

**"Memories of Oak Ridge, Tennessee During World War II"**  
**By Peggy Dickson**

In the fall of 1944, at age 14, I, Margaret "Peggy" Nancy Dickson, moved to Oak Ridge, Anderson County, Tennessee with my family from Chattanooga, Hamilton County, Tennessee. Our Dad, Charles Russell Dickson, Sr. had been employed to work in the office by Tennessee Eastman Corporation in Oak Ridge. The family moved into the left side of a two-story pale yellow, three bedroom duplex at 109 Hoyt Lane, a dead end street off of Highland Avenue. Housing assignments were made according to the job you held at the Corporation. Our Mom, Eva R Pirtle Dickson, was a typical housewife for that era that stayed at home and took care of the families needs.

We had no home telephone while we lived in Oak Ridge. Dad had a phone in his office at Tennessee Eastman Corporation. There were only about 5,000 telephones at the corporation. Everyone else had to use a pay phone.

I entered the 8th grade at Highland View Elementary School. I was a cheerleader for the basketball games. During the war, new clothes were hard to buy so my mother sewed all of my clothes. There were many people who had very little in monetary items, so I was voted the best dressed in the 8th grade. I remember my mother darning my socks to make them last, and the seams the darning created were very uncomfortable. I remember going to lunch with a friend from school and everyone was sitting in the living area around a potbellied stove. She lived in a prefab home, square, flat roofed on stilts. My best girlfriends were Nancy Evans, Mary Gratiot, and Bettie Preston. We would go to each other's house for lunch from school one day a week. I wonder where they are now. In the 8th grade the teacher instructed us and we knitted sweaters for the British children.

Sometimes after school, we would roam down the other side of Outer Drive and we found very small houses in bad need of repair left there when the government bought up the land. This was the first time I had seen a house wallpapered with newspaper.

We did not own a car part of the time we lived there and had to ride the bus to shop or go to the movies. We lived near Grove Center. We shopped there and went to the Grove Theatre, now called Grove Cinema. The Grove Theatre had Saturday afternoon matinees with newsreels and serial movies that were continued each week and the regular movies were mostly cowboy movies. Before the matinee they would have spelling bees, etc. on stage. The cost to go to the movies was: Adults, 48 cents, Enlisted Personnel, 20 cents, Children, 12 cents. We also spent many a summer day swimming at the Municipal Swimming Pool near Grove Center.

Some of the shops at Grove Center were: Tulip Town Super Market (West Town Business Center), Burton's Shoe Renewery, Wender's Men's Shop, Firestone Dealer (MARS and Co.), a drug store (name not known), Oak Ridge Bus Terminal which included: Waffle Shop and West Town Café.

I babysat for 2 small children that lived in the apartment behind us to earn spending money. We had a part chow puppy that we called "Teddy". The first half of the school year of 1945-1946, I attended Jefferson Junior High School and then returned to Chattanooga for the second half of the school year. Mr. R. McKeehan was principal and Mr. G. B. Bond was Assistant Principal of the Jr. High. I rode the city bus down the hill to the Junior High School. We had dances in the school gym and I remember learning to "jitterbug" there. We danced to song like "On the Atchison, Topeka and Sante Fe", "In The Mood", "Chattanooga Choo Choo", "Juke Box Saturday Night", "Ac-cent-tchu-ate the Positive", and "Tuxedo Junction". There were many popular songs that we sang that were about the war such as "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree (with Anyone Else but Me)", "Rosie the Riveter", "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy", "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition", and "Coming in on a Wing and a Prayer". This era created the most romantic love songs because of the boys and men who were serving their country and away from home. I still remember many friends I cared about and wonder where they spent the rest of their lives. The 9th grade brought on a "crush" for Richard "Dick" Powell from Hartford, CT. Wonder what ever happened to him.

I remember the government selling War Bonds and Stamps. The stamps started at a price of 10 cents and 25 cents up to \$5.00. I did not have much spending money but I could afford a stamp or two a week. These stamps were put in a book until the book was filled which was worth \$18.75 and could be traded for a \$25.00 bond at the bank or post office.

Secrecy was of the utmost important in Oak Ridge. We wore buttons that said, "A slip of the lip may sink a ship". The cautionary sign at the main gate of Oak Ridge was: "What you do here, what you see here, what you hear here, when you leave here, let it stay here". The children of Oak Ridge each decided what they were making in Oak Ridge. I thought they must be making Hershey Bars, because good chocolate was unavailable, it all went to the men in service.

Rationing was in full force during this time. Gasoline cards, sugar, and shoe stamps were issued. Mother rode the bus to Grove Center to buy groceries. She had to stand in separate lines for each item like cigarettes and meat. Coffee was very scarce. Butter was so scarce that and they came out with oleomargarine. The oleo we bought was white and included was a package of yellow coloring to mix with the oleo and make it yellow. We were allowed to buy 2 pair of shoes a year. For the duration of World War II, a large allotment of the shoe materials went to the service men. I remember there were no liquor stores in town and it was prohibited. Since cigarettes were so scarce, like most important things that went to our service men, my parents bought a machine, tobacco, tobacco papers and rolled their own cigarettes. I remember what a thrill it was to have silk stockings. My grandfather received a gasoline ration card. There was no shortage of gasoline, but the rubber for the car tires was used by the military and unavailable, so they rationed the mileage you used with gas rationing. Cards for gas were issued according to each persons needs. During this time they started recapping tires to make them last longer. A lot of people had a "Victory Garden" to grow their own food, but in Oak Ridge I don't remember anyone with one. Everyone had small lots and probably not the best soil after developing this land for the Manhattan Project.

If you were 12 or above, you had a resident badge with your picture on it to wear when you left or entered the city gates of Oak Ridge. I still have my badge with number 4528 on it.

The city streets were laid out alphabetically. Outer Drive was the street that ran along the top of the ridge around the city. The main city streets running at right angles to it were named for states and were in alphabetical order.

The downtown shopping center was Jackson Square. It was U-shaped and included the Ridge Theatre. Their slogan was, "Perfect Pictures for Particular People", and their phone number was 4-2981. I remember going to see the movie, "Desert Song" starring Dennis Morgan there. There was a bowling alley under the shops at the center. The shopping center was right below the old Oak Ridge High School and the Oak Ridge Football Field (the home of the "Wildcats"). My brother graduated from the high school there.

Some of the stores at Jackson Square were: Williams Drug Store, T. & C. Café, Jewel Lee Shop (Ladies Ready-to-Wear), Samuels Men's Store (Men's Wear), Community Stores #1, Henebry's Jewelry Store, and Hogin Shoe Store. The only department store in Oak Ridge was Miller's at Jackson Circle.

We attended The Chapel on the Hill which was a non-denominational church located on a small beautiful hillside up above the Historic Town Square. The church is now "The United Church". It is advertised: "This is a Church for Persons of All Faiths and Those of Uncertain Faiths".

A pamphlet was published every Thursday by Oak Ridge Recreation and Welfare Association called "What's To Do! In Oak Ridge". I told of many activities for the week including the library. I have my library card for the Oak Ridge Public Library, Oak Ridge, Tennessee number 563, with the expiration date May 5/6, year not clear.

Oak Ridge had "Rec" Recreation Halls where the teenagers would go to spend time. Charles Russell "Dick" Dickson, Jr., my brother, had his picture in the national newspapers when he was home on leave from the United States Army Air Force, "jitterbugging" at a rec hall.

During the war, people came to Oak Ridge from every corner of America and from every walk of life. I went to school with children from all over the United States. There were many different kinds of houses put up literally over night and there were many prefab houses put up. In my 1946 yearbook, The Oak Twig, Joan Gilliam described some of the houses.

House on Stilts  
"Square shaped box,  
Flat on top,  
Painted the color  
Of a lollypop".

Oak Ridge was built so fast that they did not have time to build normally. The only sidewalks they had time to put down were boardwalks. When it was announced that the atom bomb was

dropped, I was at a friend's house in Chattanooga and heard the announcement on their radio. Oak Ridge, the secret city hidden in the mountains and valleys of East Tennessee that was not on the map, was suddenly of interest to the nation and the world!!