



Many Voices Working for the Community

Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board

April 11, 2008

Mr. Steve McCracken
Assistant Manager for Environmental Management
DOE-Oak Ridge Office
P.O. Box 2001, EM-90
Oak Ridge, TN 37831

Dear Mr. McCracken:

Recommendation 169: Recommendation Supporting an Oral History Program for the Oak Ridge Reservation

At our April 9, 2008, meeting the Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board approved the enclosed recommendation.

We appreciate your consideration of this recommendation and look forward to receiving your response by July 9, 2008.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lance Mezga".

Lance Mezga, Chair

Enclosure

cc/enc: Dave Adler, DOE-ORO
Dave Allen, DOE-ORO
Gerald Boyd, DOE-ORO
Mike Farmer, Roane County Mayor
Doug Frost, DOE-HQ
Pat Halsey, DOE-ORO
Gary Hartman, DOE-ORO
F.G. Gosling, DOE-HQ
Connie Jones, EPA Region 4
Rex Lynch, Anderson County Mayor
Kathy McNeilly, Oak Ridge Public Library
Melissa Nielson, DOE-HQ
James O'Connor, Oak Ridge City Manager
John Owsley, TDEC
Ted Sherry, NNSA/Y-12
Katrata Vasquez, DOE-ORO



Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board Recommendation 169: Recommendation Supporting an Oral History Program for the Oak Ridge Reservation

Background

The foreword in the 2005 edition of “The Manhattan Project: Making the Atomic Bomb” states: “In a national survey at the turn of the millennium, journalists and historians ranked the dropping of the atomic bomb and the surrender of Japan to end the Second World War as the top story of the twentieth century.”

It is indeed an incredible story that has chapters written across the United States from New York City to Washington D.C., East Tennessee, New Mexico, California, and Washington State.

In Oak Ridge alone, four plants were built to either enrich uranium or develop the pilot process to produce plutonium for use in atomic weapons. These unbelievably complex plants were built in about 18 months in complete secrecy. Most of the people working on these projects had no idea what they were building. And they were not allowed to discuss their work with anyone outside of their immediate jobs.

But when the bombs were dropped on Japan, much, but not all, of the story could finally be told. As years have gone by, more and more information can be shared by the people who worked at the plants during the final days of World War II, the Cold War era, and beyond. The stories of many of these individuals have been recognized as important elements of history to be recorded and preserved. In the last few years efforts have been made at Y-12 National Security Complex, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and at East Tennessee Technology Park (site of K-25 Gaseous Diffusion Plant) to record the oral histories of many of the men and women who worked on the Manhattan Project and during the Cold War. In addition, the story of the birth of the City of Oak Ridge has been recorded in dozens of additional oral histories. In total, there are well over 300 oral histories that have been done over the last several decades.

However, there has been little coordination of efforts among the three sites nor has there been any standardization of how these oral histories have been gathered and archived.

As a result, Steve Stow of the Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board (ORSSAB) wrote a white paper discussing the need to have a comprehensive oral history program for Oak Ridge that consolidates existing oral histories in one location (allowing originators to keep either copies or masters), that develops a process by which oral histories can be indexed and made available to interested parties, and that sets standards for conducting and archiving future oral histories. Mr. Stow discussed his proposal with the ORSSAB Executive Committee, which saw merit in following up on the idea. The committee asked Mr. Stow to form a subcommittee to study the feasibility of developing a comprehensive oral history program. The subcommittee and ORSSAB would only act as a catalyst or facilitator to get the program going, but would have no active role in managing the program.

In April 2007, the subcommittee met for the first time to begin discussions on how to establish an oral history program. During the subcommittee’s May meeting Mr. Stow suggested organizing a meeting or workshop on oral history to discuss what has been done so far, what the issues are in setting up a comprehensive oral history program for the Oak Ridge Reservation, what the ultimate objectives would be, etc. He said participants could include a number of organizations and individuals.

In October the workshop was held at the DOE Information Center and included representatives from the following organizations:

David Bradshaw, facilitator
Mary Ann Damos, Children's Museum of Oak Ridge
Debbie Dickerson, Oak Ridge National Laboratory
Justin Eastwood, University of Tennessee Baker Center for Public Policy
Pat Ezzell, Tennessee Valley Authority
Amy Fitzgerald, City of Oak Ridge
Susan Gawarecki, Local Oversight Committee
Hubert Gibson, Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board Oral History Subcommittee
Luther Gibson, Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board Oral History Subcommittee
Pat Halsey, U.S. Department of Energy – Oak Ridge Office/ Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board Oral History Subcommittee
Brenda Hackworth, Oak Ridge National Laboratory
Gary Hartman, U.S. Department of Energy – Oak Ridge Office
Dennis Hill, Bechtel Jacobs, Co.
Bobby Holt, University of Tennessee Baker Center for Public Policy
Rick Howard, Bechtel Jacobs, Co.
Fay Martin
Ken Mayes, American Museum of Science and Energy
Keith McDaniel, Oak Ridge Heritage and Preservation Assn./Secret City Films
Kathy McNeilly, Oak Ridge Public Library
Norman Mulvenon, Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board Oral History Subcommittee
Marilyn Reafsnyder
Patty Simmons, U.S. Department of Energy – Oak Ridge Office of Science and Technical Information
D. Ray Smith, Y-12 National Security Complex
Susie Stooksbury, Oak Ridge Public Library
Steve Stow, Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board Oral History Subcommittee
Gwynn Thayer, Tennessee State Library and Archives
Cynthia Tinker, University of Tennessee Center for Study of War and Society
Bill Wilcox
Maggie Yancey, University of Tennessee Center for Study of War and Society
Bill Yee, Friends of Oak Ridge National Laboratory

The workshop participants identified several key issues that needed attention right away. They divided into workgroups to discuss those issues in more detail. Key issues were:

- Funding
- Who should be the lead organization to manage an Oak Ridge oral history program?
- The need for an advisory group to oversee the program
- Legal issues/federal requirements/security
- Format of the end product
- Repository site and access to material
- Steps for path forward

As noted in the bullet points above, one of the suggestions was to form an advisory group to oversee the program. After the October workshop, the subcommittee convened again and selected some members of the workshop to participate on the advisory committee. The subcommittee chose to invite representatives from:

American Museum of Science and Energy
Children's Museum of Oak Ridge
City of Oak Ridge
DOE- Oak Ridge

NNSA/Y-12
DOE Oak Ridge Office of Science and Technical Information
Oak Ridge Heritage and Preservation Association
Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board
Tennessee State Library and Archives
Tennessee Valley Authority
University of Tennessee Center for Study of War and Society
Two citizens at large

Prior to convening the advisory group, Mr. Stow met with Dave Allen, supervisor of the DOE-Oak Ridge office (DOE-ORO) responsible for oral histories and historic preservation. Also attending the meeting were Katatra Vasquez, DOE-ORO Cultural Resources Management Coordinator, Pam Gorman, National Nuclear Security Administration/Y-12, and Pat Halsey ORSSAB Federal Coordinator. Mr. Stow briefed Mr. Allen on the idea to establish a comprehensive oral history program and the establishment of an advisory committee to begin the program. While Mr. Allen was supportive of the idea, he suggested that a term other than 'advisory' be used to designate the committee. He felt such a term would put DOE-ORO in a position of having to respond to requests made by the committee, much like it does with ORSSAB. Mr. Allen also suggested that the committee find a 'champion' within DOE-ORO to promote the idea to DOE-ORO manager Gerald Boyd and NNSA/Y-12 manager Ted Sherry.

The committee met for the first time on January 24, 2008 and Mr. Stow reported on his meeting with Mr. Allen. After some discussion about the name of the committee the participants settled on the Oak Ridge Oral History Steering Committee. Ms. Halsey reported that Steve McCracken, DOE-ORO assistant manager for Environmental Management would act as the 'champion' for the project. Ms. Halsey will determine the process for transferring funds to the Oak Ridge Public Library.

The steering committee then decided to have the Oak Ridge Public Library act as the manager of the project. It also discussed developing a mission statement, funding, and releases for gathering interviews.

The steering committee met again on February 26 to discuss issues of funding, archiving, formats of interviews, and gathering additional interviews in more detail. The committee is scheduled to meet again on April 1.

Discussion

At the steering committee's February 24 meeting, Kathy McNeilly with the Oak Ridge Public Library presented an estimated budget of \$55,500 to begin an oral history project. This budget figure was seen as strictly preliminary and discussion indicated several additional items not included in this estimate. The steering committee agreed to seek seed money from DOE-ORO and from the ORSSAB. Ms. Halsey, on behalf of the steering committee, requested \$7,000 from the ORSSAB Finance & Board Process Committee at its February 28 meeting. The committee agreed with the request and forwarded the request to the Executive Committee, which gave final approval.

It is the hope of the ORSSAB that DOE-ORO will truly support the establishment of the program not only by endorsement but monetarily as well.

With the establishment of the Oak Ridge Oral History Steering Committee, the work of the ORSSAB Oral History Subcommittee is considered complete and the committee will be dissolved. Its last act is to offer this recommendation.

Recommendation

ORSSAB recommends that DOE-ORO fully endorse the establishment of an Oak Ridge Oral History Program and provide assistance in any way it can by:

- helping to identify and secure new interviews,
- clearing previously recorded interviews for public use and research,
- providing in-kind assistance to the program by offering use of facilities, surplus furniture, etc.,
- participating on the steering committee
- and providing funding to help establish and maintain the program.