

## **Dr. Googin and his early days at Y-12, part 1**

Young college graduate, John Googin, arrived in Oak Ridge on a “warm day in May of 1944.” This is how he began his Manhattan Project autobiography as first published in the Y-12 Development Division newsletter, *For Your Information*. Regrettably, he only published a few chapters. Yet, what a tremendous historical document are those few chapters, filled with detail and insight into his early days at Y-12 during the 1940s.

Actually he arrived in Knoxville on May 9, 1944 and knew almost nothing about what to expect other than he was being hired by Tennessee Eastman Company for something he felt would be a temporary assignment at best, not a place that he would spend his entire career. Yet, it was with a great sense of adventure that he had come “down South” never before having been farther south of Maine than New York City.

Upon arriving in Oak Ridge and coming through Elza Gate, he began his naturally keen observation of his surroundings. He noted the substantial rock house to his left and new housing being constructed to his right. In the middle of town, the road was dirt and there was a large commercial area to the right of the road with a “sea” of trailers and huts behind the stores.

John went on in his autobiography to detail his every move and observation until he entered the dormitory, found his assigned bunk in a “cubicle’ on the first floor with a window looking at the other wing, a small desk, a desk chair and a low slung sitting chair and blinds in the window.” It was room 108.

John was first sent to training for a week at a building near what he later learned was known as the “Castle on the Hill” but was actually the administrative headquarters for the Manhattan Engineer District of the U.S. Army. In retrospect, John felt the week in training was really intended to pass the time while security clearances were established.

To make the time spent more instructive for John, he wandered about learning what others were being taught and determined that something to do with physics and chemistry was surely being done here. He was anxious to learn more.

Soon all that would change as John’s time in training was cut short at the end of the first week by instructions to find his way to a place called “Y-12,” a building numbered “9202,” and report to a man named Robert J. Schmidt. This excited John as it appeared to him that real work was about to begin and much sooner than he had come to expect because others he spoke to had been in training for weeks!

So, off he went to find his way to Y-12. Having spent some evenings during that first week just learning about the various bus routes, and riding some of them to see what he could learn about this new and most interesting place, John thought he was well prepared to find this “Y-12.” He had observed that the work buses left for Y-12 from the WV-34 cafeteria bus stop every few minutes at shift change time. So that is where he started.

John caught a bus that had a sign on it indicating it was going to Y-12’s North Portal. John noted in his Manhattan Project Autobiography that little did he realize this would be the first of thousands of trips he would make to the Y-12 Plant over the years. But at this time, he was anxious to learn just what was going on there.

He had many thoughts as he rode the bus for what was unknowingly his first of many such trips. While he had prepared himself well for a career in chemistry and had even taken a job that he knew almost nothing about other than it was something to help win the war. The culture here was different than what he called “a young northerner” had ever experienced.

John would become more comfortable over the years with his place in this new culture, but he would always hold to his early experiences regarding fair treatment of everyone and his ability to listen intently to what everyone from the top management of the company, the technical staff and the craftspeople and

even people in the community had to say. He was genuinely interested in people and in helping them solve tough technical problems.

So, with all the thoughts that must have been going through his mind, John welcomed the new experience of Y-12 and must have found the bus ride getting there a time of reflection on things to come.