

A brief overview of some historical details of the city of Oak Ridge, part 2

Continuing the look at a brief summary history of the city of Oak Ridge, we now come to the actual selection decision and early construction. When promoted to Brigadier General and placed in charge of the Manhattan Project, General Leslie Groves took immediate action. After securing a AAA credit rating, he set about selecting a location for the plant and the resulting city needed to house workers.

Leslie Groves, having been told on September 17, 1942, that he was being promoted to Brigadier General and given the responsibility of the Manhattan Project, began immediately to place the project on a better footing and move it ahead. Colonel James C. Marshall had been the project leader.

Marshall had been assigned to direct the Laboratory for the Development of Substitute Materials, the name originally given the project by the S1 Committee. He formed the Manhattan Engineer District on August 13, 1942. But he did not move quickly on the selection of a site.

Among General Groves' first actions after a meeting on September 23, 1942, with Secretary of War Stimson and others, was to visit the East Tennessee site. Groves even announced while the meeting was still in progress that he needed to catch a train to Tennessee and asked to be excused from the rest of that meeting. He learned later that his attitude to get things going was well received by Stimson.

As stated in *The New World* by Hewlett and Anderson, on page 116, "On a muggy day in September, 1942, General Groves stood at a vantage point near the hamlet of Elza, Tennessee, and looked southwest over the terrain where the race for the atomic bomb might well be won or lost."

The formal selection of the site took place in September 29, 1942, when United States Under Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson authorized the Corps of Engineers to acquire 56,000 acres of land in East Tennessee at an estimated cost of \$3.5 million. However, the date most often cited for the decision is September 24, 1942.

Gates were installed along the access roads where they crossed the Clinch River at Elza, Edgemoor Bridge, Solway Bridge, White Wing Road, and the Gallaher Bridge. Gates were also installed on the Blair Road and Route 61 toward Oliver Springs. Thus Oak Ridge may well have been among the very first "gated communities" or at least it was such a community for seven years until March 19, 1949, when the main gates were opened allowing the public access to the city proper, but not the government facilities.

These three main government sites, Y-12, X-10 and K-25, were isolated by the three guard "checking stations" that remain today on the Oak Ridge Turnpike, Scarboro Road and Bethel Valley Road. The checking stations are silent sentries reminding visitors of an earlier time when access to Oak Ridge was more controlled.

The first name applied to the area was the Kingston Demolition Range, but that ominous sounding name was soon realized to be something that would attract too much attention and one that would be seen as being too close to indicating the potential purpose of the project. So the name was changed to Clinton Engineer Works (note there is no "ing" on "Engineer" in the name...much as there is no "ern" on "East" when speaking of "East Tennessee.")

The name Oak Ridge was taken from the ridge upon which much of the original city was located, Black Oak Ridge. It suited the purpose well as it did not convey any connotation or hint of what was being done here.

General Groves says in his book, *Now It Can Be Told*, on page 25, "Originally, the entire site went under the name of 'The Clinton Engineer Works,' the title deriving obviously from the nearby small town of

Clinton. The name 'Oak Ridge' did not come into general use until the summer of 1943, when it was chosen for the new community's permanent housing area, built on a series of ridges overlooking part of the reservation. To avoid confusion, as well as to lessen outsiders' curiosity, the post office address was Oak Ridge, but not until 1947 and after the establishment of the Atomic Energy Commission was that name officially adopted, in lieu of the Clinton Engineer Works."

Groves went on to say, "As in the cases of Hanford and Los Alamos, our first consideration in the selection of names was to find the one least likely to draw attention to our work."

The names assigned the various government sites, Y-12, X-10 and S-50, were much the same, having been chosen as random number and letter combinations that would convey no meaning. Although a story is often heard that the site designations are map coordinates. That is not something that matches with any map I have seen. The map that has an "X" over the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, a "Y" over the Y-12 National Security Complex, and a "K" over the East Tennessee Technology Park wasn't created until early in the 1970's. So, I don't give any credence to the theory of map coordinates.

Only K-25 may have some significance in its name and I am not at all sure that the designation did not come first. The "K" may relate to the Kellogg Company that made the gaseous diffusion equipment. The "2" is said to have been taken from the right hand side of "92" the atomic number for uranium and the "5" from the right hand side of "235."

More to come on the brief summary history of the city of Oak Ridge and how it relates to the government sites during the Manhattan Project and later as the Nuclear Era begins.