Yes, It Happened in East Tennessee

Scandals, Heroes, Inventions, Tragedies, and Murders

(A Summary of Some of the Salient Stories in Four Books)

Historically, East Tennessee was largely rural and most of its people were poor. They "got by" with raising tobacco, keeping a milk cow, and planting a vegetable garden. With the advent of automobiles, many of their boys and girls "went up north" to work in car factories in Michigan and Ohio.

Interestingly, this northern migration slowed rapidly in the 1920s and 1930s. George Eastman built a large chemical manufacturing plant in Kingsport. Congress established the Tennessee Valley Authority which started building hydro-electric dams that provided cheap electricity to the area. Businesses came and employment flourished. The 1940s saw the emergency construction of the sprawling government reservation in Oak Ridge.

The region's successes were accompanied by several unwanted happenings. Unsolved murders, horrible accidents, and life-altering scandals were part of the scene.

World War II

The importance of the contributions made by the East Tennessee manufacturers of defense-related products during World War II cannot be overstated. Some of their contributions are well-known while others are still relatively unknown. The most prominent of the well-known contributions is the Manhattan Project, which was headquartered in Oak Ridge. From this location came the enriched uranium for the world's first atomic bomb that contributed to the ending of a terrible war.

Working 24 hours a day and seven days per week, the Tennessee Valley Authority built three power-producing dams in record time. Twenty-five percent of their power was being used by the Oak Ridge plant that was enriching uranium for the first nuclear bomb. TVA also produced maps for the Army from aerial photos that were taken by pilots over enemy territory.

Also, during the war, the Aluminum Company of America, located in Alcoa, Tennessee, produced aluminum for wings and fuselages of the 300,000 airplanes that America built during the war. Knoxville's Rohm and Haas Company built the Plexiglas for the wind shields on the same aircraft. Tennessee Eastman Company in Kingsport, hurriedly developed a synthetic rubber to replace the badly needed natural rubber that previously had come from the South Pacific but was then in enemy hands.

The Fulton Bellows Company in Knoxville furnished 11 million of the 22 million five-inch shells used by the Navy during the war. The company furnished 20,000 bellows for America's top-secret Norden bombsight. Unbelievably, the plans for this device were stolen by a German national who was working in Norden's plant in Manhattan. He served 18 years in a federal prison.

In1942, eight German saboteurs were secretly placed on an American beach by submarine. The top facility on their list to be attacked was the Aluminum Company of America's North Plant in Alcoa. When the FBI apprehended them, one had a schematic of the North Plant in his pocket. Six were put to death. Because they cooperated with the FBI, the other two were sentenced to life in prison. One saboteur, Eddie Kerling, a Nazi to the end, wrote the following cryptic note to his wife two hours before dying in the electric chair:

> *Marie, my wife – I am with you to the last minute. This will help me take it like a German! Even the heaven out there is dark. It's raining. Our graves are far from home, but not forgotten. Marie, until we meet in a better world! May God be with you. My love to you, my heart to my country.*
>
> *Heil Hitler!*
> *Your Ed, always*

Weston Fulton – Edison of the South

Because of his over 200 hundred patents, Weston Fulton was called "The Edison of the South." These inventions that would become products for his company to manufacture and go to the depths of the ocean and to the moon. The accomplishments by the meteorologist-turned-entrepreneur are many and some follow.

Subsequently, 645 more wagons carrying 13,000 Indians spanned 1,000 miles of trail. With the Indians suffering from fatigue and many from diseases such as dysentery and diarrhea, one died every mile. Those who survived the arduous trip thought that their new home in Oklahoma was surprisingly nice. They found vast green fields, and that deer and other wildlife were abundant.

For some, however, old memories lingered. Twenty- five Indians assassinated John Ridge, their brethren. They could not forget that he was the main one who negotiated the treaty that led the proud Cherokees to walk, "The Trail of Tears."

East Tennessee Today

Several ongoing projects in Oak Ridge are investigating novel ways of producing energy. Much of this work is being led by a consortium that consists of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the U. S. Department of Energy, and the University of Tennessee. Two of these important projects are research into fusion energy, the same as that produced by the sun and stars, and the development of much safer small modular nuclear reactors.

Other projects underway or announced recently are related to the need to increase production of enriched uranium fuel that will be needed to power Artificial Intelligence data centers. Some of these projects include:

- Orano-U – uranium enrichment using existing centrifuge enrichment technology
- Laser Isotope Systems – uranium enrichment using propriety laser enrichment technology
- BWXT and Centrus – centrifuge manufacturing
- Oklo Company – reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel into fuel for reuse in reactors
- Radiant Technologies – manufacturing of micro-reactors for mobile installations
- Kairos Power – manufacturing demonstration reactors

- Triso X and Standard Nuclear – manufacturing fuel for the much small nuclear reactors

With these and other energy-related research projects, Oak Ridge has become a world leader in the research and development of future energy production.