

Even more Oak Ridge transitions

The University of Chicago managed the Clinton Laboratories until July 1, 1945 when Monsanto Chemical Company took over operations. Charles A. Thomas, Monsanto's president had primary interest in developing the laboratory through building two advanced reactors being designed at the time.

With Eugene Wigner leading the efforts as Director of Research at the Clinton Laboratories, he was in the best position available to direct the research and development of peacetime use of nuclear power. While he had been instrumental in developing the technology for creating nuclear weapons, his main desire was to see nuclear energy used for other purposes. He saw the release of atomic energy as very important.

While Wigner was proud of his contribution to the war effort, he was not comfortable that his work could also contribute to the death of many Japanese civilians. He joined with other scientists of the Manhattan Project in an attempt to convince President Truman not to use the atomic bomb on Japan, rather to use it as a demonstration.

However, he later came to realize that the actions taken to stop the war quickly actually saved many more lives than the number lost by dropping the two bombs on Japan. Still, the deaths were not what he had hoped to see his research used to accomplish. After the war he dedicated his energy to seeking peaceful uses of this new enormously powerful technology.

The Graphite Reactor was the primary attraction bringing Wigner to Oak Ridge. He saw it as the most readily available reactor for his purposes and immediately began to make good use of it. His efforts led to the creation of the first radioactive isotopes and thus the genesis of nuclear medicine.

There was substantial reluctance on the part of the General Advisory Committee of the Atomic Energy Commission to strengthen the standing of the Clinton National Laboratory at the expense of other national laboratories. One reason was the perceived isolated location in the south and, even worse, in East Tennessee. This hesitancy to place significant programs with them caused Monsanto to decide on May 22, 1947 to withdraw as operating contractor for the laboratory.

Meetings of the Oak Ridge Institute for Nuclear Studies board of directors on June 14, 1947 and the full council of universities on June 30, 1947 were devoted to discussing the possibility of ORINS becoming the managing and operating contractor for the Clinton National Laboratory. This was proposed to the AEC.

AEC general manager, Carroll Wilson, responded that an experienced and resourceful management team was required and that the University of Chicago was expected to return to manage the laboratory. This decision was announced on September 25, 1947.

The decision was primarily based on the fact that the Clinton Laboratory was not similar to Brookhaven, where a consortium of universities managed it. Brookhaven was thought of by the AEC as a basic research laboratory while Argonne National Laboratory and Clinton National Laboratory were considered as special applications laboratories.

However, the decision was never implemented as the University of Chicago did not actually take over the management of the laboratory. The discussion regarding the Clinton Laboratory's future continued. Brookhaven National Laboratory (started August 1947) and Argonne National Laboratory (started July 1946) continued to grow and found favor within the AEC.

However, Robert Oppenheimer, Chairman of the AEC's General Advisory Committee, said of the Clinton Laboratories, "Most of us think that the evidence is in that Clinton will not live even if it is built up." This statement is found documented in *ORAU: From the beginning*, written by William Pollard. By January 1948, the staff of Clinton Laboratories was discouraged and held little hope for a future there.

During late 1947 and early 1948, Pollard, Executive Director of ORINS, continued to work to assure the arrangement between the Clinton Laboratories and ORINS would remain as it was defined with Monsanto regardless of who the contractor managing the laboratory might turn out to be. It was by then obvious that ORINS was not going to be accepted as the laboratory's management team, but they still wanted to maintain the close working relationship to execute the contract they had developed with the AEC.

On December 31, 1947, the AEC announced to the staff at the Clinton Laboratory that Carbide and Carbon Chemical Corporation (CCCC) would operate the laboratory beginning March 1, 1948. This decision was so monumental that AEC's Wilson and Fisk traveled to Oak Ridge to personally announce it.

Eugene Wigner left to go back to Princeton and Alvin Weinberg was appointed Scientific Director in December 1948. I would suggest that appointment was monumental in the history of the laboratory and was a key element in turning around the low morale. CCCC also turned out to be a very good contractor and managed to very quickly assure the ORINS board of directors and Pollard that the laboratory would continue and even strengthen the association that had been created with Monsanto.