

I learned that John Rice and Frank spent time together and that many of the photographs in the Museum of Appalachia were made by Frank. He used to accompany John Rice on forays for historical artifacts and take the photographs that help make the history come alive.

John Rice said he wanted to write something about his friend of past adventures, Frank Hoffman. I agreed to include his recollections in Historically Speaking. Enjoy John Rice's insights into his friend of years gone by:

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Re: Frank Hoffman

I was most distressed to learn of the passing, on May 20, 2018, of the great photographer and my good friend, Frank Hoffman, currently of the Cincinnati area, but formerly a long-time resident of Oak Ridge and the official Department of Energy photographer.

I first met Frank Hoffman in the early 1960's when I was searching for some historical photographs of early Oak Ridge in connection with the Anderson County School System, of which I was serving at the time as Superintendent. The name I heard most frequently was that of Frank Hoffman, and I set out to meet him. From the first time I met with him, he was most kind and helpful, and that first casual and informal meeting led to a lifetime friendship.

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I already knew something of his outstanding work as a photographer and his numerous awards and acknowledgements. I had heard of his having photographed Presidents, celebrities, and some of the world's leading scientists. Upon meeting and getting to know Frank Hoffman, I discovered quite another Frank Hoffman than I had expected.

I learned that Frank, the friendly Yankee, had an abiding interest in people, and especially the rural and mountain people of our region, whom had been my focus. At the time, in addition to serving as Superintendent of Anderson County Schools, I was in the early stages of developing my Museum of Appalachia in Norris.

The preponderance of my free time was spent traipsing through the hills, villages, and mountains of Southern Appalachia, acquiring relics and artifacts, which, one way or another, gave insight into the colorful and ingenious lives of these mountain folk, and I soon learned that Frank had similar interests. I asked him if he'd like to accompany me on a mountain sojourn.

Indeed, he readily accepted, and this was the beginning of many treks that Frank and I took into the hinterland of Southern Appalachia, and of course Frank carried with him an abundance of "picture taking" equipment. We continued our companionship, centered around treks into the mountains, until Frank retired from the Department of Energy and moved to Cincinnati along with his wife Rosemary and his family.

During the decades I knew Frank, my admiration for him grew, and so did my appreciation for his genius as a photographer. He didn't just take photographs of the mountain folk we encountered--he always managed to capture "the soul" of the person he was photographing.

He took thousands of pictures of the people of the mountains of our region, many of which remain on display at the Museum of Appalachia, and countless others that he took in conjunction with the Museum have appeared in dozens of newspapers and magazines throughout the country.

It is, of course, with great sadness, tempered with the greatest of admiration, that I learned of the passing of my good friend and companion, Frank Hoffman.

John Rice Irwin, Founder  
Museum of Appalachia  
Norris, Tennessee

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What a great tribute from a giant of our region. John Rice Irwin has led a life of adventure and even as he is advanced in age he remains eager to learn new information and he is anxious to share his experiences. I enjoy my visits with him immensely.

I have also added a photograph of Lynn Freeny, present photographer for the Department of Energy, pictured with both Ed Westcott and Frank Hoffman. These three individuals have provided us an enormous resource for telling our history in their photographs. Can you even imagine how hard it would be to do that without these great men and their photographs?

It is my hope that we can recognize Ed Westcott with a Presidential Medal of Freedom for his work. And Lynn, please keep up the good work you are doing. Your photographs are vital to future generations understanding the history of Oak Ridge!

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John Rice Irwin provided this photograph of Frank Hoffman and Senator Howard Baker, Jr.

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Jr.  
Oak Ridge Photographers Lynn Freeny DOE Photographer 1992 to present, Ed Westcott AEC Photographer 1942-1966, Frank Hoffman AEC, ERDA & DOE Photographer 1966 - 1992 photo courtesy of American Museum of Science and Energy