

Manhattan Project National Historical Park is five years old!

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of 11-9-2020)

On November 10, 2015, the Manhattan Project National Historical Park was established with a ceremony in Washington, DC. I was privileged to be there for that momentous event. For two days prior to the establishment of the 405th National Park, I had been honored to be a participant in the Scholars' Roundtable where a group of 20 people from various backgrounds, including two representatives from Japan, worked to determine the major focus areas for the new National Park.

The results of that roundtable established major focus areas which were as follows: Big Science, Concepts of Manhattan Project, Science and Technology, War Context, People, Place, Secrecy/Censorship, Consequences/Impact of using bomb, Decision to use the bomb, Legacy, Scale, and Peace. In the five years since, I have been pleased to see these themes continue to be the primary focus areas which the park has implemented.

The park consists of three sites, Los Alamos, New Mexico; Hanford, Washington; and Oak Ridge. Over the past five years, I have visited both Hanford and Los Alamos sites and made presentations about the history of Oak Ridge. We have had two speakers in Oak Ridge from Los Alamos, Heather McClenahan and Alan Carr.

Activities began at each site immediately after the November 10, 2015, establishment of the park. In Oak Ridge, we celebrated at Jackson Square, toured the Manhattan Project National Historical Park facilities such as Building 9731 at the Y-12 National Security Complex.

We established a Friends of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park fund to provide support for things not budgeted by the Park Service. You can learn more and help by going to this link. <https://amsefoundation.org/friends-of-manhattan-project-national-historical-park-fund/>

While both Los Alamos and Hanford have made significant progress implementing the park, here in Oak Ridge we have experienced our own significant progress. Niki Nicholas was selected as the manager of the park in addition to her duties as Superintendent of both the Big South Fork National River & Recreation Area and the Obed Wild & Scenic River. She has hired staff, including Robbie Meyer and others as well as creating a strong volunteer organization.

Kris Kirby has been appointed Superintendent of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. Her office is in Denver, CO. She has visited Oak Ridge numerous times and I was glad to be able to provide her a tour of Y-12 when she was first appointed.

Niki has been personally involved in all aspects of the park activities in Oak Ridge from touring the facilities to creating historical markers across the city. She has said that all of Oak Ridge is part of our park and she has proven she means just that. Robbie has routinely provided well attended talks about the secrecy and security of the Manhattan Project as well as bike rides along greenways and most recently has established kayaking outings (weather permitting).

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One of the more creative activities was a dance at the Tennis Courts near Jackson Square. What fun! And maybe the most challenging yet very effectively executed was an event at the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell recognizing the 75th anniversary of the dropping of Little Boy, the first atomic bomb ever used in warfare, which was fueled with uranium separated at Oak Ridge. This sensitive subject was handled in a thoughtful manner and the event was well attended.

Other actions taken by the park have been several photo exhibits that have been rotated around several sites in Oak Ridge including the American Museum of Science and Energy, the Oak Ridge History Museum, the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge, the K-25 History Center, the Federal Office Building and all locations have been most well received.

The Contact Center for our Manhattan Project National Historical Park is located at the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge. In addition to the visitor interface there is also the Flat Top house that was at the old location of the American Museum of Science and Energy and could not be accommodated at the new location, so it was moved to the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge.

Also, a replica of a hutment is being planned by Ray Garrett. He has contacted the company who created the replica at the K-25 History Center, and they have agreed to supply the same replica stove. This will be a walkthrough exhibit where visitors can see inside the living quarters of the construction workers who built the Manhattan Project in Oak Ridge.

After five years, our National Park is fast becoming a key element of heritage tourism in Oak Ridge. Plans are being worked now to create the wayside exhibits for the K-25 Building footprint which is a part of the National Park.

So, while it takes time for new parks to develop and grow to be an integral part of the cities where they are located, I think we can say ours has made tremendous progress. It is highly visible and working closely with the Explore Oak Ridge folks to attract visitors to Oak Ridge.

I am proud to have been a part of the efforts to establish the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. Having the opportunity to testify before the US House of Representatives was certainly a highlight of my career as the Y-12 Historian. I am pleased to continue to be asked to help when historical aspects of Oak Ridge are being incorporated into the National Park's efforts.

If you have not been able to participate in the activities or seen the exhibits of our National Park, keep your eyes open for future opportunities. While the pandemic has unfortunately had substantial adverse impact on our museums and the National Park's routine activities, we hope to see the future provide more opportunities for participation.

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We can all take pride in our Manhattan Project National Historical Park and know that together we can continue to succeed. It is a tremendous asset and will become even more so in the future.



Ceremony to establish Manhattan Project National Historical Park held in Washington, DC, on November 10, 2015

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Our own Ed Westcott celebrates the establishment of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park in Jackson Square

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Tour of Building 9731 at the Y-12 National Security Complex