

Kingston Demolition Range



For many of us seeing where our parents and grandparents lived is as simple as getting out the family photo album. For the descendants of those families who were displaced to make way for Oak Ridge, it's never been that simple. In 1942 more than 900 families were moved to make way for Oak Ridge and the Oak Ridge Reservation, which encompasses 56,200 acres.

The Army Corps of Engineers photographed the homes, farm buildings, businesses, churches and schools that were to be demolished. The photographs were moved from Department of Energy storage to the National Archives and Records Administration in Atlanta in 1987. In all there were more than 6000 photographs.

Now these photographs that depict the homes and farms that made up the Elza, Scarbrough, Robertsville and Wheat communities are available on CD-ROM and via the Internet. For this, we can thank Donald Raby and a group of dedicated volunteers.

After about 100 hours of scanning and copying, and countless more hours of transferring the images to CD, Raby is pleased that about half the photographs are available on CD. He expects to be finished with all the CDs in Spring 2004. Raby says it was a long, hard job, but that the results are well worth all the effort he and the other volunteers put into this project.

Grants from BWXT Y-12 and the Pellissippi Genealogical Society helped with the project. Many volunteers helped with the research and work. Raby has generously donated copies of the CDs to Oak Ridge Public Library, University of Tennessee Knoxville Library Special Collections, and McClung Collection in East Tennessee Historical Center. Samples of the photographs as well as information about the project are available at <http://www.kingstondemolitionrange.com>.



"I am very pleased that the Oak Ridge Library has been the first to make the collection available on their public use computers," Raby said. "We expect to place the collection in other area libraries as well."

Raby says all he started out to do was find out about his family history. In 1888 his family moved to the Scarbrough Community, which was located near present day Y-12. When his grandfather died in 1922, the family moved to Knoxville and has lived in Fountain City since 1942. In the search for his family history, Raby met people who had some of the photographs that the Army Corps of Engineers had taken. They were numbered which made him wonder if there were others. Then he found a map of property plats with numbers that matched the ones on the photos.



Raby says, "The Oak Ridge Room at Oak Ridge Public Library was key in this search with the references and maps that guided my search. At this point my interest was limited to my own family and seeking pictures of the Raby home places."

He got in touch with Arlene Royer, the archivist who's in charge of photographs and visited the National Archives in October 2000. There he found the federal court records relating to the "Taking of Property for the Manhattan Project" contained in 26 boxes of loose document files and 13 boxes of photographs.

Seeing these photographs encouraged him to find a way to make them available for others to see. Many of the displaced families had ancestry going back to the first land grant settlements in this area. Fortunately the photographs are very well indexed and organized. Each property had an inventory stating the appraisal and amount paid the owner for the improvement (buildings) to the property. The area, which was called Kingston Demolition Range and then Clinton Engineer Works by the army, was divided into geographic sections identified "A" thru "M".

Ms. Royer explained the proper handling and restriction on the use of the documents. They are not classified and belong to the public. The National Archives allows them to be copied on site. There were limitations on the lighting and equipment used with prior approval from the archivists. The staff at the archives was delighted these documents would be available to the public.



"When I showed John Rice Irwin the photos of his family home in Robertsville, he remembered a word his grandfather used as they propped up the leaning outhouse. He told John Rice to hand him a "scantling." Scantling is an old English word for a long piece of lumber of small dimension. The memory the photograph invoked for Irwin is exactly why I felt this project was important," Raby said.

Raby says that without the help of many local groups and volunteers this project would never have come about. Assistance and encouragement came from the Mississippi Genealogical and Historical Society, the Oak Ridge Historical Preservation Association, Ed Wescott, retired DOE photographer, and the Robertsville Reunion.

(Submitted to the Oak Ridger)