



An American Tour: *55*



Atomic City, USA

Starting in October 1942, the United States Army Corps of Engineers began acquiring the Oak Ridge area for the Manhattan Project. Unlike TVA's land acquisitions for Norris Dam, the Corps' "declaration of taking" was much more swift and final. Many residents came home to find eviction notices tacked to their doors. Most were given six weeks to evacuate, although several had as little as two weeks. Some were even forced out before they received compensation. By March 1943, the area's pre-Manhattan Project communities had been removed, and fences and checkpoints had been established. Anderson County lost one-seventh of its land and \$391,000 in annual property tax revenue. The manner with which the Oak Ridge area was acquired created a tense, uneasy relationship between Oak Ridge and the surrounding towns that lasted throughout the Manhattan Project.

Maj. Gen. Leslie Groves, military head of the Manhattan Project, liked the area for several reasons. Its relatively low population made acquisition affordable, yet the area was accessible by both highway and rail, and utilities such as water and electricity were readily available due to the recent completion of Norris Dam. Finally, the project location was established within a 17-mile long valley, providing natural protection against disasters between the four major industrial plants—so they wouldn't blow up "like firecrackers on a string."

In 1947, Oak Ridge was shifted to civilian control, under the Atomic Energy Commission. In 1959 the town was incorporated and a city manager and City Council form of government was adopted by the community rather than direct federal control. Three of the four major facilities created for the wartime bomb production are still standing today:

K-25, where uranium was enriched by the gaseous diffusion process until 1985, is now being decommissioned and decontaminated. *Y-12*, originally used for electromagnetic separation of uranium, is still in use for nuclear weapons processing and materials storage. *X-10*, site of a test graphite reactor, is now the site of Oak Ridge National Laboratory. The S-50 liquid thermal diffusion plant was demolished soon after the war.

In 1983, the Department of Energy declassified a report showing that significant amounts of mercury had been released from the Oak Ridge Reservation into East Fork Poplar Creek between 1950 and 1977. A federal court ordered the DOE to bring the Oak Ridge Reservation into compliance with federal and state environmental regulations.

Currently, the Department of Energy runs a nuclear and high-tech research establishment at the site and performs national security work. Tours of parts of the original facility are available to American citizens from June through September.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oak_Ridge,_Tennessee]

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