

Ed Westcott's 100th Birthday

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on January 18, 2022)

Ed Westcott, famous Manhattan Project Photographer, and my dear friend, would have been 100 years old on January 20, 2022, had he lived. He passed away at age 97 on March 29, 2019. I miss him.

It was common for me to drop by his house with prints of a few of his photographs for him to autograph for me to sell in charity auctions. Once he showed me some 16mm footage of him getting into a helicopter to take aerial photos of Oak Ridge and climbing the water tower on Pine Ridge to make the famous panoramic image of Oak Ridge. I used that footage as the basis for a documentary film on Ed's life. See it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_U0O_07swEY&t=15s

Ed was the 29th person hired for the Manhattan Project at age 20. He came to Oak Ridge and was the only person allowed in the government facilities with a camera. He also made many photographs of life in the city of Oak Ridge as well as the only images we have of the processes and equipment used for that most significant scientific and industrial undertaking to create the material for an atomic bomb...as well as after the war ended, nuclear medicine, nuclear power, the nuclear navy and so much more.

Without Ed's black and white images of Oak Ridge during the Manhattan Project we would be at a loss to recall the magic of that era. His photographs tell the story well. His image of the "Calutron Girls" is what prompted Denise Kiernan to write the book, *The Girls of Atomic City*. Denise called me and said, "Ray, I want to write a book about the women in Oak Ridge during the Manhattan Project. I saw this photo online by Ed Westcott...I want to meet him." I helped her get to the women she interviewed, and I took her to Ed's house to meet him. She was so appreciative of that visit, made photos with Ed and formed a good friendship that lasted as long as she was coming to Oak Ridge to research the book.

Many of Ed's photographs are on display at various locations in Oak Ridge, including the Oak Ridge History Museum, the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge, the American Museum of Science and Energy, the K-25 History Center, the Y-12 History Center, the Graphite Reactor, and the East Tennessee Economic Council meeting room is filled with his images. I was honored to be able to present Ed with a Muddy Boot Award in that room.

The legacy left by Ed's photographs is a true blessing to Oak Ridge. While there were photographers at other Manhattan Project sites, Ed's 15,250 negatives on cold storage in the National Archives is by far the most extensive collection of images of that era. We are lucky that several hundred of his most famous images are available in Oak Ridge. Don and Emily Hunnicutt, Ed's daughter, has a large collection. The Oak Ridge Public Library has another large collection and many of his images are available online.

While many places in Oak Ridge feature a few of Ed's famous photographs, the Oak Ridge History Museum at 102 Robertsville Road, the "Wildcat Den" or Midtown Community Center, has what I believe is the largest collection of Ed's photographs. Just inside the entrance is a wall featuring many photographs, the large panoramic image that once adorned the main lobby of the American Museum of Science and Energy when it was located on Tulane Avenue, is now featured on two large walls of the Wildcat Den large meeting room.

The board room has many images of alphabet houses made by Ed. But by far the most extensive display is in the far east room dedicated to Ed and his photographs. The documentary film mentioned above is running there and several of his cameras and awards are on display there as well. The photographs Ed made of US presidents are also included there. His radio call sign is there. It is great to see so much good being made of Ed's history-making images!

While Ed was also the lead Atomic Energy Commission photographer and lived in Washington, DC, for part of his career, he returned to Oak Ridge when he retired and enjoyed his beloved Oak Ridge for many years. His family continues to share his photographs and help keep his memory alive.

If not for Ed, my attempts to share Oak Ridge's early history would be severely limited. I enjoyed asking Ed about things that happened while he was here during the Manhattan Project and his excellent recall

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held true right up to the time of his death. His last photograph he took was of the ribbon cutting for the Oak Ridge History Museum which features many of his historic photographs.

As we approach the 100th anniversary of Ed Westcott's birth, let us remember him as a great photographer who has been submitted to be considered for the Presidential Medal of Freedom (if selected Ed would be one of only three photographers to receive this award). I still hold out hope that Ed will eventually receive this award and well-deserved recognition.

Of course, Ed has received numerous awards and recognition for his marvelous photography. He was always humble and reserved when being recognized. Ed thought he was just doing his job...

I miss him and am still in awe of his amazing talent for telling a story in a single photograph.

Happy 100th Birthday, Ed!

Here are links to archived Historically Speaking columns featuring Ed Westcott. First are links to Historically Speaking columns I have written on Ed:

<http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2006/2-21-06%20Ed%20Westcott.pdf>

<http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2006/3-28-06%20Ed%20Westcott.pdf>

<http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2010/8-17-10%20Childrens%20Museum%20and%20Ed%20Westcott.pdf>

<http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2015/5-26-15%20Pre-Memorial%20Day%20memories%20Ed%20Westcott.pdf>

<http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2015/12-7-15%20Ed%20Westcott%20Project.pdf>

<http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2017/2-6-17%20Ed%20Westcott%20at%2095.pdf>

<http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2017/12-13-17%20Ed%20Westcott.pdf>

<http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2018/1-29-18%20Ed%20Westcott%2096.pdf>

<http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2019/1-18-19%20Ed%20Westcott%2097th%20Birthday.pdf>

<http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2019/4-9-19%20Ed%20Westcott%20-%20My%20Friend.pdf>

Links to Historically Speaking columns Ed helped me write about John Hendrix or contain photos Ed made:

<http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2006/5-9-06%20John%20Hendrix%20death%20-%20Clay%20Seals%20by%20Ed%20Westcott%20part%202.pdf>

<http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2006/4-24-06%20John%20Hendrix%20-%20Clay%20Seals%20by%20Ed%20Westcott%20part%201%20published%205-2-06.pdf>

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<http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2006/6-6-06%20Joe%20Oakes%20article%20on%20John%20Hendrix%20part%202.pdf>

<http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2006/6-6-06%20Joe%20Oakes%20article%20on%20John%20Hendrix%20part%202.pdf>

Other links about John Hendrix:

<http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2006/3-15-06%20John%20Hendrix%20Oak%20Ridge%20Prophet%20part%201.pdf>

<http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/2006/3-21-06%20John%20Hendrix%20Oak%20Ridge%20Prophet%20part%202.pdf>



The late Ed Westcott, center, and others celebrated the creation of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park in Jackson Square with a scene reminiscent of the famous photo he shot when World War II ended

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Ed Westcott (January 20, 1922 – March 29, 2019)

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Ed Westcott in his 20's and already a renowned photographer

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It was my honor to be able to present Ed with the Muddy Boot Award