

Manhattan Project National Historical Park

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of August 3, 2026)

I am proud that we in Oak Ridge have a national park and that we now have a sign on the interstate encouraging people to stop and visit the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. We have signage in the city as well to help tourists locate the park's visitor center. The park is 10 years old and has grown from an idea to a major influence on tourism in the three locations, Oak Ridge, TN, Los Alamos, NM, and Hanford, WA.

For the first time this summer, Manhattan Project National Historical Park had a Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) crew to provide maintenance on waysides, cultivate the Victory Gardens, assist with Park Ranger programs, and preserve historic cemeteries throughout Oak Ridge. Team members Emma Cipollini, Evelyn Denson, Ifeoluwa Abiodun-Adeniyi, and Ollie Hoke join the park from Oak Ridge High School. Throughout the summer, Oak Ridge-based YCC crew members received training alongside YCC crews based out of Andrew Johnson, National Historic Park, Big South Fork National River & Recreation Area, and Obed Wild & Scenic River.

The Youth Conservation Corps is a summer employment program for male and female youths, ages 15-18, to work on projects to protect public lands. The Youth Conservation Corps program is one that trains young people and provides outdoor work that is supervised by a trained crew leader. Participants gain valuable professional experience working on National Park Service lands and learn how to use tools, safe work habits, teamwork, and how conservation projects benefit the environment and protect cultural and historical resources. For more information about the Youth Conservation Corps, please visit: <https://www.nps.gov/gettinginvolved/youthprograms/ycc.htm>.

Among other things the YCC crew did such as maintaining the 40 plus wayside historical markers, they also cleaned tombstones in cemeteries (using professional trained approach and proper cleaning materials). I understand the Park Service is going to provide this training to interested individuals soon.

That is a good thing as cleaning tombstones properly is important to retain the integrity of the tombstone and not damage it in anyway. Be on the lookout for details of this training if you are interested. It will be announced on the Manhattan Project National Historical Park – Oak Ridge website: <https://www.nps.gov/mapr/oak-ridge.htm>

Here are the cemeteries that received attention from the YCC:

- George Jones Memorial Baptist Church Cemetery, AEC #4
- Rather Cemetery, AEC #63
- Gallahar Cemetery, AEC #12
- Silvey Cemetery, AEC #62
- Ellis Cemetery, AEC #3
- Shelton Cemetery, AEC #68
- "Lost" Cemetery AEC #70

Another program that has been well received is the Fishing with A Ranger program. Youth, ages 12 and younger, are invited to join the Oak Ridge, Tennessee unit of Manhattan Project National Historical Park for a monthly fishing education program.

This free program requires registration and space is limited.

More information on the program and how to register can be found at: [Fishing with a Ranger](#)

This program was made possible with a grant from the National Park Foundation.

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One of my favorite things the Manhattan Project National Historical Park has done is to place nearly 40 wayside historical markers around the city. For some time they had a fun game going for me. They would install a wayside historical marker and let me know one had been installed but would not tell me where or what it was about. The challenge for me was to locate the new wayside historical marker and post on Facebook that I had found it.

We had a good time with that game for months. Now, however, they have created a web page of the wayside historical markers that includes the content of the marker and its location.

<https://www.nps.gov/mapr/learn/photosmultimedia/oak-ridge-waysides.htm>

Recently, on April 30, 2026, (the actual anniversary date was November 15, 2025 but the celebration was delayed) the 10th anniversary of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park was celebrated at the Oak Ridge Convention Center. Free admissions to the museums in Oak Ridge was included in the celebration as was a free showing of the Oppenheimer movie.

I well recall being asked to testify before Congress regarding the creation of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. You only get five minutes to testify...I choose to tell a story about the time I was speaking to a fourth and fifth grade class of students about the history of Oak Ridge. When I had spoken for approximately 45 minutes, the bell rang for the students to go to lunch. One of the students held up her hand and asked, "Mr. Smith, if we go and get our lunch and bring it back here in the class room, will you keep on talking?" I said, "That is up to your teacher." The teacher said, "Of course, if you students want to do that, it will be fine." So they did just that and I talked for another 45 minutes.

Now what I stressed for Congress is that the young students are interested in history when it is well presented. And the National Park Service is our best national resource for presenting our history in a way that will be retained and appreciated. I am proud to have been a small part of the effort to successfully create the unique, three locations, national park. It is an unusual park and I believe doing a really good job of presenting our history to the young generation and others as well.

Another program that has been well received is the Tennis Court Dances. This is reminiscent of the dances held there during the Manhattan Project as a source of entertainment for the 75,000 residents of Oak Ridge in 1945. It is held monthly on the third Thursday evening at the Jackson Square tennis courts. It is much fun and has grown to be a most popular event during the summer months from May to October at 7pm. August 20, September 17, and October 15, are the remaining dates in 2026.

Ranger talks, hikes, bike rides, canoe and kayak trips, and ranger presence in A. K. Bissell Park are all exceptional activities that promote better understanding of Oak Ridge for visitors to our city. The entire city of Oak Ridge has become a part of the national park.

An event coming up on August 6, 2026, at dawn, is "Days of Peace and Remembrance: marking 81 years since Hiroshima and Nagasaki." This is a solemn event where no conversation is permitted. It is held at the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell, in A. K. Bissell Park. Each person is asked to ring the bell once for whatever reason that speaks to them. After ringing the bell each bellringer is invited to record the reason why they rang the bell.

There is also a virtual bell ringing option on the Manhattan Project National Historical Park's website:

<https://www.nps.gov/mapr/learn/oak-ridge-friendship-bell-ringing.htm>

As I hope you realize, I am proud of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. I believe it does exactly what I told the US Congress the park service could do so well. I am amazed at the creative ways the park rangers at Oak Ridge do their job of educating the public about Oak Ridge's history.

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The facilities that have been designated by the Department of Energy as part of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park are: The Graphite Reactor at Oak Ridge National Laboratory; Buildings 9204-3 (Beta 3) and 9731 at Y-12; and the footprint of Building K-25 at the Heritage Center's Atomic History Campus at K-25 of the Oak Ridge Discovery Foundation.

The Alexander Guest House is also mentioned in the language that created the national park. I am proud to take tourist to visit the main lobby and view the Robert Oppenheimer photograph made by Ed Westcott that includes the fireplace mantle. I have framed and placed that photograph on the mantle of the fireplace which Rick Dover retained when he refurbished the Alexander Inn to create the Alexander Guest House senior living center.

Very soon we will see wayside historical markers at the K-25 building footprint and flagpoles marking the corners of the footprint to show the amazing size of the building. It is my hope that we can have a laser show that will show the amazing true size of the largest building in the world at the time of its construction. LIS Technology, a laser enrichment company, has agreed to help us with that laser show! I am looking forward to that...

The Manhattan Project National Historical Park visitor center is located in the main lobby of the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge. You can get your National Park Passport stamped there...remember the stamp is in three sections, one for each of the three sites, so in Oak Ridge you only get one third of the stamp.

The Children's Museum of Oa Ridge has also done an amazing job with the flattop house that was donated to them from the American Museum of Science and Energy when it was no longer possible to display it in conjunction with the AMSE museum. It is open now for public visits on the third Sunday of the month from 1pm to 4pm.

The Manhattan Project National Historical Park also provides photographic displays at several locations including the Oak Ridge History Museum, the Department of Energy, the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge and will have more photographs in the wayside historical markers at the K-25 Building footprint soon.

If you want more information about the Manhattan Project National Historical Park, you may visit their website: <https://www.nps.gov/mapr/planyourvisit/oakridge-tn.htm> or just drop by the visitor center at the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge at 461 West Outer Dr.

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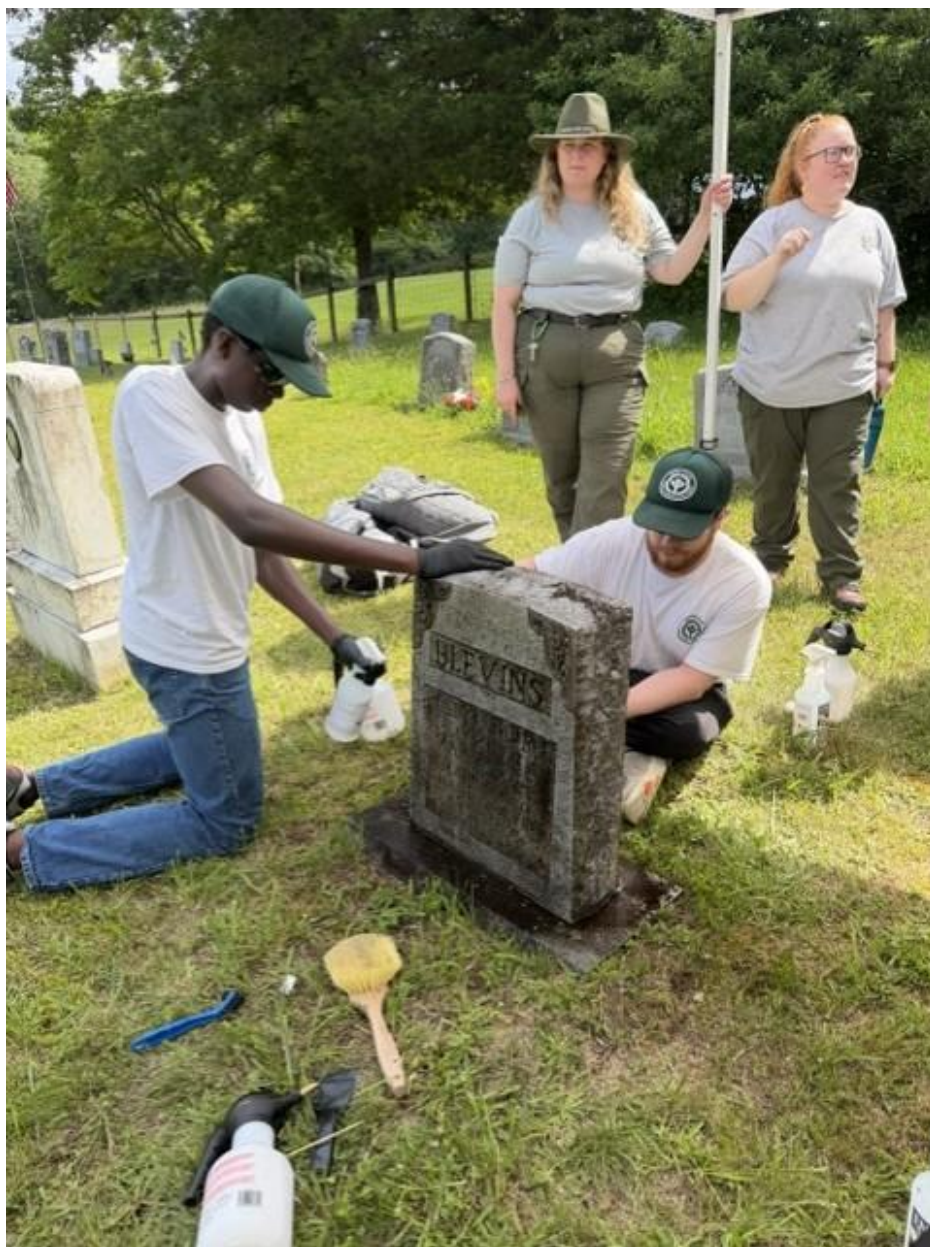
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(left to right): Ifeoluwa Abiodun-Adeniyi, Ranger Matt Klein, Emma Cipollini, Ollie Hoke, and Evelyn Denson (Courtesy of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park)

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(left to right) Ifeoluwa Abiodun-Adeniyi, NPS Archeologist Rachel Steffen, Ollie Hoke, and NPS Archeologist Summer Kiker (Courtesy of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park)

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(left to right) Ollie Hoke, Ifeoluwa Abiodun-Adeniyi, Emma Cipollini, and Evelyn Denson (Courtesy of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park)