



Many Voices Working for the Community

Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board

NEWS RELEASE

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Group Discusses Ways to Generate and Make Accessible Oak Ridge Oral Histories

A group of people interested in preserving personal accounts of the history of Oak Ridge and the work done at the three main plants on the Oak Ridge Reservation came together recently to discuss ideas concerning a comprehensive oral history program.

About 30 people representing several organizations and personal interests met recently at the Department of Energy (DOE) Information Center to talk about consolidating and/or linking the several hundred existing oral histories and defining additional work in this area that needs to be done. The workshop was facilitated by former Oak Ridge mayor David Bradshaw.

The workshop was organized by the Oral History Subcommittee of the Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board (ORSSAB) and the Oak Ridge Public Library. ORSSAB is a federally appointed citizens' panel that provides recommendations to the DOE Oak Ridge Office on its cleanup operations on the Oak Ridge Reservation.



Participating in one of the Oral History Workshop breakout groups are, clockwise from center, Gwynn Thayer, archivist for the Tennessee State Library and Archives, Bobby Holt, Baker Center for Public Policy at the University of Tennessee, Ken Mayes, the American Museum of Science and Energy, Gary Hartman, DOE-Oak Ridge Office, Bill Yee, Friends of Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Keith McDaniel, Secret City Films and Oak Ridge Heritage and Preservation Association, and D. Ray Smith, Y-12 National Security Complex.

“About 300 oral histories have been recorded over the last three decades by different agencies,” said Steve Stow, chair of the Oral History Subcommittee, “but they have not been indexed and catalogued and are not housed in one location that allows for convenient access for researchers and interested individuals.

“They have been done in several different formats. Some are on audio cassette tape. Some are video cassette. Some have been transcribed, some haven’t. So we have a hodge podge of things that have been done.

“There is no single entity right now that can manage a consolidated program,” said Stow. “That’s what we hope to accomplish - to identify some entity that can link all of these recordings together under one roof. We also hope to find some funding to do this and be able to continue recording the recollections of people who worked or continue to work in Oak Ridge.”

“The history of Oak Ridge is so unique and important to our nation's history that we should make every effort to collect, preserve, and make it available for the future,” said Kathy McNeilly, director of the Oak Ridge Public Library. “These oral histories are a treasure for our community's history. Everyone agrees that making the stories available to the general public, students, and researchers is a number one priority. However, we can't stop there - we're not done. Identifying additional people to interview and collecting their stories will add breadth and depth to the historical tapestry and further tell the story that needs to be told.”

Workshop participants included representatives from several organizations interested in the history of Oak Ridge, including the Department of Energy Oak Ridge Office, American Museum of Science and Energy, the Oak Ridge Children’s Museum, Oak Heritage and Preservation Association, Friends of Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and the Oak Ridge Local Oversight Committee. Even the Tennessee State Library and Archives sent a representative. “We are excited to participate in this oral history project. We stand ready to assist in preservation and access needs for these materials,” said Gwynn Thayer, archivist for the Tennessee State Library in Nashville.

Prior to the workshop the Oral History Subcommittee developed a list of issues to address. During the workshop the participants selected what they considered the most important to begin work in developing a comprehensive oral history program. Those included funding, finding a repository for the material, determining a managing organization, forming an advisory group to oversee the program, addressing legal and security concerns, formatting of the final product, and determining follow-up activities to the workshop.

The workshop participants divided into several groups to develop ideas to address the main issues. At the end of the workshop the groups reported on ideas they developed.

While no definite decisions were made, groundwork was laid for formation of an advisory committee and a subsequent workshop to establish the support, foundation, and direction for this effort.

Information about the workshop and the oral history initiative can be obtained online at www.oakridge.doe.gov/em/ssab/cmte-minutes.htm and from the ORSSAB support offices at (865) 241-4584.

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