

AEC and Oak Ridge Institute for Nuclear Studies

During 1946 many changes were taking place across the nation regarding nuclear energy as the government wrestled with the concept of military or civilian government control. Oak Ridge remained in the center of activities, yet struggles grew more heated as other parts of the nation attempted to establish laboratories for research into this new energy source.

Not only did the above atmosphere contribute to the formation of collaborative efforts of several southern universities, it enabled the formation of what ultimately became the Oak Ridge Associated Universities (ORAU) under the leadership of Dr. William G. Pollard. There were also collaborative efforts in New York City and Chicago that resulted in two national laboratories forming while debate raged surrounding Clinton Laboratories and what to do about it.

In July 1946 the Associated Universities, Inc. was incorporated and led to the formation of Brookhaven National Laboratory. This entity was patterned after the model being attempted in Oak Ridge but was much more rapidly formed.

Meanwhile a parallel development in Chicago was being implemented. At about the same time as the "Conference on Research Opportunities in the Southeast" was being held on December 5, 1945, in the Knoxville Andrew Johnson Hotel, a meeting of representatives of Midwestern universities met on December 2, 1945. Colonel Nichols asked that group to plan for the continued operation of the Argonne National Laboratory.

On April 5, 1946, representatives of 22 universities, the Mayo foundation and Battelle Memorial Institute formed an advisory council which elected an advisory board of the same members Colonel Nichols had asked to form the original committee. This advisory board formulated a set of bylaws for the operation of Argonne National Laboratory that Colonel Nichols referred to the Research Division of Clinton Laboratories for study. Paul W. McDaniel shared a copy with the Oak Ridge executive committee who were attempting to form a similar entity in the southeast.

These bylaws formed the basis for draft proposals for formation of the Oak Ridge Institute for Nuclear Studies (ORINS). The intent was to form an entity to provide access to the Clinton Laboratories by the southeast universities and to lend support to the creation of a national laboratory in the southeast. This original intent was modified over the coming months as a variety of different situations occurred while ORINS was being established.

Dr. Pollard was involved all along the way as were several other key individuals. Even the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) was heavily engaged with David Lilienthal, then chairman of the TVA who became the first chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission in a matter of months after working with the formation of ORINS.

It was Lilienthal and TVA's general counsel, Joseph C. Swidler, who strongly recommended limiting the universities that could participate in the cooperative efforts to only those universities in the southeast region. McDaniel also remained active in the developments as did Frank P. Graham who was elected chairman of the executive committee on July 25, 1946. Pollard was secretary and McDaniel was treasurer.

Fourteen universities became charter members of ORINS and the first council meeting was held on October 17, 1946. Clinton Laboratories management was watching this development closely and wanted to assure that as many universities as could be included were given access to the laboratory through this method. Yet, the original intent of regionalism held.

Eugene Wigner had arrived as the director of research at Clinton Laboratories. This would prove a most fortunate choice as he would be instrumental in the future of the laboratory.

President Truman appointed the five AEC commissioners on October 28, 1946 with David Lilienthal being selected as the first chairman. He resigned from the ORINS board of directors to take this position.

Lilienthal requested a delay in further developments of ORINS until the AEC had a chance to get its feet on the ground. Although it caused even more frustration on the part of those who were attempting to form ORINS and wanting to establish the Clinton Laboratories as a national laboratory, wait they did until February 1947.

At the first meeting of the board of directors of ORINS on February 14–15, 1947, a committee was formed to recommend candidates for selection to the position of executive director. William G. Pollard was appointed acting executive director.

Another major part of the meeting was devoted to defining the scope of work for which ORINS would attempt to contract with the AEC to perform. Once that was defined, the contract was obtained by Pollard travelling to Washington and meeting with the AEC Office of General Council to personally get it signed.

Offices were assigned to Pollard in the AEC administration building. ORINS had accomplished their goal of becoming an official AEC contractor.

At the October 1947 meeting of the ORINS board of directors, the committee to identify candidates for executive director recommended that William G. Pollard be appointed executive director for a five-year term. The board approved.