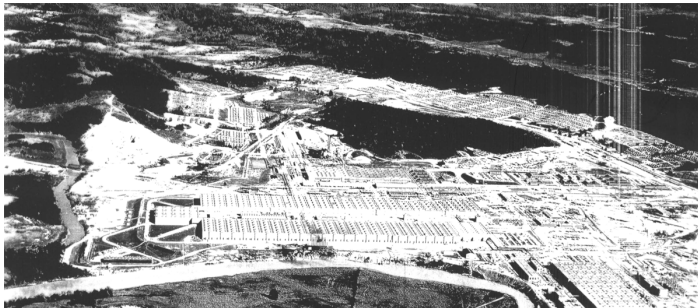


OAK RIDGE'S LOST CITY

from the Oak Ridge Observer
Series by William J. (Bill) Wilcox Jr. City Historian

ould you believe that during WWII we had a second city on the CEW reservation with a population about three times that of the nearby city of Clinton then? When J. A. Jones Co. started hiring their construction crews to build K-25, they soon learned there was no room in Oak Ridge to house more workers; the town's hutments, trailers, and flattops were jammed with construction workers expanding both the Y-12 Plant and the city itself. So they quickly threw up 450 hutments, 16 feet by 16 feet, on the south side of Gallaher Ferry Road, now State Route 58, across from the plant entrance reaching eastward from the present pond.

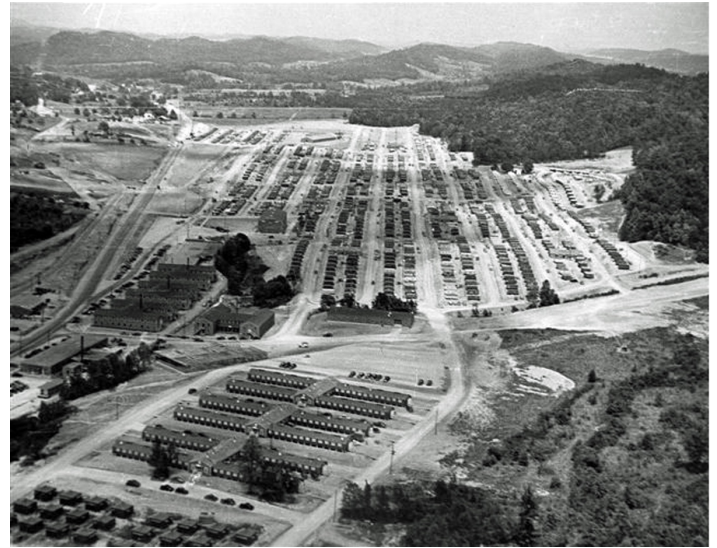
When the first of the hutments were set up there in the fall of 1943, life was pretty primitive. J. A. Jones had to bring in all the water needed by truck from Oak Ridge. But as more and more subcontractors came in who hired more and more workers, that little group of hutments grew like topsy. Within the year a small "city" emerged with more and more of the amenities. By 1945 there were 900 trailers for families, four big dormitories housing over 1200 men, 8 big barracks housing women and men in separate wings, 100 "Victory Homes" (patriotic euphemisms in those days meant "temporary"), as well as hutments for 2500 men. The community was served by a big Cafeteria, 3 Recreation Halls, Movie Theater, Bowling Alley, Bank, Barber Shop, Drug



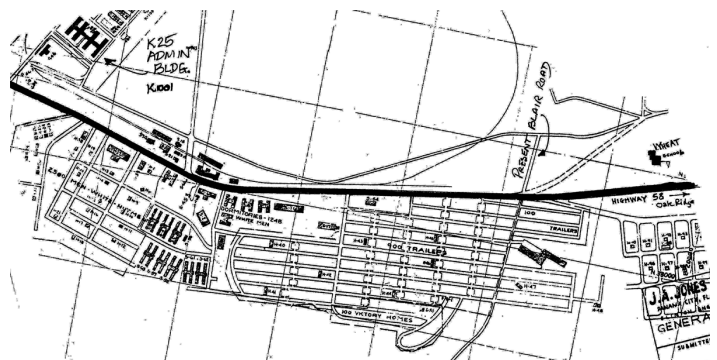
This aerial shows most of the length of Happy Valley lying across the curved road to Oak Ridge from right to left. It was built like topsy, starting with hutments for construction men at the right with a mess hall, and then growing in 1944 as the construction force grew so that eventually trailers were added and a school for the children.

Store, Dispensary, and a service station. Across the highway was a Town Hall and Post Office, Laundry, Ice House, and the pre-existing Wheat School, now serving not only as a school but as a training building for incoming Carbide supervisors.

Residents soon dubbed their town, "Happy Valley," but the official name on the drawings of the day was "J.A. Jones Construction Camp."



Looking east toward Oak Ridge. Hutments are seen at bottom, then barracks, and then some of the 900 trailers for families. Near the top of this photo (a diagonal) is the school, and over the highway to the left is the Wheat School and Geo Jones Baptist Church. The latter still stands and in 2006 will be the site of the 75th Reunion of the Wheat Community. No other structures remain.



Highway 58 is the heavy black line; Oak Ridge is 10 miles to the right, I -40, 5 miles to the left. The now demolished 4-wing K-25 Admin Bldg is at the upper left; Wheat School upper right. Map from the Oak Ridge Room Collection, Oak Ridge Public Library.

OAK RIDGE'S LOST CITY *(continued)*

By 1945 the population of the town had grown to 12,000, some references say 15,000, two or three times that of our neighboring Clinton. Life was hectic, but people enjoyed being with others, all sharing wartime shortages and substitutes. Some well known Ridgers still love telling their Happy Valley stories. Helen Jernigan was 18 and had a summer job in the amusement arcade called Coney Island. You can read her fascinating story of what life was really like there in the Children's Museum's book, *These Are Our Voices*. Helen lived in one of the barracks.

Tom Mullinix was an engineer and lived for a while in one of Happy Valley's infamous hutments before deciding it would be better to commute from Knoxville. Colleen and Jo Rowan (later Black and Iacovino) lived with their Mom and Dad in one of the trailers and still love to tell about those Spartan days. The war was never far from everyone's mind nor from their daily existence.



The author with a Happy Valley fire hydrant. Photo by D. Ray Smith.

When the war ended, construction was still humming on a new, separate diffusion plant called K-27, the first of the odd-numbered, post-war expansions of U-235 production capacity. K-27 has 9 buildings and 540 stages compared to K-25's 54 and over 3,000. It was finished in 1946, and Happy Valley was no longer needed. The site will be well marked as part of our K-25 preservation efforts.

A smaller construction camp was built in 1944 by Ford Bacon & Davis, the separate construction contractor for K-1401, the Conditioning building. A vital part of K-25, this 1,000 ft. long, 400-ft-wide building received by rail all the 3,000 Diffusers from Chrysler in Detroit, all the compressors, motors and other stage equipment, assembled them and finally treated them chemically to get them ready for Carbide to install in the "U" where they would be exposed to the corrosive hexafluoride gas. The FB&D town grew to 2,000, and was located northeast of K-25, on the hill behind the quarry not too far from where our barrier plant was later built.

Both of these so vital communities lived and served their purpose well and now are gone. Mayor David Bradshaw and Ray Smith a couple of weeks ago took the Atlantic documentary film team on a hike through the Happy Valley site searching for remnants of that lost city. They finally found a fire hydrant with the patina of 60 summers and winters in the midst of the empty woods, also the foundations of one of the hutment bath houses. But the land where 12,000 lived with their families and worked to build K-25, now rests in sylvan peace.