

Manhattan Project National Historical Park

U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar recommended on July 13, 2011 that Congress establish a Manhattan Project National Historical Park. He is quoted as saying, "The secret development of the atomic bomb in multiple locations across the United States is an important story and one of the most transformative events in our nation's history." The park is intended to be located in Hanford, Washington; Los Alamos, New Mexico; and Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

He continued, "The Manhattan project ushered in the atomic age, changed the role of the United States in the world community, and set the stage for the Cold War." This recommendation did not come about quickly; it was 11 years in the making.

It all began with the Manhattan Project Preservation Initiative, an outgrowth of the Department of Energy's Departmental Corporate Board on Historic Preservation. This approval in December 1999 resulted in a complex-wide historic preservation strategy that would focus initially on the Manhattan Project.

It was at this time that the DOE's History Division was directed to establish a list of eight "Signature Facilities" that would be the core of the department's interpretive efforts. The eight facilities are: (1) The Metallurgical Laboratory, University of Chicago (Chemistry Building and CP-1 site); (2) X-10 Graphite Reactor, Oak Ridge, Tennessee; (3) K-25 Gaseous Diffusion Process Building, Oak Ridge; (4) Y-12 Beta-3 Racetracks, Oak Ridge; (5) B Reactor, Hanford, Washington; (6) Chemical Separations Building (T Plant,) Hanford; (7) V-Site Assembly Building, Los Alamos, New Mexico; and (8) Trinity Site, Alamogordo, New Mexico.

During a visit to Y-12 in 2009, Skip Gosling, the DOE Historian, designated the Alpha and Beta Calutron Magnets and the small calutron in the basement as "Signature Artifacts." Building 9731 is the first building completed at Y-12 and, along with Building 9204-3 (Beta 3), is intended to be preserved as National Historic Landmark facilities on the National Register of Historic Places.

DOE's web page on the Manhattan Project Preservation Initiative states, "In July 2000, the Corporate Board partnered with the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and convened a panel of distinguished historic preservation experts, who visited the Signature Facilities and delivered a report to Secretary Spencer Abraham in March 2001. The panel unanimously agreed with DOE that the Signature Facilities are of extraordinary historical significance and stated that they 'deserve commemoration as national treasures.' Secretary Abraham promised that the report's recommendations would be integrated into DOE's planning for the Signature Facilities."

This latest recommendation to Congress by the National Park Service comes after seven years that included significant discussion at the three sites. The Department of Energy has agreed to continue to own, maintain and operate the facilities that will form the national park. This reduces considerably the cost to the National Park Service and will undoubtedly aid in quicker movement toward realizing the park.

U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman [D-NM] sponsored and Lamar Alexander [R-TN], Maria Cantwell [D-WA], Pete Domenici [R-NM], and Patty Murray [D-WA] cosponsored the "Manhattan Project National Historical Park Study Act of 2003," signed into law by President George W. Bush, in 2004. This legislation directed the National Park Service to work with the Department of Energy to conduct a special study to determine if historically significant Manhattan Project facilities such as those "Signature Facilities" should be designated as a National Historical Park.

On his web site, Senator Bingaman says: "The Manhattan Project was one of the most important events in our nation's history. I believe it is important for us to acknowledge its legacy, and a National Historical Park is the best way to achieve that goal." Bingaman also states, "In the coming months, I will be working on legislation to make this park a reality."

Bingaman concludes, "In conducting the study, the National Park Service undertook an extensive public involvement process engaging state and local governments, private property owners, interested organizations, and others. Through this process, strong public support emerged for preserving resources associated with the Manhattan Project and making the story of this remarkable effort more broadly known."

At Y-12, we may see a National Park Service presence in the New Hope Center's Y-12 History Center before we see the realization of the Park Service in Buildings 9204-3 (Beta 3) and 9731. As many of you know, we are already working on Building 9731 and have opened it to public tours during the last two Secret City Festivals, to rave reviews.

Building 9204-3 (Beta 3), still has two Beta Calutron racetracks (one remains in standby today). The west racetrack was divided into four smaller units by removing six calutrons and installing metal shunts. It operated until 1998 and separated many of the stable isotopes available in the Oak Ridge National Laboratory's inventory today.

Building 9204-3 (Beta 3) has already been designated by the American Nuclear Society as a Nuclear Historic Nuclear Landmark in September 2002. Building 9731 has been determined by a study in 1995 to be a candidate for consideration as a National Historic Landmark, and the submittal form is being completed now.

Building 9204-3 (Beta 3) was opened to the public in 2005, and 2,000 people were taken back to 1945 as the portions of the building toured remain as they were then. The tours created enormous interest by the press, the public and Y-12 employees. Bill Brumley, then National Nuclear Security Administration's Y-12 Site Manager, opined that we had created the most positive press for Y-12 since the Manhattan Project.

These historic facilities have that unique attribute. They transport the visitor back in time mentally through the senses of sight, smell and touch ... and that can only be accomplished by the authentic visit to the actual site of the history. The National Park Service knows how to interpret our history, but they need the real things to do that job most effectively. Here at Y-12 we have the real things!