

AEC and Oak Ridge Operations

During the months between August 1, 1946 and January 1, 1947, many changes had to be planned to transfer the control of the atomic energy program from the Army to the civilian government. General Groves and Colonel Nichols were engaged in helping that transition. Others, both political and military, assisted in the effort as well.

One of the major transitions required was that of moving the center of authority for daily operations from Oak Ridge, splitting the responsibilities and placing segments of control in various other locations. Unlike the Manhattan District which placed primary administration on the Oak Ridge staff, the Atomic Energy Commission's headquarters, to be located in Washington, was intended to control activities through field offices.

Oak Ridge was to retain responsibility to direct the operations of the uranium feed material plants K-25 and Y-12 and the emerging Clinton Laboratory - all three sites already located in Oak Ridge. Additional responsibilities were also given to the newly formed field office, primarily because of the staff and experience already located here.

In the September 1, 1955 issue of the *AEC Handbook on Oak Ridge* there were five primary missions allotted to the major field installation of the AEC located at Oak Ridge and officially established on September 15, 1947. The missions were:

1. To direct the operation and maintenance of plants and facilities for the production of fissionable and related materials.
2. To direct design and construct plants and facilities as may be required.
3. To administer research and development contracts including that of the Oak Ridge Institute of Nuclear Studies
4. To administer the AEC program for production and distribution of radioactive and stable isotopes.
5. To direct the construction, maintenance and administration of housing and community facilities for the town of Oak Ridge until government ownership is terminated.

The 1964 edition of the *AEC Handbook on Oak Ridge Operations* states that the AEC, "...immediately began preparing long range plans for Oak Ridge to enable the community to continue to function as a major scientific center." The handbook goes on to note several milestones in that transition over the first several years.

Those milestones were:

1. The gates were opened to the public in 1949
2. Land first leased to residents in 1953 – opening the way for extensive construction
3. In 1956 the first property was sold to private owners
4. In 1959 Oak Ridge's voted to incorporate and establish their own municipal government

So, obviously things were continuing to change and develop in Oak Ridge. However, the new field office expanded responsibilities considerably during these early formative years to become the most diversified and largest of the AEC field offices. By 1964, there were 790 AEC people working for the Oak Ridge Field Office and 650 of them were located in Oak Ridge. Contractor employment was 22,000.

This expansion brought even more importance to Oak Ridge politically and economically. Yet, many of these responsibilities extended beyond Oak Ridge and thus resulted in new facilities in many other locations across the nation.

By 1964 the Oak Ridge Field Office mission is quoted as having three primary functions:

1. Directing the operation of feed materials plants which turn out pure uranium metal and uranium compounds used in the production of plutonium and enriched U-235.

2. Directing the operation of the gaseous diffusion plants which produce enriched U-235, and other production facilities, including those to produce weapons components, and radioactive and stable isotopes.
3. Administering contracts for research and development, and training at several major AEC installations.

Activities of the Oak Ridge Operation were carried out in plants and laboratories in five states and Puerto Rico. Work at facilities outside Oak Ridge was administered by area offices which reported to the Manager of Oak Ridge Operations.

These area offices include:

1. Paducah, KY
2. Portsmouth, OH
3. Cincinnati, OH
4. St. Louis, MO
5. New Brunswick, NJ
6. Puerto Rico

Next we will look more closely at the specific changes that took place at Y-12 and other Oak Ridge facilities as the AEC began to develop and expand. The growth associated with the research and development, the production industry springing up in support of the nuclear weapons and commercial use of atomic energy were all unprecedented and Oak Ridge was at the heart of it all.