

THE DAY THEY OPENED THE GATES OF THE SECRET CITY

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Compiled from the *Oak Ridger* Accounts, Author's Experience, and Stories of Participants

Prologue – Summer 1948

Early in 1946, the year after the end of WWII, a hot debate had developed in the halls of the Congress, in the press, and even in Oak Ridge, over whether the military ought to stay in control of these new ultra-weapons or whether it would be better for everyone if civilians took charge of our nuclear future. Many people hoped the new nuclear science and technology could be put to work to benefit mankind and so it made sense to have civilian scientists and managers lead that effort. The great debate was won by the civilians when the Congress passed the Atomic Energy Act of 1946.

When the Atomic Energy Commission took over on January 1, 1947 Oak Ridge was in a great state of flux. Y-12, operated by the Tennessee Eastman Company (TEC), had always been the biggest employer in town – with 22,400 people working there in May 1945. But with the great success of K-25 they were shutting down that huge operation. They had laid off 14,000 people since October 1945 and then the day after Christmas 1946 TEC had just handed out the last batch of layoff notices telling almost 6,000 more their jobs were through in one more week. At Y-12, that was one “blue” Christmas, certainly not a happy holiday.

K-25 was going full blast, now turning out the precious highly enriched U-235 like Y-12 had been doing, but at much lower cost.

X-10 had really gotten a new lease on a new life, having now been designated one of the brand new “National Laboratories.” At first named Clinton National Lab, it was soon renamed Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

Administration of the vast atomic energy empire was moved from the Manhattan District headquarters here in Oak Ridge up to Washington, DC. Our top Oak Ridge boss now held the title of the Manager of the Oak Ridge Operations Office. In keeping with the tradition of administering much more than just the facilities in Oak Ridge, he was responsible for many of the uranium feed supply and ancillary operations all over the eastern U.S. Our first ORO Manager, for a little over two years, was John C. Franklin.

All over the country, cities everywhere started getting back to a normal peacetime existence as rationing and price and wage controls all stopped and everyone welcomed their veterans back home. The AEC found themselves with three cities on their hands with a singular problem – they never had been normal! Oak Ridge was by far the largest, but Hanford, WA and Los Alamos, NM were in similar straits. Their townspeople like ours thoroughly enjoyed their much-protected existence and the benevolence the Army had provided.

ORO Manager Franklin and his staff decided to try a number of things to gradually “normalize” things – a volunteer Town Council, a “City Manager”, and set plans in motion to open the gates of Oak Ridge – keeping the plants secure by building new fences and guard houses on the roads to the plants from the city. Many Ridgers liked things the way they were, and he knew there would be fierce opposition. But he announced on June 10, 1948 that the AEC intended to open the gates – “probably around the first of 1949.” That proved to be the news story of the year. The plan was to keep the Gallaher and Blair as restricted entrances (for booming K-25), but to remove the guards and gatehouses from the entrances at Elza, Edgemoor, Solway, and Oliver Springs (Illinois Ave.). A poll by our newspaper the *Oak Ridge Times* found mixed feelings in the citizenry about the relative comfort of the closed city vs. the advantages of an open city. Some two hundred people showed up at the Town Council meeting four days after Franklin’s announcement and a straw vote showed 157 voting **Don’t Do It** vs. 17 **Do** – nearly 10:1 against.

Of course the AEC went ahead. They built new concrete guard- or gate-houses (they called them “Checking Stations”) on the highways leading to Y-12, ORNL, and to K-25, all of which are still standing today, two of which have been nicely renovated and restored by the DOE. They built fences around the plants and National Laboratory, commenting later that they felt security of the plants would be better after the city opening than it had been before.

1949 was a year that saw many aspects of life at Oak Ridge moving toward “normalcy.” The *Oak Ridger* began its long years of service to the community in January. A major argument/fuss/war started when the AEC stopped paying the rent subsidy they had been paying on Dormitory rooms and the rental agency for the government passed it on to the residents as higher rents. The dorm residents screamed unfair, and the argument waxed hotter and hotter, finally climaxing in a Congressional Investigation and Hearing in Oak Ridge in April. The other sign of “normalcy” that took folks’ minds off the gate opening was when all the bus drivers went on strike for more money. The *Oak Ridger* for March 2, 1949 carried the banner headline, *25,000 WITHOUT TRANSPORTATION IN BUS STRIKE*. So at the same time the Government was trying to help sell us on how we needed “to grow up” and be a nice normal community, we were getting a taste of how “nice” this was going to be with rent hikes and strikes that affected lots of people.

Detailed Planning Gets Underway – Winter, 1949

ORO Manager Franklin and his staff, recognizing they faced considerable community resistance, decided they better go all out to sell the event. The person put in charge of the event for the AEC was the AEC’s man responsible for City operations – Frederick (Fred) W. Ford, referred to in some contemporary news stories as Director of Community Affairs, in others as the City Manager. He had followed Len Z. Dolan, an ex-Y-12er, who the AEC picked in 1947 to be the first City Manager. ¹

The first announcement of the specific date for the gate opening, March 19th, came on January 28, 1949 in a big headline along with the story that President Truman had been invited to come “turn the key” along with our Senators K. D. McKellar and Estes Kefauver.

It’s clear from all the committees and their members discussed in the newspaper stories that Franklin and Ford decided the more people they could get involved in the planning, the more interest and support they would engender. Their first appointments of people to help with the big day were the two Co-Chairmen, announced early in February: **Carl M. Harmon** who was the

President of the Better Business Association and **W. A. Swanson**, Chairman of the Town Council.² For the next month the *Oak Ridger* carried two photos on the front page of almost each issue of two new people who had agreed to serve what turned out to be 16 “businessmen’s committees”. When they got through naming all the Chairs, they started printing photos of the Vice Chairs. The list of 16 Chairs and about 165 members of their committees listed in the newspaper on March 17, 1949 reads like a “Who’s Who” of the leaders of the City. (The full list is given in the Appendix with the exception of two names I couldn’t decipher in the microfiche). Several of the key people were pressed into service on more than one committee.³

Advertising	Harry C. Weaver, Chair	plus twenty-one
Concessions	Horace Sherrod, Chair	plus two
Decorations	Wm. L. Harwell, Chair (Legal Dept. K-25)	plus three
Entertainment	M. C. Phillips, Chair,	plus fifteen
Finance	H. L. McKinnon, Chair	plus six
Health & Welfare	Van D. Hicks, Chair (Former Postmaster WWII)	plus sixteen
Housing	McKie Alexander, Chair	plus three
Meeting/Ceremonial Sites	Art Schlanger, Chair	plus nine
Parade	C. E. Boone, Chair	plus twenty-seven
Program	Marshall Pengra, Chair (Mgr. WATO radio)	plus nine
Publicity	Don J. McKay, Chair (Publisher, <i>The Oak Ridger</i>)	plus nine
Reception	Tom E. Lane, Chair (Head Industrial Relations, K-25)	plus twelve
Ribbon Cutting	Logan Emlet, Chair (Operations Div. Head, ORNL)	plus three
Speakers	Atty. Frank Wilson, Chair	plus two
Special Guests	A. H. Gossard, Chair	plus fifteen
Transportation & Safety	Wm. J. Hatfield, Chair	plus eleven

The Program, Speakers, and Special Guests Committees went to work immediately lining up an impressive list of distinguished politicians and celebrities. The first “big” acceptance, announced February 24th, was that of Sen. Brien McMahon, who helped author the Atomic Energy Act of 1946. The next day the news was that Margaret Truman, the President’s daughter, had declined the honor of “wielding the scissors to cut the ribbon” because of a concert tour conflict. Soon thereafter Frank Wilson’s Speakers Committee worked through our Sen. Estes Kefauver and nailed down the V. P. Alben Barkley and Tennessee Gov. Gordon Browning as the main speakers.

The Month Arrives – March 1949

The final plan saw the Day structured around four main events. The first was the actual **Opening** of the gates – scheduled for 8:30 AM so as to allow time for all the outside visitors to come in, have a look around, and then with the townspeople to gather for the second event which was to be the big **Parade** starting at 11:00 AM. The parade was to wind up at 1:00 PM so folks could have lunch before gathering at the high school football field in Jackson Square for the **Speeches** by visiting dignitaries at 2:30 PM. Then everyone could relax, tour the town, and dress for the Saturday night **Banquet** and dance at the Oak Terrace in Grove Center. There were a number of other events that developed as well as a number of parties at various people’s homes.

The committees went to work writing letters and phoning politician’s staffers and celebrity’s agents trying to firm up commitments. All through the month, the news dribbled in of more acceptances from politicians, and then the Hollywood stars. March 11th brought news that Hollywood star dancer Donald O’Connor was to be the MC for the big evening dance and Alexis

Smith was coming to be crowned “Miss Atomic Blonde.” But movie stars were not the only news on March 11th. That same issue of the paper urged all Oak Ridgers to get out and vote the next day on whether liquor sales should be allowed in Oak Ridge. That vote for liquor was overwhelmingly defeated, and on top of that news both Donald and Alexis cancelled a week later.

But then happy news came that Cowboy Star Rod Cameron was coming to ride a horse in the Parade, and also coming were Virginia Mayo, Marie “The Body” McDonald, Adolph Menjou, Jack Bailey, Patricia Neal, as well as dozens of State and Federal elected officials -- even USAEC Chairman David Lilienthal. TIME, LIFE, and NEWSWEEK were coming to cover the event. The work of all the committees was paying off.

However as the time drew closer, it seemed to the USAEC folks and the City movers and shakers that despite all the arrangements that most of the townspeople could “care less!”

Letters to the Editor worried over the probable rise in traffic accidents in the open city, too many door to door salesmen, risks to safety of kids --“we are even going to have to start locking our doors!” “Where do you expect us flat-toppers to keep our lawnmowers and garden tools so they won’t get stolen?” They were storing them in the open space below their house. The complaints went on and on.

In addition to those who looked forward to the gate opening with regret or apprehension, thousands of other Ridgers were much more concerned with two hot-button issues that had reared up that spring -- the fierce Dormitory rent issue and the big AIT Bus System strike that stranded thousands as our entire public transportation system ground to a halt.

Of course even though the buses didn’t run and dorm residents were furious, it was much too late to stop the gate opening, so the AEC and the Committees plowed ahead. They decided, as a last minute “pep rally,” to have the Town Council call a special town meeting in the ORHS gym up above Jackson Square for the evening of Monday, March 14 to give the public a last minute “heads-up” on the final plans -- hoping to generate some excitement for the big doings the coming Saturday by announcing the final dignitary and celebrity lists. Four of the Town Council showed up at the ORHS Gym to host the meeting, but the audience turn-out was only 10 Oak Ridgers. Whoops! Next day the Ridger headline was “Small Attendance Kills Briefing on ‘Open Sesame.’ ”

In spite of it all, the long-awaited, carefully-prepared-for day finally arrived, clear and a little chilly.

March 19, 1949 8:30 AM – The Opening Ceremonies at Elza Gate

The first event of the big day was held at Elza gate at an early hour to let outsiders come in, see the town, the parade, and join in the other festivities. An estimated 10,000 Ridgers were gathered at Elza, standing all over the intersection and around the special Speakers’ Stand and even crowded on the roof of the Guard Gates all decked out with red white and blue bunting. Lots of folks had walked there because of the maddening bus strike in town now entering its third week. On Monday, March 21 after the big day Saturday, the *Oak Ridger* reported that 1,261 kids stayed home from school in protest, and on Tuesday 2,271 stayed home! Those protests sent a strong message to the disputing parties and the strike was finally settled March 24.

By 8:30 AM on Saturday the road from Clinton was backed up for a half mile with cars waiting to get in.

Promptly at 8:30 AM, the Rev. Roy C. Arbuckle went to the microphone and gave the invocation. Then the AEC'S ORO Manager John C. Franklin spoke a few words of welcome to everyone present for this auspicious occasion. He pointed out that since the secret was out that Oak Ridge was the home of atomic energy there was no further need to keep it closed, and that the plants could be made more secure by being separated from the city itself. He then introduced his Community Affairs Director Fred W. Ford who gave the main, but short remarks for the occasion.

We have B. B. Blevins, who grew up on Olney Lane in Oak Ridge and now lives in California, to thank for "rescuing" Fred Ford's speech for history. When the Ford home at 104 Olney was being closed up years ago, B. B. spotted, recognized, and saved Ford's original 3" x 5" note cards of his remarks on this historic occasion. He gave me a copy of the cards, and for this paper I have edited Ford's notes into a readable format.⁴

Today marks the commencement of another Era in the history of Oak Ridge – a city known throughout the world for its part in the development and application of atomic energy.

It is with deep pride, and a sense of humility that I greet -- for the City of Oak Ridge and the sponsoring citizen's committees -- our neighbors in Eastern Tennessee and the distinguished guests who are honoring us with their presence. Our kind greetings go also to those former residents and friends whose radios may be bringing them to today's events.

Two eras have passed in the seven years since the Army quietly moved into this valley and established the security gates. The First (Era) transformed the farm lands and wooded hillsides of this peaceful rural community into a city of 75,000 population – complete with laboratory and plants.

It was only after the news of the first explosion in the Far East that the people of Oak Ridge – including most of those working in the plants – learned of the truly important part that they had played in the development of that bomb.

The Second Era commenced after the cessation of hostilities when the responsibility for the Oak Ridge operations was transferred from the Army to the Atomic Energy Commission. This Era has two prime objectives: [1] the more economic and effective production of fissionable materials, and [2] basic research that will give ever increasing applications of this force to the benefit of mankind.

Progress has been made here in Oak Ridge – in the development of radioisotopes, valuable in the fields of medicine and agriculture. A constantly widening variety of isotopes are being furnished to hospitals and research centers, and group after group of scientists from the North, East, South, and West -- including some from foreign countries are (coming here and) being trained in their use.

We are now entering the Third Era in the life of Oak Ridge. You are here to assist us in one of the first steps on the road to the Oak Ridge of Tomorrow. In a few minutes the symbolic tape will be severed by energy produced at our plants, and no longer will there be any barriers between us and our neighboring communities.

Step by step – in the democratic way, we will move forward to prepare ourselves for incorporation and self-government.

We are proud of our mission in science – we are also proud of our community – its schools and the other municipal services that are being provided to our citizens. Permanent housing is beginning to take the place of our temporary war homes. We are selling our land for the construction of churches, and are training our sights to provide the ways and means whereby one will be able to buy or build his own home and his business enterprise.

May I repeat a remark I have made frequently – this is the most friendly city in which it has been my pleasure to live and work. Mrs. Ford loves it too! We are certain that you who are visiting us today as well as those who will follow on all the tomorrows will share our enthusiasm.

Oak Ridge is honored in having you – and we welcome you most cordially to our midst. We hope you will be as happy in visiting us as we are in your coming -- And when it comes time to leave, won't you please carry with you the friendly parting words of this locality –

“THANKS FOR COMING – HURRY BACK!”

Now we are ready for the impulse from the pile.

It was 8:45 AM when Fred W. Ford finished his speech. The moment everyone came for had arrived. Now Dr. George T. Felbeck was introduced to “cut the ribbon.” The choice of Felbeck for this honor was very appropriate. He was the top man of the Union Carbide organization that was brought into the Manhattan Project by General Groves in January 1943 to help complete the R&D needed and then to operate K-25. It was he who directed the final successful assault on the so difficult K-25 diffusion barrier problem in 1944, and who was in charge of putting together the K-25 organization that launched Carbide on their 40 years of service here in Oak Ridge. Since early 1945 he had been working in NYC, having been promoted to a position of V.P. of Union Carbide, but was pleased to come back for the occasion.

But this ribbon was not to be cut by any old ordinary scissors, but as promised, by “atomic energy” in the form of a signal from ORNL’S Graphite Reactor. Ford and the media back then all called it the “atomic pile.” The detailed technology for “cutting” the ribbon was worked out by an ORNL team under the supervision of Logan Emlet, then head of their Operations Division.⁵ Emlet named three men in the Engineering Instrument department of ORNL “as being in charge of the operation. They were W. Ragan, C. G. Goss, and D. D. Walker.”

The newspaper account says that at 8:45 AM Dr. Felbeck telephoned the atomic pile engineers at ORNL.⁶ The crowd could hear his telephone conversation over the loud speakers. The newspaper says, “Then for three minutes the crowd could hear the atomic pile working. At 8:48 AM the electrical signal came and the ribbon went up in a cloud of white smoke.” A section of the ribbon was magnesium, which ignited to give a brilliant flash and puff of white smoke, and they had also added some potassium chlorate to the ribbon to make a nice “bang.” In one of the photos of the occasion we have the crowd clearly is startled. The newspaper reporter noted that then the crowd cheered.

Logan Emlet had been interviewed a week before by reporters anxious to understand the magic that was being planned.⁷ Emlet said “there would be a brilliant flash, a puff of white smoke, no colors would be attempted, but some sort of sound – probably a loud pop.” The power would be released through a telephone wire direct from the Atomic Pile, and the ribbon, doctored with magnesium would flare up. The *Oak Ridger* report continues, “Emlet told reporters that the pile

would be shut down at 8:00 AM and at a signal from the gates (the phone call from Dr. Felbeck at 8:45 AM) the pile would be started up again until it reaches normal operating power at which time the energy will shoot through the wire and ignite the ribbon. Plans are for the ribbon to extend from gate house to gate house at Elza entrance where the main ceremony is slated to be staged.”⁸

At the 2006 commemoration (the first) of the March 19, 1949 Gate Opening, a photo was given to ORHPA Chairman Martin McBride of the gadget used to send the electrical pulse to Elza Gate. It is an ionization chamber which was inserted into the reactor when it was shut down at 8:00 AM, then at Felbeck’s 8:45 AM phone call they let the reactor go critical again and the voltage built up over a period of about three minutes to the point a pulse would go over the lines and ignite the magnesium section of the ribbon with its potassium chlorate coating, producing the white smoke cloud and the loud bang.⁹



Westcott Photo (see Appendix) – Looking south, Melton Lake Drive is in right background. The press stand is at right foreground; the poster lists all the regional radio stations covering the event, WATO first. The cloud is just beginning to form from ribbon burning. Time - a few seconds after 8:48 AM. B.B.Blevins has identified the smiling lady on the street level just to the left of far front corner the Press Stand as Winn (Mrs. Fred) Ford. He said she was given a Press Pass for the events.

By 8:50 AM the Elza ceremony was all over. Crowds moved back, car engines on the Clinton road all started up, and cars started pouring in through. Three other gates opened that day at 8:30 AM: Edgemoor, Solway, and Oliver Springs. For the first time since April 1, 1943, cars did not need to stop for inspection by the guards. Within an hour after the Gate Opening Ceremony at Elza, “the central city area was crowded with visitors and traffic was heavy on all city streets as visitors toured the town.”¹⁰

An interesting historical coincidence is that this Elza gate-opening ceremony took place at almost the same spot where five people quietly stood on the same, 19th day of another month – six and a

half years before Sept 19, 1942. The view those five had that day was of a pastoral East Tennessee countryside, not the gates of a thriving City. Those five were three Stone & Webster engineers along with two army officers -- one of whom was the Manhattan Project's new Commander, General Leslie R. Groves. His mission was to take a final look at the proposed site, and he then and there made the decision to order it taken over for use by the Manhattan Project. This quiet farmland -- and the world -- would be forever changed.

March 19, 1949 10:00 AM – The Second Gate Opening Ceremony

At 10:00 AM that same morning 100 Oak Ridgers gathered off of Outer Drive on Ogontz lane for another opening gate opening ceremony and parade – this one organized by Logan Emlet's 9 year old son Johnny. He had heard all the talk for weeks about the ribbon, parade, dignitaries coming from Washington, movie stars and especially Rod Cameron, the cowboy star. He decided he and all his pals ought to stage a gate opening and parade of their own. He talked his Dad into a providing a piece of the magnesium ribbon to ignite, and organized the neighborhood kids into take the parts of the stars and dignitaries. The gates across Ogontz Lane were cardboard, and instead of an electrical pulse, they used a torch from a small bonfire the kids built. Johnny's parents and a neighbor, Dr. Russ Baldock, a Y-12 physicist, stood by to help with safety and to maintain order. But they assured the reporter that they did not supply any of the ideas; "they had a hard time keeping the kids from exploding with impossible projects."

After short, or more likely no speeches, the ribbon stretching across the intersection of Ogontz, Olmstead, and Olean Lanes was ignited with a torch from a small bonfire by Bryan Clynes – dressed in a laundry sack as the atom bomb. Then came the grand parade of tricycles and decorated wagons pouring through the cardboard "gates." One of the wagons was labeled "Oak Ridge 1943" and sported a pair of small galoshes languishing in a sea of watery mud. The next wagon was labeled "Oak Ridge 1949", and had a toy house, road, and car. David Kramer towed a dented garbage can with the sign "Ridge Janitor Service." Biffy Dodson was Alben Barkley and made the main "speech." Susan Emlet was Dale Evans, Sue Phillippi (with her first lipstick) was Lana Turner, Jane Duncan was Marie McDonald, and one of the girls, Carrol Sutherland was crowned "Miss Atomic Blonde." A dozen others got their names listed in *The Oak Ridger* accounts for taking specific parts ranging from "Parade Master" to "Philippine Girl."

The kids major disappointment was that the Hollywood stars Adele Jergens and Rod Cameron who they had invited didn't show up for their ceremony on Ogontz. Sonny Mathis had landed the job of impersonating Rod and pouted Saturday morning that because Rod was a no-show; he "wasn't ever going to any more of Rod Cameron's movies." But they all put these rebuffs behind them quickly and threw themselves into the spirit of the occasion. Since the name "Operation Sesame" had been co-opted by the City, the kids called their ceremony "Operation Gates-Ajar", and the *Ridger* reported, "The kids naturally couldn't leave it just at that – along side the cardboard gates was a jar." The *Oak Ridger* covered the kids' Ogontz opening with big stories both before and after the big day.

March 19, 1949 11:00 AM – The Big Parade

By 10:30 AM crowds started to gather all along the parade route, with the greatest concentration along Tennessee Avenue from Kentucky Avenue to Georgia. Jeanie and I, 2½ year newly-weds living in an H-Type Dorm converted into apartments called Goshen Hall in West Village, were

with the majority who voted against opening the gates – we loved our wartime town! We skipped the gate opening out at Elza, but did go to see and took home movies of the parade from a good spot on Tennessee Ave. right across the street from the old Post Office.

It started almost on time at 11, having been formed in Midtown on the old trailer camp roads off the Turnpike. The parade then went up the Turnpike to Tyler Road where they turned left and went up to Tennessee and turned right marching through the main crowd down to Georgia Avenue where they turned right, went back across the Turnpike and dispersed up on Administration Building Road.

The Parade was headed by what I thought were the two best floats of all -- the first was the City's float adorned by what we could in those days describe as a bevy of gorgeous girls. And the second float also appealed to everyone. It was from Gatlinburg where they are experienced at parades. It featured a miniature mountain scene complete with a waterfall, stream, trout fisherman, and a trout. Some 20 marching bands were spread throughout the line of march, coming from all our city schools plus many from Knoxville and the surrounding region, all interspersed with cars carrying the visiting dignitaries from Washington, officials from surrounding towns, and, of course, the Hollywood stars: Adolph Menjou, Marie "The Body" McDonald, Jack Bailey (MC of the show "Queen for a Day"), Adele Jergens, and Lee Bowman. Rod Cameron, the cowboy star, rode his big horse. And there were 15 other horse riders, a half dozen on Tennessee Walking horses.

In addition to our own Governor Gordon Browning, Alabama's Governor "Kissing" Jim Folsom was here. Vice President Alben Barkley, the key guest, flew in that morning and was supposed to join the parade at Tyler and Tennessee, but his plane did not get here till 12:21 PM, carrying a plane load including Senators McMahon, Kefauver, and dozens of other dignitaries from the Capitol. They all missed the parade, but were all rushed over to Oak Ridge for a late bite to eat.

The parade was scheduled to run for two hours and did. At 1:00 PM the honored guests were all treated to a luncheon at the Oak Terrace in Grove Center, and the rest of the huge crowd scrambled for something to eat, then many of them drifted up to Blankenship Field for the afternoon program.

March 19, 1949 2:30PM – The Afternoon Speechmaking

The Master of Ceremonies for the afternoon speechmaking was Marshall Pengra, Chair of the Program Committee and Manager of WATO, our first radio station. The University of Tennessee Band furnished the music. The invocation was by the Rev. R. R. Sala, the newly installed Pastor of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Woodland.

Pengra then introduced all the movie stars, and the kids in the audience went wild when Rod Cameron stood up and waved his cowboy hat. The order of speakers announced in the paper Friday, the day before, was: Gov. Gordon Browning, Adolph Menjou, (spokesman for the Hollywood contingent), Perry Brown (the Commander of the American Legion), Sen. Estes Kefauver, David Lilienthal (USAEC Chairman), Sen. K. D. McKellar, and finally V. P. Alben Barkley. But on Saturday the 19th, Senator McKellar cancelled, and Sen. Brien McMahon was added, so the order of speakers had to be changed around at the last minute.

Now maybe you'd think the order wouldn't make much difference. It's not clear to me how it ended up. They retained Browning as the lead speaker, but he was to say only a little in the afternoon because he was to be a feature of the evening speechmaking. And they kept Barkley in the prestigious wrap-up spot. Somehow, they messed up with the others! The honorable, distinguished National Commander of the American Legion, one Perry Brown, who had flown in for the occasion and was slated to speak on the afternoon program somehow had heart-burn with the revised order, or else his local fans did. He had been met that morning at the airport by a large delegation of Post Commanders and veterans from all over East Tennessee. And his many admirers had arranged a large reception for him that afternoon at the Jefferson Recreation Hall to which a remarkable 2,400 Legionnaires and their wives were expected to attend. So The Honorable Mr. Brown was sure a major attraction for lots of veterans. But come Saturday afternoon at the 2:30PM event, he refused to speak! The *Oak Ridger* explained it, "because of a last minute change in the order of the speakers. Local representatives of the Legion objected to his being given a less prominent spot on the program than he had originally been scheduled to have."¹¹ Oh, the problems of Frank Wilson's Speakers' Committee.

But most of the crowd was spared knowing such trauma, and enthusiastically applauded all the dignitaries with their optimistic views of Oak Ridge's future.

Here's what they heard. After some brief remarks of welcome by Gov. Browning, Pengra introduced Adolph Menjou who spoke for the Hollywood guests. It's clear from comments in the newspaper reports that Adolph, a handsome graying character-actor with a trademark mustache and urbane manner, had throughout the weekend made a very favorable impression on the whole town. Menjou remarked that it was a great tribute to every man and woman who had a part in making this city and that a center like this could be created almost overnight and could function with such complete anonymity. He added, "All America salutes you. If ever there was one community in the whole USA that could be held up to the world as an example of true America it is this city of Oak Ridge. Oak Ridge did its job in WWII. Many believe Oak Ridge ended the war. Let us hope that never again in the history of mankind will it be necessary for Oak Ridge to unleash the genie of atomic energy for the destruction of mankind."¹²

David Lilienthal, highly regarded ex-Chairman of the TVA and now Chairman of the new Atomic Energy Commission, said that the gates coming down is part of the AEC's program of constant reassessment of issues in light of new facts and conditions. "When Oak Ridge first settled it was distinguished for its rows of hastily built houses and huts immersed in red mud. But today it looks very much like an ordinary town. The more normal in appearance it becomes, the happier the people of Oak Ridge will be, we believe."¹³

Representative John Jennings from Knoxville then introduced Senator Brien McMahon, the primary author of the Atomic Energy Act of 1946, which gave control to the USAEC. He said, "Today, something is happening here that is contrary to the current of the times. While everywhere throughout the world the areas of freedom are contracting, here, in the least likely of places, the boundaries of freedom are expanding. While here at Oak Ridge you tear down the fences as much as possible, almost everywhere else you look you can see new fences. Those aggressors who might otherwise have nothing to deter them now pause before the might of the bomb, and because they respect its power we dare not let it fall into their hands. In Oak Ridge's gate opening, we are winning a small victory in the perpetual battle for freedom."¹⁴

Pengra then introduced Sen. Estes Kefauver who said Oak Ridge should be honored to have so many notables here for its opening ceremonies, and introduced Vice President Barkley.

Barkley told the crowd that because of the atomic energy developments at Oak Ridge, World War II ended a year sooner. Contrasting the fences that are being taken down here but being erected all over the rest of the world, he said: "We do not propose that we as a nation shall be fenced in by any nation or group of nations in the world." Because certain countries would not agree to any fair management of atomic energy, we are now in a stalemate and are forced to keep our secrets closely guarded, but he hoped someday the world would come to accord on this vital question. He concluded that we are already the political and industrial leaders of the world and want to be the moral leaders too, but to be the moral leader our country must be strong.

March 19, 1949 4:00 PM – The Women’s Club Fashion Show

This was sponsored by the Women’s Club, not by the AEC, was held in the High School Auditorium right above Jackson Square, and was open to the public with no admission charge. Guests of Honor were V. P. Alben Barkley’s daughter Mrs. Max Truitt and Marie McDonald, the Hollywood actress and professional model.

March 19, 1949 7:00 PM – The Banquet and Dance

Saturday night’s banquet was held at the Oak Terrace in Grove Center, the largest accommodation the town offered. The tab was pricey for that time—\$10.00, and many came in formal dress. There was a cocktail party and reception for the honored guests from 6:30 PM to 7:30 PM. preceding the dinner.

The MC for the evening was the Chairman of the Speakers Committee, Attorney and later distinguished Judge Frank Wilson. He introduced the dignitaries present, some who had been prominent back in the wartime MED days like Col. Philip Kromer (former MED official and Boy Scout leader for whom Camp Kromer is named), Capt. Kelly; Capt. E. C. Parker, USN; Dr. Geo. T. Felbeck, Union Carbide; Cliff Hernandez, former Head of WWII’s city operator Roane-Anderson; and ORO Manager John C. Franklin. And Wilson introduced other dignitaries present from outside town: James Hardin, Nashville Judge Advocate for the VFW; Rep. Chet Holifield; Rep. Ellsworth; Rep. Wickersham; Rep. Noland; Rep. Miller; General Wilson; General C. A., Anderson; C. V. Swan; W.T. Sheldon, TN State Highway Patrol; and Capt. R. C. Packer, USN who arranged for the formation of airplanes that flew over the city during the parade this morning.

The main speakers after the banquet were Sen. Brien McMahon and Governor Gordon Browning, both carried over the air by WATO starting at 9:00 PM. The *Oak Ridger* reporter wrote that Browning said, referring to Oak Ridge, "This unique but wide-awake city is now part of all of us without restrictions except where restrictions should be." And then the reporter added, "Applause ran throughout the audience the Governor announced that he is now urging the state legislature to approve the appropriation for a large research hospital proposed for Knoxville to do mainly cancer research using radioisotopes developed at Oak Ridge." He concluded his talk with a vicious attack on the Soviet Union’s policy of aggression, "if it were not for the products developed in Oak Ridge, Russia would be at the throats of every nation in the world."

After the speeches, there was dancing and then at 11:00 PM a festive floor show including appearances by Marie McDonald and Rod Cameron. Marie sang for the crowd as did 12-year-old Ernestine Loudermilk who was a recent winner in an Oak Terrace talent night contest. The show

climaxed with a Grand March led by Governor Browning and Miss McDonald, and dancing went on and on till 2:00 AM. A fitting end to an historic day!

APPENDIX

March 19, 1949 – The Opening of the American Museum of Atomic Energy

The Oak Ridge Institute of Nuclear Studies (ORINS) was the forerunner of today's Oak Ridge Associated Universities (ORAU). In 1948 ORINS developed a public education and training exhibit called "Man and the Atom" that toured all over the country and excited much interest and favorable comments. Discussions of its future quite naturally evolved into the idea of making it the centerpiece exhibit for a museum in Oak Ridge, and the USAEC agreed and made available to ORINS the former Army cafeteria that served West Village, also known as the Jefferson area of the city. Thus 55 Jefferson Ave became the city's American Museum of Atomic Energy. And its doors opened to the public on March 19, 1949, the same day as the city's doors opened.

David L. DeJarnette was appointed the Curator by ORINS. His announcement in the March 11 *Oak Ridger* said the museum would be open seven days a week from 10:30 AM to 6:00 PM on weekdays and from 12:30 PM to 6:30 PM on Sundays. Their mission was "to tell the story of atomic energy in such a way that it will be interesting and understandable to young and old alike."

Adult admission was to be 25 cents including tax, children under 12 would pay 5 cents. Proceeds were to add new exhibits, maintain those exhibits now in the museum, as well as to support a program of public education in the field of atomic energy.

It was well attended by citizens and visitors alike, and became famous for its radioactive dimes and Mechanical Arms.

Gordon Lindner, one time SEDer and long time Oak Ridger, was helping in the Museum that opening day demonstrating those mechanical "hands" when Marie McDonald visited. Gordon was up to the challenge of showing her how they worked, and managed to use the "arms" to strike a match and light a cigarette for her. He told this story in an interesting Letter to the Editor on the 57th Anniversary – remembering as do all those of us who were here, the glamour, excitement, and significance of that event-filled day in our city's history.

The Committee Membership – Those Who Organized the Events

Here is the listing of the Committee Membership, taken from the *Oak Ridger*, Friday, March 17.

General Co-Chairmen of the Businessmen's Committees

A. Swanson
Carl Harmon
Assisted by:

L. W. Bevel, Executive Secretary
John W. Tygard, Treasurer

Publicity Committee **Don J. McKay, Chair**

Howard P. Doyle, Vice Chair
Harry C. Weaver
R. E. Rose
Marshall Pengra
Tom Harvey
J. Earl Drinnon
Mark V. Sims
Milton Kress
Mrs. Sidney Schiffman

Program **Marshall Pengra, Chair (Manager of WATO radio)**

James O. Aldrich, Vice Chair
Atty. Frank Wilson
Mrs. Dana Nance
Mrs. A. H. Gossard
Mrs. Paul Sutton
Mrs. W. M. Wood
Don J. McKay (Managing Editor, *The Oak Ridger*)
Rev. Roy C. Arbuckle
Miss Minnie Duncan

Finance **H. L. McKinnon, Chair**

Sam Miller, Vice Chair (Founder, Samuel's Men's Store on the Square)
Clark Center (Gen. Manager, Union Carbide facilities)
Thomas G. Clynes (Banker)
C. W. Cole
L. C. McNeal
Morris Hetzler

Speakers **Atty. Frank Wilson, Chair**

L. C. Blackwood
A. H. Gossard

Entertainment **M. C. Phillips, Chair**

Mrs. A. H. Gossard, Vice-Chair
C. E. Bagwell
Mrs. Ward E. Foster
C. E. Lawrence
Mrs. Paul E. Sutton
J. J. Ebin
Mrs. J. T. Epperson
Van D. Hicks (Postmaster, WWII)
Geo. H. Dykes (Industrial Relations, Y-12)
Mrs. John W. Tygard
Mrs. C. J. McMahan
Mrs. C. W. Floyd
L. C. Blackwood
J. H. Dripps
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Advertising **Harry C. Weaver, Chair**

L. W. King, Vice Chair

Mrs. Edrie Sessoms, Vice Chair
 Mrs. James G. Aldrich
 Howard Doyle
 James D. Aldrich
 Stanley Roberts
 Stewart Seagull
 Gordon Carter
 Frank Carringer
 Madge Spencer
 W. O. Davis
 Roy Nicholson
 Johnny O'Conner
 Mrs. Paul E. Sutton
 Mike Brown
 Louise Maro
 L. F. Overstreet
 George Warne
 Malcolm Beasley
 Cliff Brill (Aetna Insurance Agent, Jackson Square)
 Miss Velma Campbell

Special Guests

A. H. Gossard, Chair

Leo Hemphill, Vice Chair
 Mrs. Fred W. (Winn) Ford, Vice Chair
 Dr. M. D. Peterson
 Clark E. Center
 Russell Field
 Mrs. A. H. Gossard
 Atty. Frank Wilson
 Gene Wells
 George Flack (Industrial Relations, Y-12)
 Geo. O. Robinson (Info Officer for MED, Author)
 Marshall Pengra
 L. C. Manceal
 Mrs. Everett Buster
 Mrs. Dana Nance (Councilman)
 Dr. Newton Underwood (Physicist/Metallurgist at K-25)

Reception

Tom E. Lane, Chair (Head Industrial Relations, K-25)

Lyle Worrell, Vice Chair
 John C. Franklin (Manager ORO)
 Mr. & Mrs. Clark Center (Gen. Manager, K-25, Y-12, ORNL)
 W. L. Harwell (Center's Legal Staff)
 Geo. H. Dykes (Industrial Relations, Y-12)
 Dr. and Mrs. Dana Nance (Surgeon and Councilman)
 Thomas G. Clynes (Banker)
 Dr. and Mrs. M. D. Peterson (Director ORNL)
 J. Carson Ridenour

Parade

C. E. Boone, Chair

George Leonard
 Mrs. Paul Sutton
 John Epperson, Vice Chair
 Hugh Knies
 James D. McPherson
 J. Earl Drinnon

Mrs. Robert S. Stone
 Lt. Col. William T. Sergeant (Security)
 Charles E. Ryan
 Garrett Asher
 B. F. Standifer
 Frank C. Fields
 Paul C. Pennnington
 Albert V. Faloon
 R. M. McDermott
 Owen V. Elliott
 Al Litzenberger
 John J. Carney
 Mrs Len (Helen) Dolan
 Mrs. L. Paul McDowell
 Ed Glennon
 L. Cavett
 Marc Simms
 William S. Mills
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Meeting/Ceremonial Sites **Art Schlanger, Chair**

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W. J. Ladmak
Artie A. Addison
Wm. Sidder
J. P. Riordan
Gibson Morris
M. F. McDermott

Ribbon Cutting **Logan Emlet, Chair (Operations Division Head, ORNL)**

W. Ragan ("Engineering Instrument Dept., ORNL")
C. G. Goss, ditto
D. D. Walker, ditto

The Photographs

There are two often published photos of the Elza Gate Ceremony, one taken from the street level shows the big white cloud and caught the crowd reacting in surprise to the flash, smoke, and noise. It is, among other places, printed on page 203 of *City Behind the Fence*. In the Program for the Commemoration on March 19, 2006, it is printed on the back cover with the credit given to M. E. Wimberly.

The second is a photo taken by Ed Westcott looking south. It shows the cloud just developing from the burning, and a portion of the Press Stand. In the background there is a long line of cars parked on both sides of Melton Lake Drive going down toward the Marina. It is in published in the recent Westcott book *Images of America – Oak Ridge*, page 125. I talked to Ed about this photo April 2, 2006, and he graciously gave me permission to reproduce it in this paper.

Odds and Ends

Harold Cofer was the Chauffer who drove a parade car carrying celebrity Jack Bailey, and has written up his experiences in a delightful account. At the AMSE 57th Commemoration chaired by Martin McBride March 19, 2006, he and many others told their stories which would be fun to sometime add to this sketch of the event.

In their March 21 coverage of the Big Day, the *Oak Ridger* includes a column of “Side Lights” – short one paragraph blurbs. One brags about “Oak Ridge’s ultra modern street layout standing up well to the traffic in most observers’ opinion – no more trouble getting home from the parade than from a football game.”

Another blurb says the finest of the 20 bands in the parade was a fine marching band from Tennessee A & I.

Still another: “The excitement hadn’t died down Sunday night in the mind of four-year-old Bobby Wiest, son of Mr. and Mrs. M. C. Wiest of 106 Pelham Road. Police were told that the small boy was missing from home. Following the descriptions given by the boy’s mother, police found young Bob at the carnival.” (A separate attraction that weekend).

An article about the new ORINS Museum tells about their very popular “Radioactive Dimes.” “A take home feature of the exhibits is a radioactive dime which of course pinches the tourist for a dime to irradiate. The irradiator is used to demonstrate the production of radioisotopes. The coin is dropped into a slot in a lead cube which contains a neutron source. The silver in the ten cent piece, silver 108 is switched to silver 110, a radioactive form of the element which has a half life of only 22 seconds and is harmless. When the dime is handed back to its owner it is encased in lead for safety and as souvenir.” The radioactivity was essentially (~99.9%) gone in 220 seconds (3.7 minutes). It was a fine way to teach the public something non-scary about radioactivity.

Thanks so much to the Oak Ridge Public Library for the availability and usability of the newspaper microfilms.

END NOTES

¹ My spouse Jeanie was his Maintenance Division Secretary at Y-12 when he left at the end of 1946, and thought he “hung the moon.”

² The *Oak Ridger*, Feb. 7, 1949.

³ This list is given in The *Oak Ridger*, March 21, 1949.

⁴ I have transcribed his note cards for easier understanding of his talk’s flow. The underscoring is his. The parentheses are my additions – he undoubtedly smoothed out these notes when he talked. Curiously Ford’s welcoming of the outsiders and his message to them of how friendly we are is a keynote of his talk, yet Elza was still closed for his talk and cars were waiting to get in. Edgemoor and Solway and Illinois Ave. opened at 8:30AM so cars could possibly have arrived from those gates by 8:45AM.

⁵ Emler later became Y-12 Plant Manager, serving 1952 to 1954.

⁶ *Oak Ridger*, March 21, 1949.

⁷ *Oak Ridger*, March 10, 1949.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The smoke was magnesium oxide, and from the photo appears to be about 15 or 20 feet in diameter. If it had been raining, the MgO smoke would have mixed with water and the fallout would have been milk of magnesia, reasonably benign.

¹⁰ *Oak Ridger*, March 21, 1949.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*