

## Y-12's Moon Rocks and Jim Williams

Often I am stopped and given suggestions about what would be good information to include in the history of Y-12 being published weekly in *The Oak Ridger*. It is not unusual to be given stories that are most interesting, have some odd characteristics or circumstances. Some of the things that have happened at Y-12 are unique, others are comical and often others only make sense if you really know something about Y-12's history over the years.

While my approach to documenting Y-12's history has for the most part been chronological, recently I was asked to cover the history of Quality at Y-12. Having done that, I am now being asked to consider other such organizational or programmatic histories, such as the history of Safety (Environment, Safety and Health), the Plant Shift Superintendent's office, Security at Y-12, and the history of Radiation Control.

All most interesting subjects that I am looking forward to documenting and I know there are several more such as Metal Preparation, Fabrication, Maintenance, Utilities and other organizations at Y-12 whose history should be captured as well. Please contact me if you have something already done on any of these histories or if you desire to contribute toward the documentation of these important Y-12 histories.

Today's story comes from yet another unusual route. At a recent rotary club meeting Stephen Cate approached me, much as others mentioned above have done, and said, "I have a story for you. Did you know that Jim Williams has a moon rock?" I thought I had misunderstood him. "A real moon rock?" I asked. "Yes, a real moon rock," Stephen assured me.

Well, I certainly wanted to follow up on that. So I asked Stephen to send me an e-mail with the details. I find e-mail works best for me as I often fail to capture all the pertinent details in conversation. Having something on the computer is helpful when I go to recall the story idea.

Jim Williams turned out to be a most interesting interview. He and his wife, Juanita, are in an assisted living apartment in Knoxville. I first called him and then visited him there. When I first contacted Jim, he was anxious to tell me about Jack Case and "Johnny" Murray as he called John P. Murray, the Y-12 Plant Manager with the third longest tenure after Jack Case with 15 years and Gordon Fee with nine years.

Jim recalled times when these managers would come to the machine shop where he worked and would stop by and talk to him. This impressed Jim a lot and was evidently a key strategy these top managers often used to stay close to the working floor. They would just walk through a shop and go up to individual workers and ask them a question or two just to learn how they felt things were going.

From what Jim told me, he was one of several machinists who worked on the Apollo Lunar Sample Return Container, or more commonly known as the Moon Box, in the late 1960's. He is proud of that work and remembers that the machining of the single large block of aluminum took several weeks to actually complete all the necessary cutting away of excess material to make the box shaped container with no seams.

Jim recalled that well after the moon box job was done and the machine shop where he worked had moved on to other projects there was this one occasion when he was chosen to help take a tour group through the shop and tell them what was being worked on. He was walking along with several other supervisors and machinists helping to tell the tour participants about the work when Jack Case asked him to step aside and let him talk to him for a minute.

Jack said, "You did a wonderful job on your part of working on that 'Moon Box'." Jim said, "Thank you sir." Jack continued, "I think you deserve a piece of the moon that was brought back in one of the boxes you made." And Jack handed Jim a small dark colored rock. Jim said, "Why, I could pick up a little old rock in my driveway like this one" and Jack replied, "not one that has come from the moon, you can't."

Jim knew Jack Case and had talked to him about every time Jack came through the shop. Evidently Jim was very outgoing and would easily speak up in a crowd and did not mind talking to upper management.

I believe, from talking to Jim, that he thoroughly enjoyed every minute of his job at Y-12. He will tell you that if you talk to him long. He worked at Y-12 for 36 years, having hired on in March 1954 and retired in April 1990.

Jim carries that small “moon rock” around in his pocket today and puts it under his pillow along with his money every night. He said he learned to do that in the military in 1950–52 to keep his valuables from being stolen.

When I first heard about this “moon rock” being given to a machinist by Jack Case, I wondered about that. Then one day I was in a meeting with Jim Campbell, President of the East Tennessee Economic Council and we were talking about Jack Case. Without any prompting by me, Jim mentioned that Jack used to give small pieces of the “moon rocks” to workers. Well, I about jumped out of my seat to tell Jim Campbell about Jim Williams and his treasured keepsake “moon rock” given to him by Jack Case.

I wonder, are there other pieces of “moon rock” around that Jack Case gave to folks?