Suggested Citation:

Bissell, A.K. "A Reminiscence of Oak Ridge." The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications 39 (1967): 71-86.

A REMINISCENCE OF OAK RIDGE*

By A. K. BISSELL

Tonight as we meet to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the founding of this new community, it is fitting that we should gather in this historic building. Erected in the finest tradition of our government, the Chapel-on-the-Hill provided a place of solace for the pioneers of all faiths and, if the walls could speak, I could spare you this feeble presentation. Also, it is fitting that this address should be delivered at a meeting of the East Tennessee Historical Society, in view of its dedication especially to the preservation of the great moments in the history of this region, as well as of the state as a whole.

In our generation this was a peaceful countryside. An early resident later said, "All the folks in these parts were farmers; they worked the ground and minded their own business, peaceful folks living a simple life. Of course, when the Civil War came along we sent a few of our boys out to fight and then in World War I, we did our share but other than that we didn't pay much attention to the outside world and they didn't bother with us." Now, this same quiet farm land is the birthplace of atomic energy. Here in the early '40's an incredible job was done, an unbelievable mission accomplished. In a few short years a bomb was built, a war was won. Today these great energies are devoted to peace and for the benefit and welfare of all mankind.

But this is not my subject tonight. More competent people have told the story of atomic energy—the magnificent saga of American industry; the citizen army of engineers and scientists; the great American general who led it all.

Tonight I want to reminisce about the building of a City. Too often in the glamor and romance of atomic energy, sight has been lost of this monument to human ingenuity. Perhaps an analogy might serve to set the stage. Suppose tonight we were to call in the owners of the Holiday Inns and direct them to buy 60,000 acres of rolling farmland in the foothills of East Tennessee; we would tell them that within six months we wanted the land prepared and utilities ready to begin the

*An address delivered by the Mayor of Oak Ridge at a meeting of the East Tennessee Historical Society, November 3, 1967, at the Chapel-on-the-Hill in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

building of homes. Within eight months we wanted to have 20,000 people living there with restaurants, schools, water, electricity, transportation, medical and dental care, and a local newspaper. Further, the population would increase for a year and a half until 75,000 people must be fed, housed, educated, and transported back and forth to work, and what is more, nobody must know about it. Good as these men are, I suspect they would throw up their hands, but this is what happened right here where you are visiting tonight.

It wasn't easy, but as time passes we lose touch with the unpleasant. Perhaps the truth is close to a remark of one of our oldest citizens, "It was terrible but we loved every minute of it."

And so it began in these Cumberland foothills. During the early fall of 1942, the Army moved in with subterfuge and secrecy—a thousand farms were taken and 60,000 acres isolated from the main stream of American life. At first the tempo matched the slow pace of farm life—scattered earth-moving equipment smoothed a few spots and carved out a few access roads; a few shacks were hurriedly constructed, a telephone was installed. But the pace soon changed. The biggest engineering and construction company in the world, the United States Army, took charge. Architects, engineers, and every type of skilled craft arrived to change the face of the earth. The railroads extended their lines. Soon mountains of material began to arrive and gates were erected to keep out the curious. Within five months, roads, streets, and utilities were in sufficient shape to begin construction of the first thousand homes.

First, the plans were for a town of 13,000, then 25,000, then 45,000. Actually, by the end of 1944, 75,000 men, women and children were residing within this new secret town. "Residing" may be a little misleading; perhaps "living" or "existing" would be better terms to describe the status of most early citizens.

When it was apparent that the population would exceed the earliest estimates, it was clear that permanent housing, because of the time for construction, would not serve the needs. Every type of preconstructed or easily erected, building was procured. TVA flat-tops were brought in by the hundreds; thousands of trailers were used. An offsite-constructed 16 x 16 wooden box, called a Hutment, was utilized. Also,

a sectional unit that resembled a big panel truck body, but pleasantly called a Victory Cottage, served the shelter needs of other hundreds.

In the beginning the big job was construction. Only one paved road crossed the area and a single power line wandered over the countryside. Soon local sources of labor were exhausted. Recruiters traveled the South and offered top wages for the idle workers. Soon the roads were filled with trucks, old cars, buses, rolling towards the promised land. Before long, recruiters were sent all over the country looking for technicians and craftsmen to operate the plants beginning to spring from the barren ground. At the same time, engineers and scientists were being borrowed, begged, or stolen from the universities and industry. The Army rolls were being screened for draftees with technical backgrounds or with skills meeting the thousand and one needs of the new city.

Meanwhile, back in Anderson County, things were humming. Roads were being built, plants for the treatment of water and sewage were being constructed. Ground was broken for schools and a hospital, stores and restaurants; the foundation was laid for the Chapel-on-the-Hill.

And so they came for two years at the average rate of 5,000 a month. Each one had to be registered, badged, fingerprinted, and investigated. Each one had to be housed, fed, transported, entertained, and cared for.

It was truly a bedlam but somehow it worked. In addition to the thousands living on the area, there were other thousands commuting daily. Transportation had to be provided. At the peak, the Army had contracts with fifty bus lines bringing people to the plants from as far away as ninety miles. Car pools were the thing, and it is estimated that 20,000 cars traveled the roads daily. City transportation was provided and within two months the bus operators reported an experience of 908,000 bus miles carrying 2,531,000 passengers. Schools were started within six months and opened for business in September, 1943. By the end of that year, there were 5,700 students and the figure later rounded off at 8,400.

Police and fire departments were organized and trained, although the caliber of personnel available did not permit a broad training pro-

gram. From two guards and four firemen in January, 1943, these combined forces peaked at several thousand.

Naturally, all did not go well. All types of goods were in short supply. Waiting in line was the order of the day; it got so that if you saw a short line you got into it just on general principles. The schools were overcrowded; the buses didn't run on time; dust and dirt were everywhere; mud was waist-high, or so it seemed; food was scarce; the beer ran out; the roof leaked; the mail was slow; telephones were at a premium; the laundry got lost; food prices were high; the movies were old; meat was an exception; the bowling alleys were crowded; coal deliveries were sporadic.

Despite these shortcomings, the Army worked hard, long, and ingeniously to keep matters under control. The basic problem faced by the Army was that Army regulations and even federal law were not designed for this unique adventure. Running a giant motel was beyond the scope of any previous federal or Army experience. On top of that were the restrictions of secrecy. To overcome both of these limiting and exasperating factors, the Army brass came up with the citizen organization whose charter conveniently gave veto power to the Army.

Quite early the Oak Ridge Health Association was formed to offer medical protection with financing by payroll deduction. This provided a needed service and at the same time avoided dealing with an insurance company with its broad requirements for what was then considered classified information.

To provide fun and games not contemplated or permitted by federal administration, the Recreation and Welfare Association came into being. This permitted the easy distribution and use of revenues from beer, bowling, and the movies. This association was a huge success. Gross sales rose to two million dollars a year and, before it was over, the association employed 2,000 people and spent $500,000 on the care of six theatres, seven recreation buildings, libraries, playgrounds, baseball diamonds, a skating rink, canteens, taverns, billiard halls, tennis courts, picnic areas, the swimming pool, and the local newspaper.

Later, to meet the exigencies of another type of welfare, the Army created yet another citizen organization—the Oak Ridge Welfare Service. With funds from the Recreation Association, many of the difficult family and delinquency problems were handled.

Yet even with these brilliant expressions of American "Can do," problems were rarely completely resolved. For instance, it was a tremendous task to build housing, but the problem of assignment was fraught with greater, even though different, difficulties. Policies were stated and restated. Yet interpretations led to variations causing misunderstanding, hard feelings, and almost unbelievable pressures. It is felt that, more than any other single cause, dissatisfaction with housing was behind the excessive project turnover. The policy seemed simple—only essential operating personnel were entitled to permanent type housing. Construction workers, concessionaires, and community service employees could only get the various types of temporary structures. Although theoretically all operating people were equal, some were more equal than others. It soon developed that rank had its privileges and its influence. Contractors seeking to promote their recruitment would make promises they couldn't fulfill. Concessionaires were absolutely needed—or so they said. Then there was the situation of tenants losing jobs, leading to the difficult problem of evictions.

Beyond the problem of assignment was the problem of maintenance. The "landlord" considered everybody as a temporary tenant who had to be supplied with household maintenance items and skilled maintenance services. This meant complete services including even the replacement of faucets, washers and light bulbs. The landlord also had to clean the streets, provide the water, take care of the garbage, run the buses, provide police and fire protection, man the cafeterias, do the laundry, manage the dormitories, collect the rents, etc., etc. At first the Army landlord used its own employees but soon turned to a contractor whose work force rose to just a few shy of the original estimate of the total population of the town—13,000.

Another continuing problem was providing retail stores for the community. By the time the population reached 20,000, only nine such stores were open; only one of these was a food store. For security reasons the Army could not publicize its need for private merchants; applicants and their employees had to submit to security investigation and had to offer conclusive proof of supply sources—in a war period. No exclusive rights were granted and no guarantees offered. Further, the merchant got the poorest housing and all arrangements were subject to periodic open bidding. If successful, the merchant would have to

sign an agreement for rental as a percentage of gross sales; prices could not be more than those charged in Knoxville; records would be open to government scrutiny; and if profits were too high, prices must be reduced.

With the cold and hard logic of the Army, it was natural for the city to be split socially several ways. First, there was the world of the construction worker. In the project hierarchy, he was at the bottom. Temporary and mainly unskilled, he had the poorest housing in the worst part of town. Generally he was unable or unwilling to bring his family. He worked hard and he lived hard, posing many problems to the untrained and inexperienced police department.

Next was the world of the operating personnel. He was brought here to run the plants or serve the community. Generally middle class, he lived in the permanent housing—or at least he was eligible to. His family was here or they were coming, or he hoped to make one. Most of these were young, still showing scars of the great depression. This was the first real job and the future looked good even through the dust and coal smoke.

There was another world restricted to the Army brass and the top contractor people. They were in the best housing in the best part of town. They worked hard and played hard too, but they also ran the police department. To their credit, these men took an almost impossible scheme and made it work. Oak Ridge and our country can be forever grateful to this little world.

When things got too bad, the construction worker left and the operations man complained. The laborers left in droves and complaints mounted. In what could be judged a democratic gesture but which was perhaps more of an attempt to take the heat off, the Army suggested in late '43 the formation of a town council to "study problems and present recommendations" to the city authorities. Except for acting as a vehicle for the citizens to let off steam on such matters as the cafeteria food, high prices, poor laundry services, etc., little was accomplished. The chairman boasted of "holding as nearly as possible to a status quo policy and cooperating with the authorities."

The ebbing of the tide for the wartime community began with the fall-off in total employment—plant and community—after reaching a peak of nearly 83,000 in May, 1945. Construction forces had been drop-

ping throughout most of 1944, except for the Gaseous Diffusion project, which continued into 1945. Total employment, however, reflecting the steady rise in operating personnel, continued upward until the spring of 1945. The downward slide began in June and picked up speed as events on the other side of the world offered tangible evidence of the successful accomplishment of the project objectives. By the end of the year, total employment had fallen to 43,000 and continued on down at a slower pace throughout 1946 to 28,000.

This was the lean time—a time of doubt and confusion. The challenge, "Don't you know there's a war on?" changed to "Don't you know the war is over?" Uncertainty was the theme. Military personnel were relieved. Many of the scientific and technical people returned to their universities. In Washington a major debate was taking place, and scientific groups were traveling the country attempting to educate people about atomic energy and alert them to the dangers of atomic weapons. The greatest single purpose project in the history of the world was adrift.

But not for long. By the late summer of 1946, the first Atomic Energy Act was passed and very soon doubts about the future receded. There would still be a vigorous atomic energy program and Oak Ridge would continue to play a major role. But one point became very clear—things would be different!

No sooner did the AEC take charge on January 1, 1947, than changes were felt. Under the new civilian control, the accent was peace and normalcy. The can-do Army personnel were replaced by cost-conscious experts in real estate and town management, who were aghast at the carry-over practices they found.

But the people were restless, too. They were tired of "construction-town" living, with its drabness, the unpainted buildings, the look-alike houses, the dusty roads, the soft coal smog, scarred terrains, inadequate shopping facilities, and coal boxes in front of each house. Sensing that a civilian landlord would be more amenable than the Army to suggestions, fifty-three candidates sought the seven seats on Town Council in the 1946 election, in contrast to the serious paucity of candidates during the preceding period.

This feeling seemed to find a response in the expressed policy of the AEC General Manager late in 1947:

> Prior to the promulgation of new policies or the significant modification of existing policies, the consultative recommendations of the residents should, in so far as possible, be employed as guides for arriving at specific decisions affecting community life; and such recommendations should be subordinated only by considerations of security or Federal requirements and policies. When the consensus of the residents, as expressed through their representatives, must be overruled, the reasons therefor should be made known as explicitly as security policy permits.

This was a nice sounding statement but it assumed too much. It assumed that basically both parties had the same interests. It assumed that the people would graciously accept "reasons of state" against their interest.

The policy as proposed didn't work, but there was consultation. Meetings with committees of the Chamber of Commerce, Town Council members, the Parents Advisory Council, and others gave the city administrators a full range of community opinion, and one would have to say they were as responsive as "Federal Requirements and Policies" would permit.

Another early policy statement by AEC officials advocated the sale of homes and the beginning of self-government. Both sides agreed in principle, but it would be seven tortuous years before the goal was reached.

In 1948 a Master Plan was prepared and the first in a long series of studies was started. The level of housing maintenance was drastically reduced and the utilities was separately metered. Studies were made of the housing, and 1949 marked the beginning of close to $70,000,000 in community improvements: new grade schools, street paving, new multi-family housing, the rehabilitation of some of the better pre-fabs, the development of a new commercial center, a new high school, a new single and duplex housing area, a new municipal building, and a new hospital.

This was not a giveaway but a realistic effort to change a construction camp into a city and to place the new community on a sound financial basis preparatory to self-government. As part of this program, AEC finally hit the nerve center with a proposed increase in housing rental. Protest followed protest but to no avail. Again "Federal Requirements and Policies" proved stronger.

At the heart of the conflict between the people and the AEC, during these interim years, was a disagreement in principle. AEC held that charges for housing and services should be comparable to those charged outside Oak Ridge for the same services or similar housing. The people felt that such charges should relate directly to cost, reduced by such factors as depreciation, and lack of community services. Both sides had valid arguments but again AEC used its power of final authority. "Comparability" became a new dirty word, but AEC held consistently to its position until the $64 issue arose. I will come to that in a moment.

Meanwhile, a giant stride was taken toward normalcy and self-government in March, 1949, when the fences came down and the gates were opened. With great fanfare—movie stars and the Vice President—the city was "freed." But there was little rejoicing among the natives. When the proposal was made, protests again took place. A town meeting assembled and rejected the idea of fence removal, 152 to 17. The Town Council split right down the middle. But the fences came down and the gates were opened and few of the gloomy forebodings materialized.

As the Army had moved relentlessly toward building the bomb, the civilian agency moved relentlessly towards achieving what it termed a "sound financial position." Bus service was reduced and finally withdrawn. House maintenance withered. Charges were made for the use of public buildings. The Recreation and Welfare Association was dissolved, and with it went the revenues to support numerous civic, social, welfare, and recreational activities.

The "reform" movement continued apace until the AEC announced in January, 1951, that they would seek "full comparability in housing rentals and that these charges would increase an average of 28% on August 1." The storm that burst dwarfed all prior protests. The Town Council voted to censure the AEC. A local union appealed to the Senate Banking Committee for an investigation of AEC's housing practices; the local newspaper criticized the Commission editorially and, during the succeeding months, protesting telegrams and letters flowed in a steady stream to AEC, the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy, and the Tennessee representatives in Congress.

Although not yet self-governing, the people acted in the finest political tradition. They took advantage of a new federal statute providing for rent control under certain circumstances growing out of the Korean conflict. They forced a public hearing under the Federal Housing and Rent Control Act of 1947 which concluded that a housing shortage existed in Oak Ridge. Later, in response to a petition from Oak Ridge residents, the Secretary of Defense declared Oak Ridge a critical defense area, providing for a continuation of rent controls.

Finally, all the rent control statutes ran out and the new charges became effective February 1, 1954—2½ years later. AEC later estimated that the people saved close to $3,000,000 by their first venture into politics. They had learned early an old political adage—"If you can't legislate, litigate."

While this controversy was going on, a group of citizens, with the encouragement of AEC town management people, attempted to forward the cause of incorporation. By sheer pressure they forced a referendum on the question in March, 1953. As predicted, incorporation was overwhelmingly rejected.

From the outcome, it was clear that not only did the people wish to hold AEC's feet to the political fire at that particular time, but they wanted to know something more definite about AEC's position on financial assistance after incorporation, and on home sales.

Beginning in 1948, study after study was conducted into the future of the city. They were made by recognized authorities in the field, but on such a complex subject it was not unexpected for the experts to disagree, which did not help to clarify the matter for the average citizen. Also, it was soon apparent that the "average citizen" had differences in views. At one time, the Chamber of Commerce, the Union, and the Town Council each had expert consultants adding to the confusion.

In an attempt to bring some order out of the confusion that seemed to be developing, the AEC hired the Bureau of the Census to conduct a public opinion poll. Several community leaders pointed out that the poll could only reflect the confusion and that the results would be misleading. Future events would prove their judgment correct—at least in some respects.

The results of the poll were made public in the latter part of 1952. Among other things, the findings reflected that 68% favored private ownership of housing! 53% said they would buy their present homes; 90% found Oak Ridge an excellent or good place in which to live; 58% favored self-government. It was this last finding that led the AEC and certain groups of citizens to bring about the disastrous referendum on incorporation of March, 1953.

The negative view reflected by this referendum led to a much more conservative stance on the part of both the AEC and Town Council. Both sides dealt in generalities and each accused the other of failing to provide leadership.

Another significant difference between the community and AEC made itself known at this juncture. Council meetings were open to all and AEC representatives participated in the formation of community views on incorporation. On the other hand, local AEC positions had to be approved in Washington before they could be released locally. In the case of legislation, further secrecy was required until the approval of the Bureau of the Budget was sought and obtained.

It now appears that the local AEC made its specific recommendations for legislation some time in 1952. These recommendations were adopted by the AEC Washington Headquarters in February, 1953, a month before the defeated referendum. Then followed months of discussion and negotiations with the Bureau of the Budget. Finally clearance was granted and on April 12, 1954, the Commission submitted to the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy draft legislation providing for the sale of the communities of Oak Ridge and Richland, Washington. Until this date the citizens of Oak Ridge had little inkling as to the specific recommendations that AEC would make to Congress. However, following the referendum in March, 1953, public interest in incorporation was virtually dead. In fact, "Incorporation" had become so controversial a topic that civic leaders frequently shied away from any discussions on the matter.

During this long bureaucratic process, the mind of Town Council turned to other matters of public interest and concluded the year 1953 by adopting a resolution requesting the AEC to abandon its adherence to Tennessee school segregation practices and "to direct the appropriate officials to proceed to administer the Oak Ridge schools without

segregation or discrimination as to race or color." If it did nothing else, this resolution took the people's minds off the problems of incorporation. The Council felt the full brunt of the community discontent. Popular feeling forced the withdrawal of the resolution, and a recall election was directed at Waldo Cohn, the councilman who introduced the resolution. A majority of those who went to the polls voted for the recall petition, although the number fell short of the required two-thirds. This public sentiment, however, did not prevent the integrating of the schools under federal edict in the fall of 1955.

It was an even more conservative Town Council that turned to scrutinize the AEC proposed legislation. Council found in broad outline the bill recommended:

(1) That the Commission will assist the residents in planning and preparing for local self-government;

(2) That the Commission will transfer governmental responsibilities and donate municipal facilities to local bodies as soon as the residents have had an opportunity to decide upon the form of local organization and to establish responsible governmental bodies capable of taking over local government functions;

(3) That the transfer of governmental functions, once made, will be complete, with the Commission not retaining power over or responsibility for local governmental decisions.

(4) That, because of the inadequate tax base presently existing in the new communities, and in order to avoid sudden and drastic changes in the level of governmental services provided, the Commission will make financial contributions toward the operation of school, hospital, and other municipal functions for a maximum period of 10 years, with the expectation that the amount of the contributions would progressively decrease as the new cities take vigorous steps to increase their tax base;

(5) That single family and duplex residential houses will be sold at 90 percent of appraised values to tenants, but all persons connected with the AEC project would have a prior right over the general public;

(6) That existing tenants of commercial, church, and non-profit properties will have a priority right to purchase, at the appraised value; and

(7) That FHA or VA mortgage insurance and, if necessary, direct AEC mortgaging, will be made available to purchasers of residential properties and that such purchasers will be given some measure of protection against the special risks of buying houses in a "one-industry town" through a commitment by AEC to relieve them of liability for deficiency under mortgage indebtedness if the level of employment at atomic energy projects falls drastically.

It was quickly realized from the mood of the people and the schedule of Congress that action in the 1954 session was improbable. Reflecting public sentiment, Town Council asked for additional time and suggested that consideration of the bill be postponed until the 1955 session. The proposed legislation was allowed to die in committee.

During the second half of 1954, the AEC draft legislation began to receive a thorough examination by various groups in the community. The Town Council established a committee to recommend amendments to the draft; the local labor union engaged municipal consultants to review the legislation; the Chamber of Commerce retained the Bureau of Public Administration of the University of Tennessee; and the League of Women Voters sponsored the formation of the Oak Ridge Facts Advisory Council. Inasmuch as these various groups arrived at widely divergent views on how the proposed legislation should be amended, the Town Council's first attempt to reconcile the various opinions was unsuccessful; but subsequently, some degree of unanimity was obtained.

In the meantime, the AEC transmitted a revised bill to the Joint Committee. This revision submitted in April, 1955, was based upon the 1954 version with some important changes. The 1954 draft had provided for assistance to a future municipality and to other entities receiving any AEC facility for a period of ten years, based upon the difference between the cost of providing municipal services in the final year of AEC operation and the revenue to be received by the local entities in any future budget year. The 1955 revision limited the assistance in Oak Ridge to school purposes and provided fixed dollar amounts over a fifteen-year period initially $497,000 and declining 6-2/3% each year thereafter.

On June 10, 1955, the long awaited public hearings on the AEC proposed legislation were conducted in Oak Ridge by a Subcommittee of the Joint Committee. Serving on the Subcommittee were Representative John J. Dempsey of New Mexico, chairman, and Senator Albert Gore of Tennessee. Twenty residents and special representatives testified before the Subcommittee during the one-day session. The general tenor of the statements favored early Congressional action on the draft legislation, although most of the witnesses recommended that the financial assistance provision was inadequate and restrictive. Numerous sug-

gestions were made to the Subcommittee on what type of financial assistance arrangements should be included in the legislation.

The bill was complicated, as you can imagine, but community interest concentrated on two obvious points. How much will I have to pay for my house or place of business, and what will be the tax rate?

Here, AEC in its backup for the proposed legislation departed from its traditional position of "comparability" and proposed a modified cost basis. The tax figure used was $2.14 for each hundred dollars worth of property. Assuming that this was levied at 100% of value, whereas other cities in Tennessee assessed at much less than actual value, this meant that Oak Ridge had a tax rate about twice the state average. The switch in principle away from "comparability" was not lost on the local leadership.

Further hearings and discussions were held during July in Washington and compromises were worked out there with the help of Senators Gore and Kefauver and Representative Howard Baker.

Finally, the bill entitled the Atomic Energy Community Act, passed both houses of Congress and became Public Law 221 of the 84th Congress after signature by President Eisenhower on August 4, 1955. The statute differed from the AEC proposal in the following respects:

(1) Single and duplex houses would be sold to the occupant at 15% discount from the appraisal price.
(2) An additional 10% could be deducted in lieu of an indemnity clause.
(3) Allowance would be made for tenant improvements—this provision was later applied to commercial property.
(4) The local tax rate would be set on the basis of "comparability."
(5) The AEC would make annual assistance payment on a "just and reasonable" basis for a period of 10 years.

This is, of course, an oversimplification of an extremely involved law, but it does reflect the principal provisions of interest to the average citizen. The administration of the law was fraught with controversy, but the end was in sight; perhaps it was more the beginning, since the next several years would prove to be the most turbulent in the city's young history.

The AEC's decision to withdraw certain housing from the sale caused a flood of appeals to Washington. A sudden 2,500 drop in population did not help the differences of opinion on commercial property appraisals. All sorts of questions arose concerning priorities and financing. Another uproar came with the closing of one of the grade schools.

For the first time, every citizen was involved personally and there was little time or interest in broader community problems. A meeting in October, 1956, to approve a draft of an incorporation statute was attended by less than fifty people.

But action toward incorporation continued and a major hurdle was overcome on March 20, 1957, when the Governor signed a specially designed bill allowing for incorporation of Oak Ridge. Even here all was not without ruckus. A late amendment changed the provision for the election of seven councilmen at large to election of councilmen by voting districts, which in Oak Ridge meant twelve. Local leadership felt strongly about this change, but a later referendum indicated that the amendment was preferred by the voters.

The enactment of this "Oak Ridge Law" marked the beginning of a quickened pace that would continue through 1957, 1958, and 1959. By midsummer 1957, the Town Council hired a Chicago firm to study the fiscal problems of incorporation. The firm found itself in a very odd position—working for Town Council but probing the organizations, operations, policies, workloads and costs of the municipal, hospital and school actvities of AEC contractors. This difficulty may have been responsible for the spotty results reported in May, 1958. None of its recommendations were accepted, but one served to fan the flames of the most bitter controversy in the town's existence.

The question which aroused and divided the community concerned who would receive the new hospital. Under the Community Act, the hospital would go to the agency chosen by the people. A referendum was agreed upon and three organizations were listed: the City, Oak Ridge Hospital, Inc. (the old hospital trustees), and the Methodist Church. Emotions ran high and the Chicago firm's recommendation that the hospital should go to the City was received with less than total elation.

The referendum was postponed several times, but finally on August 7, 1958, voters streamed to the polls in unprecedented numbers and expressed a choice for: (1) Methodist Church, (2) Oak Ridge Hospital, Inc., (3) the City of Oak Ridge (if incorporated by August, 1959).

Under the rules, the City was dropped and a runoff referendum was held on November 4 and won by the Methodist Church. Feelings

ran so high that on November 10, Town Council declined to act on a motion to offer congratulations to the Methodists.

One good effect of the hospital controversy was to point up the need for incorporation. By December, an organization known as "Citizens for Incorporation" was formed. This group took a positive approach with the statement, "The time has come to stop the arguments, the side issues, the delays; now is the time to incorporate." With a broad cross-section of the community behind it and a forceful program of information and persuasion, Citizens for Incorporation led the voters to the polls on May 5, 1959, in a resounding victory for incorporation, 5,552 to 395.

Following the referendum of May 5, 1959, occurred the election of the new city officials; a referendum on municipal installations and utilities; the transfer of roads and streets; the conclusion of a financial assistance agreement with the AEC; the hiring of a City Manager; transfer of the schools; reappraisal of property for tax purposes; the gradual build-up of city staff; the first city budget; the first city tax rate; the first determination of annual assistance; the first sharing of state taxes; the preparation of ordinances; and the transfer of the remaining facilities and utilities. Finally, on June 6, 1960, after eighteen years, the government of the city of Oak Ridge could meet the Lincolnian test of democracy—"of the people, by the people, and for the people."