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# A National Historic Park in Oak Ridge?

## Historically Speaking

By **D. Ray Smith** | **Historically Speaking**

**Special to the Oak Ridger**

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OAK RIDGE, Tenn. — A draft environmental assessment just released by the National Park Service recommends that a Manhattan Project National Historic Park be located at Los Alamos, N.M., not Oak Ridge.

The location where approximately 4 percent -- less than 4 cents on the dollar -- was spent for the Manhattan Project is being considered as the location for the primary interpretation of the most significant event of the 20th century. On the other hand, approximately 63 percent -- over 62 cents on the dollar -- was spent in Oak Ridge and a major portion of the Manhattan Project was located here. Col. Nichols even managed the entire Manhattan Project's daily operations from Oak Ridge.

Oak Ridge should be considered part of the National Park because of its major role in the original Manhattan Project. Not to mention that Oak Ridge is the location where a large part of the nation travels within a few miles on Interstate 75 and I-40 and near the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Los Alamos, by contrast, is isolated and well over an hour from I-40 in Albuquerque.

Something does not seem right here. Let me explain how this came to be.

The National Park Service has been conducting a study described on its Web site as "... the Manhattan Project National Historical Park Study Act (Public Law 108-340), passed in 2004, which directed the Secretary of the Interior to 'conduct a study on the preservation and interpretation of historic sites of the Manhattan Project for potential inclusion in the National Park System.'" Here is the link to the site where the report of that study is located for public comment: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkId=482&projectId=14946&documentID=30977>

This Historically Speaking column will provide details of this study and will discuss the potential of locating a Manhattan Project National Historic Park in Oak Ridge. Now, we just need to work to demonstrate our collective desire for the opportunity of locating the headquarters of such a National Park in Oak Ridge as recommended by the Department of Energy's Office of History and Heritage Resources in Appendix F on Page 181 of the study.

The study report begins by providing the following background: "The Manhattan Project was an unprecedented government-directed, top-secret program implemented in the United States during World War II to construct a nuclear weapon in advance of Nazi Germany, which had initiated atomic energy research in the 1930s. The period of significance for the Manhattan Project is 1942 through the end of 1946. A series of events in 1942 denote the project's initiation. Army Corps of Engineers Brigadier Gen. Leslie Groves was selected to be military head of the project; then Groves selected Robert Oppenheimer as chief scientist for the project, and laboratory sites were selected to be located at Los Alamos, N.M., and Oak Ridge, Tenn."

Note the absence of mention of the production sites of Oak Ridge's Y-12 Electromagnetic Plant and K-25 Gaseous Diffusion Plant and reactors at Hanford, Wash.

The report continues, "Near the end of 1942, President Roosevelt gave the final authorization for the construction of the atomic bomb, and the first controlled nuclear chain reaction was achieved at the University of Chicago under the direction of Enrico Fermi. All of these events mark the beginning of the Manhattan Project in 1942. On Jan. 1, 1947, the Manhattan Project was taken over by the Atomic Energy Commission, thus officially ending the Manhattan Project."

This study produced by the National Park Service is disappointing in that it demonstrates a lack of dedication to preserving for future generations the history of the Manhattan Project.

Even though the study finds the four study sites -- Oak Ridge, Hanford, Los Alamos and Dayton, Ohio -- all meet the established criteria for national significance, the final analysis of the study recommended against forming a national park.

That conclusion was hard for me to comprehend until I learned that the National Park Service headquarters has directed its regional offices not to bring any recommendations for additional national parks. So, the first report ignored the significance and followed the direction of its headquarters staff.

That is, until political pressure caused the study team to recommend a Manhattan Project National Historic Park be located only at Los Alamos.

It is sad to note that Oak Ridge, Hanford and Dayton were relegated to an "associated with" status in the study.

There is a public hearing scheduled for Jan. 26, 2010, to be held at the Department of Energy Oak Ridge Operation's Information Center at 415 Oak Ridge Turnpike. A group of individuals have joined together to create a response to this study. The group is made up of representatives from Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation Association, the American Museum of Science and Energy Foundation, Oak Ridge Associated Universities, Y-12 National Security Complex, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Oak Ridge Convention and Visitors Bureau and the city of Oak Ridge.

It is the team's intent to focus on the larger picture of creating a Manhattan Project National Historic Park with National Park Service staff presence at Oak Ridge, Los Alamos and Hanford with the national park headquarters at Oak Ridge.

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