

Union Carbide's Last 20 Years in Oak Ridge

Now that we have finished the Union Carbide Report of 1962, *Union Carbide's 20 Years in Nuclear Energy* which featured the first 20 years of their 40-year tenure as the primary contractor for the Atomic Energy Commission/Energy Research and Development Administration/Department of Energy's Oak Ridge, Paducah and Portsmouth facilities, how about the last 20 years of Union Carbide's tenure here in Oak Ridge?

I am privileged to know one of the primary individuals who helped gather the information included in that historic report that covered the first 20 years...Bill Wilcox, our Oak Ridge City historian and retired technical director of Union Carbide's nuclear facilities. He was a key figure in creating that report of the first 20 years, and he is a valuable and key figure to help us capture the last 20 years.

So, I asked Bill if he would consider finishing up this recent series of articles on the first 20 years of Union Carbide in Oak Ridge by writing a complementary series on the last 20. He graciously agreed. Take it away Bill!

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Ray's two time frames, if anyone wants reminding, are 1944 (the first year when Union Carbide's subsidiary, Carbide and Carbon Chemicals Corporation [C&CCC], had a significant presence at K-25) until 1964 -- and then the last twenty were from then until 1984 when Carbide resigned their contract.

The first five of Carbide's first 20 years had seen great changes in Oak Ridge and in Carbide's role. Both Y-12 and X-10 (Clinton Labs) had succeeded in their wartime missions of producing for the first time in world history highly enriched U-235 for military use (Y-12) and plutonium-239 for research (X-10). Having done their jobs, both Tennessee Eastman and E. I. DuPont and their successor Monsanto Chemical resigned their contracts.

Carbide was then asked by the new Atomic Energy Commission (USAEC) to take over the Y-12 contract from TEC in 1947 and that of ORNL from Monsanto a year later. There was a lot of shuffling around in Carbide's management structure during the 1950s accompanied by a great eagerness in the young staffs of each installation to quickly move into the new peacetime era of applying nuclear science to all kinds of peacetime problems despite all its uncertainties and challenges.

Over those first 20 years the science and technology advances made by each of the three installations were highly significant as described in Ray's previous articles about them.

Now let's turn to some highlights of what was done during Carbide's last 20 years. Those were indeed momentous times in Oak Ridge with our installations making new discoveries in science and engineering that proved vitally important to our nation and mankind all over the world.

Carbide's top boss of the three Oak Ridge installations for the first 20 years had been Clark E. Center, one of the few experienced plant managers they brought in from their Whiting, Indiana plant. He attended the very first meeting of Carbiders with the Kellogg engineers to learn what Carbide had gotten into!

That was in January, 1943. He retired in 1964, having served for the first 20 years -- to many he was "Mr. Carbide." Our beautiful public woodland park on Melton Hill Lake, now well known only by our fishermen, was named in his honor. Promoted to follow Clark Center in the top job in 1965 (at the start of the last 20 year period we are describing) was Dr. Clarence E. Larson.

He had come to Y-12 in 1943 from California (U. of C., Davis) where he was E. O. Lawrence's top chemist for the Y-12 process. After the war, he stayed on here as R&D manager, then served a couple of years as Y-12 Manager, and then five years as ORNL Director, the last Director before Alvin Weinberg took over in 1955.

At the start of his tenure, Clarence decided Carbide's main office in Oak Ridge should not be in Clark's plain-jane office in the A Wing of K-25's K1001, but at Y-12, closer to the government's offices. He moved into what we underlings felt was a pretty classy suite in the first floor of Y-12's Building 9704-2, even with a landscaped area outside.

The latter was a brand new sight for all of us, but it disappeared after a few years. Clarence must have been regarded highly "up the line" because in 1968 he was appointed to the prestigious U. S. Atomic Energy Commission (USAEC) and moved to Washington, taking with him his spouse Jane Warren Larson, daughter of Colonel Stafford Warren the medical boss of the Manhattan Project during World War II. Jane was Y-12's first Librarian for books and records, as sharp as she was attractive, and a gifted artist in later years.

Roger F. Hibbs took Clarence's place for the remaining 15 years Carbide was here. Roger was one of the dozens of fresh college graduates hired to help operate the Y-12 Plant in 1943, and had advanced up the ladder to Y-12 Superintendent before reaching the top job.

During his long 15-year tenure as Carbide's top boss, he related well and productively to the Carbide Vice President he reported to in New York City, and to the successive Oak Ridge Managers Sam Sapirie, Bob Hart, and Joe LaGrone, as well as to the staff he had running the four installations.

The top installation managers at Roger's staff meetings during those last 20 years were, for ORNL- Alvin Weinberg and Herman Postma, for Y-12 Jack Case and Gordon Fee, for K-25 Bob Jordan, Bob Winkel, Ken Sommerfeld and Bill Thomas. It was a fine group that managed and led well for the Government and for Carbide.

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Thanks, Bill! What a great overview of the last 20 years of Union Carbide's presence in Oak Ridge. Next, Bill will give us a glimpse of some specific milestones of significant accomplishment during those last 20 years of Union Carbide's role here serving the nation and community.