

A brief overview of some historical details of Oak Ridge, part 4

After having reviewed, quickly, the history of the Oak Ridge Reservation, now let's take a quick look at how the Oak Ridge National Laboratory transitioned from X-10 and the Graphite Reactor to begin its history as a national laboratory. The creation of the national laboratory also resulted in the formation of Oak Ridge Institute for Nuclear Studies, which evolved into the Oak Ridge Associated Universities and Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education.

In 1946, after the war was over, the future of Oak Ridge was uncertain. People were leaving, and the population went from 75,000 to closer to 30,000. K-25 was going strong. Y-12 was struggling to retain a mission, and the X-10 Graphite Reactor was producing the world's first isotopes for nuclear medicine.

Dr. William G. Pollard, a University of Tennessee physics professor, aware of the tremendous scientific and industrial assets in Oak Ridge, began to promote the idea of researchers having access the government's facilities here. This was fresh and a new approach to scientific discovery. The South did not have a national laboratory, and the political climate was not inclined to provide one.

Dr. Pollard created a proposal and worked tirelessly along with several others from what was known then as "The Clinton Laboratories," and for a short period as the "Clinton National Laboratory," to gain the political support for a national laboratory.

The original proposal had been modified to include several other universities throughout the South, and on October 17, 1946, the Oak Ridge Institute for Nuclear Studies was formed. The original mission of this unique consortium of universities was to assist researchers gain access to the tremendous scientific capabilities of Oak Ridge, and 14 universities joined as charter members of the consortium. In March 1948, the official name was changed to the Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

The Oak Ridge National Laboratory has become the Department of Energy's largest and most diverse national laboratory, with a widely diverse basic science mission. It continues to grow today with the world's fastest supercomputer and the world's most powerful pulsed neutron generator among other major scientific achievements.

ORINS, beginning in 1948, served for years as a hospital for terminally ill cancer patients seeking treatment through the use of radioactive materials. From 1950 until the mid-1970s the ORINS hospital located near the Methodist Medical Center treated thousands of patients.

In 1966, ORINS became known as Oak Ridge Associated Universities and continues to manage the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education for DOE. Their mission remains focused on researching health risks, assessing environmental cleanup, responding to radiation emergencies, supporting national security and emergency preparedness, and educating the next generation of scientists, according to their web site: <http://orise.orau.gov/about-orise/history.aspx>.

I can't mention Oak Ridge Associated Universities without including the historical tie to Y-12 that was the Training and Technology program or "TAT School." This was one of the best, if not THE best, example of a training program providing assistance to individuals who were generally from inner city and other areas where work skills were not being provided. The school, which was a joint effort of ORAU and Y-12, began with support from the Atomic Energy Commission.

In the early 1960s, specialized skills training and work-for-others concepts were taking on growing and ever more important roles as emerging missions at Y-12. The manufacturing processes had expanded into broad areas of chemical processing and metal working. Y-12 had a wide range of specialized processes and was surely among the most technical, highly precise and complicated machine shops in existence anywhere in the world.

In 1966, Y-12's contractor, Union Carbide Corporation's Nuclear Division, began participating in a demonstration industrial training program in cooperation with Oak Ridge Associated Universities. This experiment in learning came about as a result of a 1965 survey conducted by ORAU which concluded, "...millions of Southerners are unable to make reasonable use of their potential for work mainly because of inadequate education and training."

This experiment had the support of the Department of Energy's predecessor agencies, the Atomic Energy Commission until 1974, then the Energy Research and Development Administration that was formed when the Nuclear Regulatory Commission came into being, and finally in 1977 when the Department of Energy was created. The dedicated and continuing effort to train unemployed and underemployed persons was seen as an important mission by all three successive government agencies charged with the oversight of Y-12.

This innovative program, a forerunner of other similar programs across the nation in later years, was best known just as "TAT" or the "TAT School" and was officially named Training and Technology. This unusual-for-its-time program was created and first funded by the Department of Labor's Research and Demonstration Program. The Manpower Development and Training Act of 1961 took over the funding after the initial demonstration proved highly successful.

In 1974, when the Manpower and Development and Training Act ended, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act took over the funding. The CETA legislation, lasting from 1973 to 1982, provided support but was erratic and saw continuing struggles between local governments and others for control of the funds and training programs. TAT was on the cutting edge of skills training for all the years of its existence, but continual change in legislation governing such programs eventually caused TAT to close down in early 1984.

TAT is just one of the highly successful initiatives that have come from Oak Ridge's innovative and creative people. Oak Ridge history, including successes like the TAT initiative, should be captured as it is happening. When historians get it years later, it is hard to recreate the excitement and details available when the history is being made.

This quick glance at the history of Oak Ridge can only serve to point out the obvious need for us to do a more thorough and complete job of documenting our history. Thanks to those who asked for help with the documentary films.

The award winning Secret City documentary films created by Keith McDaniel in the middle 2000s continue to serve as one of the keys to effectively telling our history. More documentary films such as Y-12's *A Nuclear Family*, which received four international film festival gold and platinum awards, can only help.

Of course, the most effective thing recently is Denise Kiernan's New York Times Best Seller book, *The Girls of Atomic City*. She is reaching audiences that none of us locals could ever get to. Go Denise!

And finally, we were paid a visit by President Truman's grandson. I am excited about Oak Ridge and especially Y-12's history, as I am sure you can tell. I just wonder what the future holds for our history! Bring it on!