

## Oak Ridge history documentary films and videos

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Among the best methods we have for effectively conveying our Oak Ridge history are the various forms of visual media which seem to continue to grow in popularity. The use of oral histories on video are also excellent means to tell our story. We have over 900 oral histories at the Oak Ridge Public Library (many of which are video):

<https://cdm16107.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15388coll1>

The Atomic Heritage Foundation also has an enormous archive of 600 oral histories online:

<https://www.manhattanprojectvoices.org/>. Cindy Kelly, Founder of the Atomic Heritage Foundation spoke to the Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation Association recently and noted that there were 12 hours of General Groves oral history as well as an excellent oral history of Robert Oppenheimer that his family thinks is the best record of him speaking.

Several years ago, at the height of DVD popularity and well ahead of the recent recognition of these forms of communications such as Zoom and other virtual meeting formats, Keith McDaniel created the Secret City series of two documentary films (*Secret City: The War Years* and *Secret City: Years 1945 -2006*). I was pleased to be asked to assist by being on the advisory steering committee for him and to be included as a co-producer.

First released in 2005, this award-winning documentary film is what I consider the most effective history of Oak Ridge during the Manhattan Project years. It is now available online at: <https://www.y12.doe.gov/library/video/secret-city-war-years> . It is accompanied on the Y-12 website by the following apt description:

“A landmark documentary film that has become the definitive history of the Manhattan Project years in Oak Ridge, TN. The amazing story is told by many of the people who lived it. The Oak Ridge heritage is one of the great scientific and engineering feats in history. Told from the human perspective, the unique work undertaken in Oak Ridge literally changed the world forever.”

The second documentary film in the *Secret City, The Oak Ridge Story* series is also available online: <https://www.y12.doe.gov/library/video/secret-city-1945-2006> The website description states:

“A sequel documentary film to Secret City: The War Years that follows the history of Oak Ridge, TN after the Manhattan Project and documents many examples of science making history. The film continues the dramatic story of Oak Ridge as the once secret city grows and takes its place among the most important scientific and technological centers in the world.”

One of the most effective methods to use these documentary films for me has been the approach to encourage teachers to show segments of them to their students while asking the students to write down questions they would like to ask the Oak Ridge Historian. Then the teacher calls me using Facetime and I interact with the students directly by answering their questions on the phone.

Other documentary films and short videos are also available online. Many of these were created while I was the Historian at the Y-12 National Security Complex. Prior to retiring in November 2017, these videos were placed online:

<https://www.y12.doe.gov/about/history/video-gallery>

Among the most viewed is the *A Nuclear Family* series of four 30-minute episodes on the history of the Y-12 National Security Complex created for the East Tennessee PBS television station. Also included are two additional short introduction and extras videos.

A video series, *Our Hidden Past*, includes popular videos such as The Prophet of Oak Ridge, which is the John Hendrix story, and *From Oak Ridge to the Moon*, which tells of the production at Y-12 of the Apollo Lunar Sample Return Container or “Moon Box.” The *Our Hidden Past* series also includes the following: *1<sup>st</sup> Mission*; *Biology, Part 1*; *Biology, Part 2*; *Peacetime*; and *Precious Metals*.

An introductory video to the Y-12 portion of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park is also included at this video gallery.

One of my favorite documentary films that I was working on just before I retired from Y-12 is *Ed Westcott: Photographer*. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U0O\\_07swEY&t=5s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U0O_07swEY&t=5s)

This film came about when Ed showed me a 16-millimeter film of him getting into a helicopter to take aerial shots of Oak Ridge and climbing the ladder to the water tower on Pine Ridge to make the famous panoramic photo of Oak Ridge. Right then I knew we had the heart of a documentary film.

Ed had had a stroke and was unable to speak clearly, so putting him on camera to talk was out of the question. I had struggled with how to make the film for some time. I often went to Ed’s house taking with me some of his photographs that I had printed for him to autograph and let me sell at auctions for nonprofits. He did that gladly.

But one time, he motioned for me to follow him into his bedroom where he had set up the projector and showed me the 16-millimeter film. I said, “Ed, let me get that digitized and I can use that to form a portion of a documentary film on your life.” He laughed, and said, “Go ahead!”



What a delight for me that was. I so wanted to honor Ed. I was privileged to be able to present the East Tennessee Economic Council's Muddy Boot Award to Ed in 2013 and, of course, he had received many prestigious awards, but no film had yet been made about him.

Another visual media format gaining momentum now with more and more people using virtual meetings is the video podcast. Keith McDaniel and I created *Hidden History: Stories from the Secret City*. We began by thinking of an audio podcast, but Covid hit, and we wanted to still do the podcast but could not easily connect in person.

Zoom was just starting to be used and we agreed a video podcast would be better anyway. So, we started and have done a video podcast every other Saturday for the past year and nine months, except for a short break during the Knoxville Film Festival when Keith was busy there.

These programs last an average of 30-40 minutes and usually feature a guest who brings out some aspect of Oak Ridge history that may not be well known. Examples of past guests are Richard Rhodes, author of *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*; Robert Norris, author of *Racing for the Bomb*; and Clifton Truman Daniel, grandson of President Truman.

Several local people such as Niki Nicholas, Manager, Manhattan Project National Historical Park – Oak Ridge; Alan Lowe, Executive Director, American Museum of Science and Energy; Terry Domm, Chairman of the Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation Association along with Mick Wiest, Executive Director of ORHPA, and Emily Hunnicutt, Chair of the Oak Ridge History Museum Committee, have also been on the program.

Hidden History: Stories from the Secret City programs can be found on Facebook (just search for the page by name) and here:

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC52AinI\\_FiRCGMvtZdLEvWg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC52AinI_FiRCGMvtZdLEvWg)

And, by the way, Keith has posted his award-winning *The Clinton 12* documentary film there as well!

There are other video based approaches being taken by the American Museum of Science and Energy, the Manhattan Project National Historical Park and Explore Oak Ridge. And even more are planned.

Here is an excellent example of what AMSE is doing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRyFX2PkUMY>. Riley is an intern working at the museum and she is a delightful host for several videos. Just search for "amse video riley" on Google and you will find videos introducing you to the museum's main areas.

I am working with Katy Watt to feature a Historically Speaking column introducing a video based promotional campaign. Of course, they already have several videos online. Here is a video that introduces our museums: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUo5lghP-KM>

The Manhattan Project National Historical Park has several excellent short videos here: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVIR49cPXZ8MafGa\\_XZ-bMA/videos](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVIR49cPXZ8MafGa_XZ-bMA/videos)

This video features Ruth Huddleston, a Calutron Girl: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u\\_OdMxPiQZE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_OdMxPiQZE)

This video features Katie Strickland's biscuit pan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Xg2LlvMw70>

While I have listed many videos here, I am sure I have missed others such as those produced by the History Channel, *Lost Worlds*, *Secret Cities of the A-Bomb*, and *Modern Marvels: The Manhattan Project* and even the television series, *Manhattan*. I have also not mentioned the Knoxville TV stations that have done excellent video work featuring Oak Ridge history.

An example is the recent *The Secret in Scarborough: The Oak Ridge 85 Documentary* video produced by Yvonne Thomas of WBIR Channel 10: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Gia6ibaTMc> There are many other videos being produced more easily with today's smartphones.

A few years back, there was a special effort to get high school students interested in producing short videos. I have been interviewed by many students who were producing videos for annual History Day competition.

Keith McDaniel is now teaching video production at Roane County High School. Bill Carey, History for Kids, is using zoom to teach about our history online. Much is happening! We need to be sure we are taking full advantage of visual media!

J. D. Phillips has produced short videos on YouTube about many locations in East Tennessee. Here is an example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdoXNF8VeUs&t=2s>  
*Oak Ridge, Tennessee: The Early Years*

My intent was to provide you readers access to some of the many local documentary films that are online and easily accessible.



Katie Strickland's biscuit pan is on display at the K-25 History Center



The Ed Westcott documentary film runs continuously in the Oak Ridge History Museum and in the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge



## Secret City: The War Years



Keith McDaniel's Secret City Series is in my opinion the best source of Oak Ridge history



Yvonne Thomas' excellent documentary of the Oak Ridge 85 desegregation story making Oak Ridge the first public school in the southeast to desegregate