

# *Back of Oak Ridge*



**By: Grace Raby Crawford**

**Edited by: David Ray Smith**



*About the Author*

Grace Raby Crawford

A gentle lady who is 88 years old at the time of this writing, Grace Raby Crawford is unique in many ways. She is living independently. Her home is comfortable and welcoming. She has many memories of her life and holds especially dear those memories of Paralee Raby. In the writing of "Back of Oak Ridge" she pays special tribute to Paralee.

Her mind is as clear as a bell and she enjoys talking about the times of her life. She has lived a full and rewarding life and has much to be proud of. However, this special memory documented in "Back of Oak Ridge" is more than just her tribute to Paralee. It is a documentary of a place in time, a people uprooted, a sacrifice given and a world-changing event that required these people to sacrifice their way of life for the greater good of mankind.

David Ray Smith

The cover photograph of the Perry and Paralee Raby home comes from the Kingston Demolition Range photographs. Donald Raby has researched and made these photographs available of the old home places taken in 1942 when the government took approximately 1000 properties in present day Oak Ridge and displaced approximately 3000 people to make way for the Manhattan Project.

To obtain copies of this material send e-mail to: [drsmith@esper.com](mailto:drsmith@esper.com) or phone (865) 482-4224.

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## PREFACE

I was reared in the Oak Ridge area and lived there until the land was acquired in 1942 by the government for the "Great Project" - as it was called then. And because of this, I feel it a great privilege to put into words my memories of the community as it was – ***BACK OF OAK RIDGE***.

It has been said of the Oak Ridge area, "...from a Wilderness to an atomic city," but many people do not realize that a growing and thriving community existed there. There were many acres of cultivated fertile fields, beautiful farm homes, churches, schools, post offices, lumber mills, grain mills and at one time an ammunition (powder) mill. Various other small businesses were also in the community.

There were large peach and apple orchards from which fruit was hauled to market in other places. There were cattle, sheep and hogs on most every farm. None of these are found in a "wilderness."

The people who lived in this community before 1942 were very proud and independent. Hard work and consistency was the key to their success. A slogan of the 1934 graduating class of Robertsville High School (of which I was a member) was, "The door to success is labeled PUSH". This applied not only to the Robertsville class, but to all who lived in this area, for it seemed they were always striving to push ahead to greater things. As I hope to make clear in the pages of this story, this was truly a *great* place !

## CHAPTER 1

### *Community Description*

Farming was the main source of livelihood in this rural community. Each family grew enough vegetables, corn, hay, and legume crops for it's own use, along with some extra to sell at the market. The extra money received from the sale of their surplus commodities was used to meet the taxes on their land and to help with the education of their children. They also kept cows and chickens for their milk, butter, eggs, and hogs for the meat for the family table. No one was hungry in this small community. They did not have the fanciest of foods, but they had "down to earth" good eating.

Although this community was located in a remote section of the county, as some might call "back in the sticks", this did not in the least alter the ambition of each household for their children to get a good education. This educational goal was realized in many cases as children from these families grew up and became teachers, principals, doctors, dentists, lawyers, ministers, and county officials. Some even became State and Federal officials.

Other than the farms, the community was comprised of three schools - Robertsville High School, Wheat High School, and Scarboro<sup>1</sup> Elementary School. There were also many churches. The mail was distributed by the post office at Edgemoor. There were many country stores to which the residents brought their produce to exchange for the needed items for the home that could not be raised or made.

There were no theaters, country clubs, skating rinks, or any large places of entertainment. There were, however, plays, spelling bees, and old-fashioned pie suppers at the schools. Fiddlers' contests were held at various places for the entertainment of anyone who wished to attend. Many parties and dances were held in the homes at which the old as well as the young people took part.

Going to church was really a recreation for the young people then. They would walk many miles to church and in "Revival Time", which was usually in the fall, all the churches would combine for one "Great Campaign for Souls." The Methodist minister would preach in the Baptist church and visa-versa as denominations were left out and souls were won. The rural roads were filled with young and old people on their way to the revivals. Many young men, looking for pretty girls to walk home, found their life companions in this way.

Another form of recreation was fishing, which was more for a hobby and for food rather than for selling. I remember my grandfather taking me fishing with him when I was a very young girl. We fished from the mouth of a creek going into Clinch River up near the little place of Elza. This being my first try at fishing, I was very excited. Grandfather would bait my hook as I was afraid of the red worms we used for bait. It wasn't long until I got a nibble on my hook, and he showed me how to jerk my pole to catch the fish. When I felt the nibble again I gave the jerk, like he said, and lo and behold I had one! It was only a sun perch weighing less than a pound but I was as thrilled as if I'd caught a five-pound bass. Now this may sound dull to the young kids of today, as they have so many kinds of recreation, but to me the walks in the woods and fishing trips were anticipated with much excitement.

Another joy to the younger ones of this little, secluded valley was to go after the cows in the evening and find one with a new calf or to gather eggs and maybe find a "nest full" up in the hayloft.

In the autumn there were "chestnut hunts" for the young people. They gathered in groups to go hunt for the many chestnuts that had fallen in the forest and which were very good

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<sup>1</sup> The original name for the family for which this community and school are named spelled their name Scarbrough, but over time the spelling has been altered until the location is now known as Scarboro.

to eat. The couple who came back with the most chestnuts got the reward of a kiss from each other, in front of the group. Candy "pullings" were often held after the molasses (sorgum) was made and were a lot of fun for everyone. Sorgum molasses was cooked to a "candy" stage and stirred until it was cool enough to "pull." With a person at each end, each pulled and twisted until the candy became stiff and then laid it out to harden.

Although the chief occupation of this community was farming, some of the men worked away in the coal mines of the Cumberland Mountains. They came home to their families only about every two weeks. Others found work in the then, far away city of Knoxville and boarded there for weeks at a time, as transportation was a problem. They made as few trips as possible; the only route being by train until in later years the bus became available. At that time very few of the people owned automobiles.

There was much good timber in this vicinity. Men from other counties brought in sawmills and bought the timber from the farmers, cutting it into lumber to be shipped out to the city for sale. This provided employment for the men of the area after their crops were harvested, and brought in much needed extra income.

Hunting and fishing were great hobbies of the "townsfolk". The forests were filled with game, such as squirrel, rabbit, quail, etc. Many also hunted opossum, skunk, coon, weasel, and fox for their pelts, which they sold for very low prices, but every nickel counted on their income. There was much work to this bit of income. They had to spend long hours hunting the animals. After the animals were killed and skinned, the pelts were stretched over a pointed board and hung to dry. They were then packed in boxes for shipment. Many days went by before the final reward of this work was seen.

These were a closely-knit group of people. They could be called "one big family." Love was everywhere and each was his "brother's keeper" in sickness and in health.

Several black families resided in the area and were always accepted as part of the community. I remember with great respect one black family that lived near the settlement called Scarboro. Four generations lived together - the grandmother, mother, son, and grandson. They were loved by all who knew them.

The grandmother, who we called Aunt Ann, had been a slave before and during the Civil War. Her daughter, known as Aunt Jose was a child of Aunt Ann and her master. It was a practice of the masters to sire children by the female slaves and sell the children. But Aunt Ann was freed after the Civil War and got to keep her daughter.

I always felt welcome in their home and shared many meals with them. Because they were a very religious family a prayer of thanks was always said before a meal. Aunt Jose often attended New Hope Baptist Church and was always welcome there even though the congregation was white.

The upper class of the community always sought Aunt Jose out to cook for them on special occasions as her reputation of being the "best cook" for miles around was found to be undisputed. When someone was sick or in need, Aunt Jose prepared her delicious food and carried it to them.

Aunt Jose was also a midwife and delivered many babies in the homes of the poor who felt they could not afford a doctor. She never charged a fee but only took what she was given, which many times was nothing. She offered these services from a heart filled with love. No night was too dark or weather too bad for her to go when duty called. She could be seen walking down the roads carrying a kerosene lantern to light her path.

Other black families lived over on what was then known as Black Oak Ridge, along the road now known as West Outer Drive. They owned small farms and were a very independent

Back of Oak Ridge

and self-supporting people. There was a Baptist Church in this vicinity that also served as a school for black children.

The services of the black men were always in demand by the farmers and timber men because they were such good workers. They bought and sold at the same stores with everyone else and received the same respect. As I have stated before: "each was his brother's keeper," was demonstrated here by black and white alike.



**Grace Raby (Crawford) is third from left - Editor**

## CHAPTER 2

### *The General Store*

The local merchandise stores were important to the residents because they were in walking distance of most of the homes. Other means of transportation was at a minimum, although some people rode horses or drove wagons.

These stores provided most of our necessities such as: groceries, feed for livestock, hardware, yard goods (cloth), sewing notions such as thread, needles, scissors, thimbles, buttons and trimmings for dresses. School supplies were available there and before the textbooks were supplied by schools these too were sold in these stores. One store even sold ladies millinery and all the young ladies were pleased to go there for a new hat as hats were more popular then.

Groups of men would also gather at these stores to exchange views on politics and "spin yarns" of their experiences on hunts and fishing trips. They were always jolly groups laughing and joking with each other, especially on rainy days when the farm work would come to a halt.

I would now like to make honorable mention of some of the merchants who owned these stores. The first store I remember as a child was located in Robertsville and was owned by John W. Key, a man whom to know was to love and respect. He was a deacon in the Baptist church and a Sunday School teacher for his entire active life. The children loved him dearly, for a child never went away from his store empty-handed. He always gave them candy in some form or a piece of fruit, and he gave them many words of praise and encouragement. Mr. Key's store was also used as a voting precinct for Robertsville voters and at one time housed a post office.

Another one of the old stores was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Clark Crozier, whose ancestors were among the first settlers in the area getting their land by land grants. They also sold the necessary items for the residents and did well for themselves as well as for others.

To mention more of the merchants of Robertsville: John McWane, Curt Dover, Luke Hendrix, Mr. and Mrs. Bill Lockett (Bill and Lizzie), and Mr. and Mrs. Nash Copeland (Nash and Juanita).

In the vicinity of Elza was a store owned by Mr. and Mrs. E.P. Hill who, after they left Elza, moved to Clinton, Tennessee, and operated a store there for many years. Mr. Hill lived there until he passed away at the "ripe old age" of 101. Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Copeland (Glen and Frances) also owned a store in the Elza area.

In the Scarboro area were stores owned by Mr. Aleck Lockett, Mr. and Mrs. Hobert Brimer (Hobe and Bess) and Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Ford, and Mr. Jim Freels.

The Bethel area contained the stores of Tom Freels, Jim Diggs, Charles Brennen, and Henry Copeland.

As is obvious, the residents "Back of Oak Ridge," had no lack of general merchandise stores and the owners were loved and respected by all.

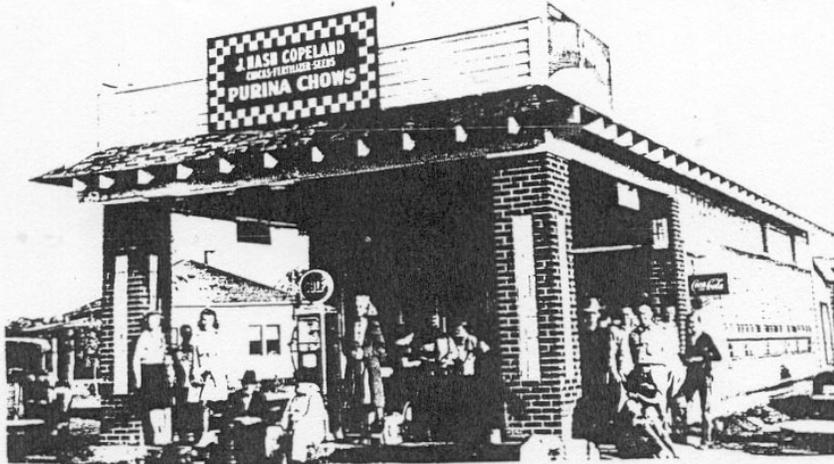
Also, at that time, there were men who came around in wagons and hacks and bought eggs, live chickens and butter from the farmers paying them in cash or taking orders for merchandise to be delivered on the next trip. These men were called "Peddlers". The kids could be heard saying, "Mom's gone to meet the peddler".

As the years passed and progress was made from horse-drawn vehicles to gas-propelled ones, there came what we called the "Rolling Stores". These were closed-in trucks built by their owners and equipped with shelves on each side to hold and display the items for

## Back of Oak Ridge

sale. These also made the rounds once a week saving the people many steps to the general stores.

The "Rolling Stores" were a real treat for the children who never got to go to the other stores very often. They eagerly awaited the arrival of the Rolling Store because, with their allowance of just a few pennies, they could pick and choose from the candy and chewing gum displays to their hearts' content.



*COUNTRY STORE — The Nash Copeland Store is seen in a pre-Oak Ridge picture as community residents gather late in the afternoon to pass the time of day. Seated in front of the gas tank is one of the area's better known residents, "Uncle Billy" Hightower, who was a well-known minister in Robertsville.*



*CROSS ROADS STORE — Jim Freels, uncle of Bill Freels, Y-12, owned and operated this store in the Scarboro community. Other stores were owned by Hobart Brimer and Edgar Ford. Storekeepers in the valley often trade eggs, berries or almost anything for merchandise. If a surplus of eggs amassed, they graded or "candled" them and transported them to Knoxville.*

## CHAPTER 3

### *The Plague*

October was here again and the leaves were taking on their beautiful colors of red, yellow, and gold. The morning and evenings had a nip of the cool air of autumn. The crops were almost all harvested and winter was not far away. Autumn of 1914 was one that would long be remembered by many in this rustic community.

The water supply of the vicinity was from wells, springs, and cisterns; there was no chemically treated water then. Sometimes these water supplies became contaminated causing people to be ill after drinking the water. It was in this manner that a "darkening cloud" came over the bright days of this autumn in the form of an epidemic of Typhoid Fever. Hardly a home escaped the awful plague. Many lost loved ones in death, others had the long ordeal of sickness wishing they could die.

In one little humble but clean home, lived a frail young lady with her husband. One day she too was stricken with this terrible fever. She had contracted the disease while tending two of her sisters who were stricken with it. Because of the loss of her sisters she was very sad and had no desire to live (She told me in later years that she had prayed to die).

So for months and months she seemed to hang by a thread between life and death, being delirious most of the time. But God, in His wisdom, had plans for this little frail lady and as days went by she began to show improvement. Later, she was able to be moved to another home she and her husband had rented.

However, she was still so weak that she had to be carried from the buggy to the house by her husband. She gradually grew stronger and was able to do her work again. For some reason she appeared to have a new lease on life.

## CHAPTER 4

### *The Prophet*

The valleys and forests of this settlement were named after many of the old settlers there or for the locale of the land. For instance, Robertsville took its name from a family, Roberts and Scarboro<sup>2</sup> from the Scarbrough family. Bethel Valley was named for the church in this valley, Bethel. Bear Creek Valley, known for the bears that had been seen along the banks of the creek.<sup>3</sup> A valley that was mostly inhabited by the Gamble families was so named, Gamble Valley. Pine Ridge was so named because of the number of pines that grew there; Black Oak Ridge for the many stately oaks thereon; Haw Ridge for the abundance of the Black Haw trees it produced; and many other names recognized by those who lived there.

It was in one of these very familiar places called the Flat Woods that an old gentleman known to many people as the "Prophet" lived. His name was John Hendrix<sup>4</sup>, a name to be remembered in later years. He was the stepfather of the frail lady spoken of in the preceding chapter. His second wife, Martha Jane,<sup>5</sup> was her mother. John and Martha Jane had a son named Curtis Allen Hendrix.<sup>6</sup> But John was not a man for a quiet home life; he was a rambler and a dreamer. Some even thought he was "touched in the head."

John Hendrix made many predictions for the future that eventually came true. He told many weird stories of how these predictions were revealed to him. Many times he went into the woods and be gone for days with no one knowing where he was. When he returned, he would say he had been getting "revelations" by sleeping on the ground so many nights.

He told us that here in this very community where we lived would be a great city with many large factories. He also predicted that a railroad would pass right by his little farm and through Elza and that a tunnel would be cut through the ridge. All of this came true just as he said it would.

The little farm he had reference to was a fifteen acre tract of land (now Hendrix Creek Subdivision in Oak Ridge)<sup>7</sup>, purchased from an adjoining neighbor, and paid for by day work on the farm for this man. It took many days' work to pay for the farm at fifty cents per day - the farm wage at that time.

Because of John's long excursions in the woods and from the exposure of sleeping on the ground in all kinds of weather and from malnutrition, he became ill. Once while sleeping on the ground his hair froze to the ground. His illness was soon diagnosed as Tuberculosis, a very dreaded disease in those days.

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<sup>2</sup> Research shows the original family name was Scarbrough and over time the name of the community has been changed to Scarboro - Editor

<sup>3</sup> One story has a bear being killed by a person using an axe - Editor

<sup>4</sup> John Hendrix's father was Luke S. Hendrix, his grandfather was Morgan Hendrix and his great grandfather was Garrett Hendrix who came from Wilkes County, NC before 1794.

<sup>5</sup> Martha Jane (Whitehead) Gregory Hendrix was born in Happy Valley, Blount County and had seven children when she and William A. Gregory divorced and she later married John Hendrix in 1908. Paralee Gregory Raby was her daughter.

<sup>6</sup> Curtis Hendrix wrote a poem expressing his feelings about leaving the area that was to become Oak Ridge. This poem is included in a later section of this material devoted to more details of John Hendrix's remarkable life story.

<sup>7</sup> Hendrix Creek Subdivision is now located where the "Flat Woods" and John Hendrix's home place was located. His grave is on the top of the hill. The spring is still there at 108 Holbrook Lane and the location of Curtis Hendrix's place is just north of the spring. The location of John and Martha Jane's home was just southwest of the spring. The location of the 15 acres John Hendrix deeded to Perry and Paralee Raby and where they moved a house to that property is just about 100 yards west of the spring.

Most people were afraid to be near Tuberculosis victims. It was because of this that John found himself "Set Out" from his wife and son, into a small cabin on his little farm. This farm adjoined his wife's farm here in the Flat Woods.

It did not take long for John to realize he was too ill to live alone and he did not know what would happen to him. He wondered who would risk their life to take in someone like him with "Consumption". He thought of his stepdaughter, Paralee, who was then married to Perry Raby. So he sent them a message by a neighbor saying he wanted to talk to them. They readily came to his side, knowing he was alone and thinking they might be of some help. When they arrived they found him in a very serious condition.

John told Perry and Paralee that he was a very sick man and asked them if they would take the risk of caring for him. They did not hesitate a moment in telling him they would be glad to be of any assistance possible. For this service he made them a deed to his small farm.

12

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## Warranty Deed

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*John Hendrix & Wife.*  
TO  
*Perry Raby & Wife.*

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REGISTER'S OFFICE  
STATE OF TENNESSEE }  
*Anderson* County }  
RECEIVED FOR RECORD *17*  
day of *May* A. D. 191*5*  
at *9* o'clock *A.*M.  
Noted in Note Book *8*, page *137*, and  
Recorded in Book of Deeds *F*  
Vol. *3* Page *515*

WITNESS MY HAND. *David*  
Fee Paid *1.25*  
*Geo. T. Riggs*  
REGISTER.

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State Tax	\$	<i>18</i>
County Tax	\$	
Clerk's Fee	\$	<i>15</i>
Total	\$	<i>33</i>

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NEWS PRINT, CLINTON, TENN.

Deed to John Hendrix farm

They moved him to a little house where they lived on a farm they had rented. It was there that Paralee came to know the deeper thoughts and character of her stepfather.

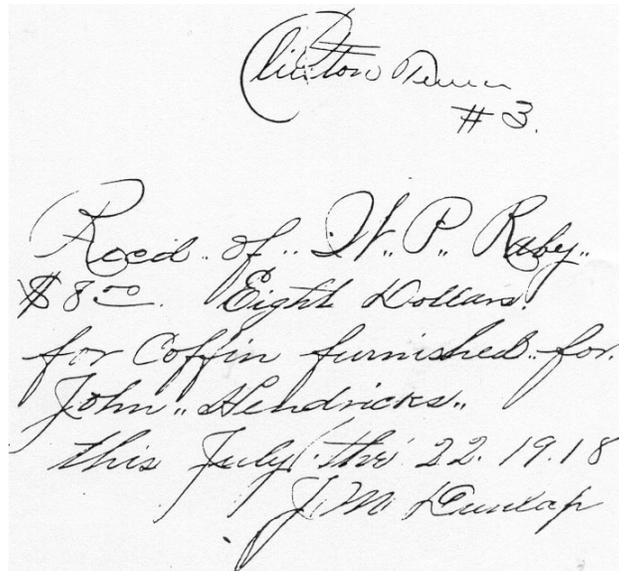
John was very humble and appreciative of the care and assistance given him and often would remark, "Why would anyone be so kind to an old man like me? I do thank you over and over."

As the days passed, the disease took more and more of his strength, until he was so weak he had to be turned in bed and fed the few bites he could be coaxed to eat.

One day he called Paralee to his side and said, "I have a request to make if you and Perry will see that it is carried out". "What is it, John?" she asked gently. He answered, "I want to be buried on the top of the hill overlooking my little farm and apple orchard so I can watch the thieves out of my apples." This request was very typical of the man, John Hendrix.

On June 2, 1915 he told the couple anxiously watching his every breath, "I'm going to be with the angels." He only took a few more breaths until he slipped away into the Great Beyond.

In those days it was the custom of some to have homemade coffins. Certain men in the community followed this trade. One such man by the name of Jim Dunlap was called upon to build a coffin for John. The cost for this coffin was \$8.00. A copy of the receipt (in Jim Dunlap's handwriting) is shown below:



A handwritten receipt on a piece of paper. At the top, it says "Clinton Dunlap #3." Below that, the main text reads: "Recd. of W. P. Raby \$8.00 Eight Dollars for Coffin furnished for John Hendricks this July the 22. 1918 J. M. Dunlap".

**Receipt for John Hendrix's coffin**

Most of the coffins were made of walnut wood, dressed and brightly varnished, lined with white satin, and well padded. On the outside were shining metal handles. The completed coffin was a beautiful piece of handiwork.

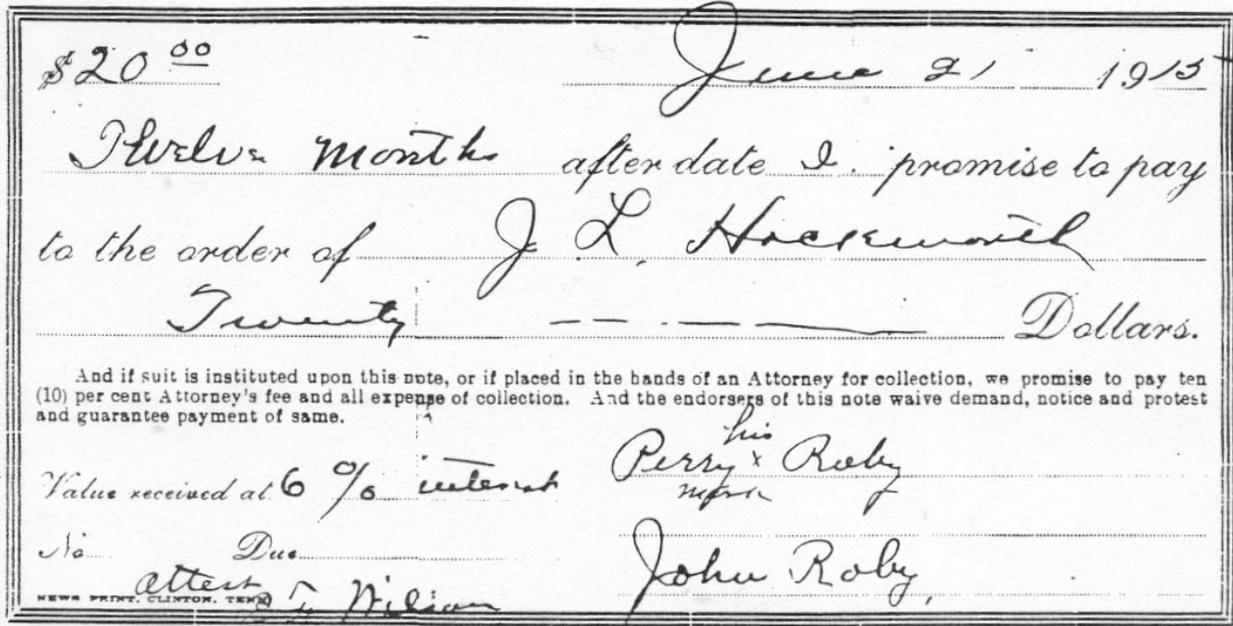
As John had requested, a grave was dug by several of his neighbors upon a hill overlooking his little farm. After a brief graveside service, he was lowered to his final resting place there. The grave can now be located in the Hendrix Creek Subdivision off Lafayette Drive in Oak Ridge.

Little did people realize then that many of his predictions would come true in this generation and he would be known as the "Prophet of Oak Ridge." The "many factories" he referred to turned out to be the ones that helped win World War II. There is indeed a railroad

that passes on the edge of what used to be his farm and goes through Elza and into a tunnel through the ridge.

The passing of John brought more loneliness to Paralee and Perry. It seemed they had been through so much for their young lives. Yet they went ahead making plans to build a home on the property left them by this unique and lovable man, John Hendrix.

A small frame house, standing on a farm nearby, was found to be for sale, but would have to be moved. This would mean it would have to be torn down and rebuilt. The couple decided to buy it anyway, but the price was \$20.00 and they did not have this much in a lump sum. A note was drawn up for them to pay this \$20.00.



**Note for purchase of house**

Money was scarce in those days and the couple had just passed through many hardships, with many doctor bills and other expenses. Therefore \$20.00 was a large amount of money to them.

Of course, this was just a humble little shack in the Flat Woods the couple could call home. In the meantime, they were still living in the rented house where they lived when John passed away. They were sharecroppers on this farm.

## CHAPTER 5

### *In Memory of Paralee*

Paralee's life had been saddened greatly by the passing of her two sisters and now her stepfather. The days were long and dreary for her, but this sadness was of short duration. In exactly two months and one week after the death of John Hendrix, a "ray of sunshine" came to brighten this home in the form of a little four and one-half pound baby girl, whose mother had just passed away. The father of the baby felt it would be impossible for him to care for such a small and delicate child, so he asked Paralee and Perry to take this baby and rear it as their very own. I have a copy of the letter from the father asking them to keep the baby.

Paralee has said many times that this was another reason she lived through the great siege of Typhoid Fever, when she had no desire to live. She had been permitted to take care of her stepfather until his death and now a tiny baby had come to share and bless their lives. From that day on the child was the center of Paralee and Perry's lives. The baby was so small and undernourished it took a lot of tender loving care to keep her alive. Paralee carried her on a pillow until she was three months old. She watched anxiously for every ounce gained, hoping she would grow to be a normal-sized baby. As months passed, the baby began to thrive and grow on the home-pasteurized milk and mashed vegetables from the table.

Soon the baby grew into a little girl, yet she was very thin and delicate all through her childhood. This caused Paralee many anxious hours and to be almost too protective of her daughter.

Paralee's house was not one of luxury but one of contentment and the love it takes to make a real home. Paralee was a devoted wife and mother and also "loved her neighbor as herself." She went into the homes of her neighbors when there was sickness and cared for them, regardless of the type of illness or the weather. However, she nor the child ever contracted any of the contagious diseases. There was no harder working lady anywhere.

She was a devoted Christian and took the child to church from the time she was old enough to be out. She walked two and one-half miles each way to the church, carrying the baby before she was old enough to walk.

When the little girl, Grace, was six years old, Paralee, had a son of her own, who died at birth. This seemed to cause her to love Grace even more. She said many times that if the boy had lived there would have been no difference in the two.

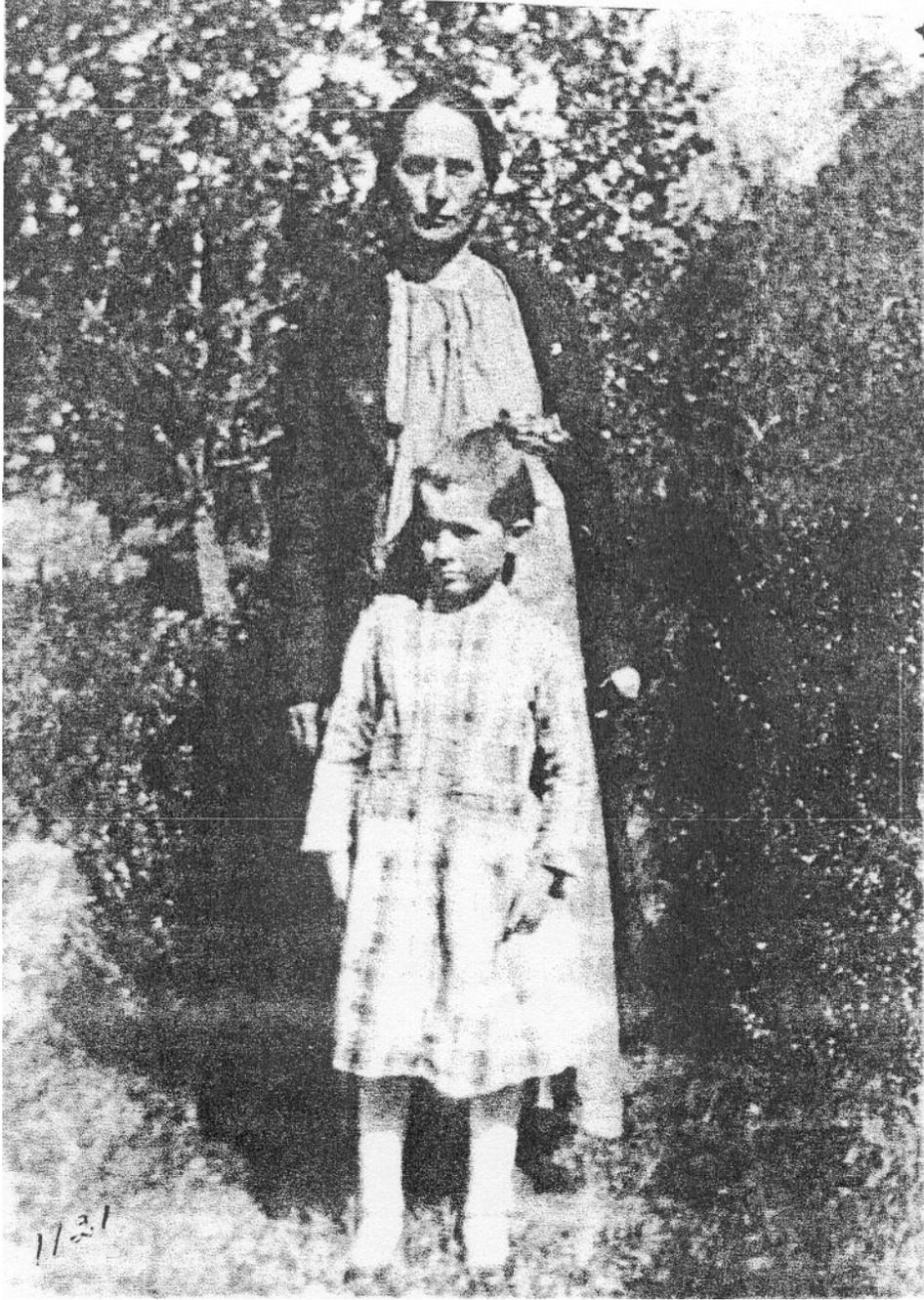
Since Grace had no brothers or sister to go to school with her, Paralee was pleased to have her half brother, Curtis Hendrix who was a few years older than Grace, to watch after her at school. He was like a big brother to Grace.

Curtis dropped out of school after completing the eighth grade but Grace continued on through high school, fulfilling the goal Paralee had set for her. Paralee spent many days of hard work along with her husband in order to provide Grace with the necessities of school.

Because their home was in the Flat Woods and some distance from the main road with a small forest to pass through, Paralee always walked with Grace to and from the school wagon, and later a bus, until she was through high school in 1934.

All the memories of my childhood and young adulthood are precious and centered around this dear lady. No one could have had a better mother than I had in Paralee. This chapter is dedicated to her and the precious memories I have of her as one of the Greatest.

With love,  
Your Daughter, Grace



**Paralee and Grace**

## CHAPTER 6

### *The "Secret Project"*

The routine of life was very much the same from year to year in this quiet settlement among the hills of Tennessee. Until one day in 1941 a change took place when World War II was declared. This wasn't the first time the young men had been called away from this little community in the hills to serve their country. It had only been a little over twenty years since World War I when many loved ones were taken to fight; some returned but some did not. However no sacrifice was too great for these people who loved their country so much.

World War II seemed to be different and even worse than World War I because so many young boys were being called to duty, yet the people of these valleys and hills never complained. They were still willing to make the sacrifice for their country. This was the Volunteer State and a Volunteer community.

Then in 1942 came the rumor that the Government was going to take a large amount of land in this secluded valley, our beloved homes. This was supposed to be a "secret project" concerning the war and would help America to win. "What could it be?" everyone was asking. "What could they do here?" Everyone was apprehensive, thinking they would have to move off and leave what they had worked for all their lives, into strange places, where there would be all new faces.

Then on November 11, 1942, it became definite that we would have to move. As can be seen from the dates on the letter from the War Department, sent to Paralee Raby, we had less than one month to leave our homes.

Back of Oak Ridge

WAR DEPARTMENT  
CORPS OF ENGINEERS  
KINGSTON DEMOLITION RANGE  
LAND ACQUISITION SECTION  
HARRIMAN, TENNESSEE

Parlee Raby  
Rt. 1  
Oliver Springs, Tenn

November 11, 1942

The War Department intends to take possession of your farm December 1, 1942. It will be necessary for you to move, not later than that date.

In order to pay you quickly, the money for your property will be placed into the United States Court at Knoxville, Tennessee.

The Court will permit you to withdraw a substantial part of this money without waiting. This may be done without impairing your right to contest the value fixed on your property by the War Department.

It is expected that your money will be put in court within ten days, and as soon as you are notified, it is suggested you get in touch with the United States Attorney to find how much can be drawn.

Your fullest co-operation will be a material aid to the War Effort.

Very truly yours,

*Fred Morgan*  
Fred Morgan,  
Project Manager

Letter from War Department to Paralee Raby

## Back of Oak Ridge

To be separated from lifetime friends and loved ones was more than many could stand. Many of the older people really grieved themselves to death. They lived only a few months, or at the most a few years after they were forced to leave their homes here on such short notice.

The younger people scattered to various places in this county and other counties in Tennessee. They bought homes and settled down to a new way of life, so very different from the life in which they had grown up. Very few moved farther than a fifty-mile radius of this place.

Paralee and Perry too found a new abode in another small community called Hillvale. This is near the town of Norris, Tennessee. As in Robertsville, they quickly made new friends and were soon about their usual way of helping others. But the family circle back of Oak Ridge had been broken and could never be the same again.

Many letters were exchanged from place to place for a while. But as time passed, they became less frequent and people lost touch with their neighbors and friends of the past.

We who left our homes hold no resentment. We are proud of the great part it had in the winning of World War II and feel like that we did not sacrifice our homes in vain. Each family that left would probably agree that "Back of Oak Ridge" was not just a little spot of earth, but "a little spot of Heaven."

## CHAPTER 7

### *Additional Material provided by Editor*

The following information is added to the original "Back of Oak Ridge" by David Ray Smith in October 2003 and is provided to further clarify and expand on the history of **John Hendrix, The Prophet of Oak Ridge**.

As a result of my research into the history of John Hendrix, it is my belief that he was born in Bear Creek Valley in 1865 while his father Luke Hendrix lived on a farm near the intersection of Mount Vernon Road and Bear Creek Road. The junction of these roads can be seen in the 1942 aerial photos showing the original routes of the roads. Much of Mount Vernon Road still uses the original route. Bear Creek Road's old location is now First Street in Y-12.

It is my intent to submit this documentation of the location of John Hendrix's birthplace in the hopes of seeing an historical marker erected marking the location. Grace Raby Crawford has confirmed the location of the house where Luke Hendrix lived. Donald Raby has conducted research into the deeds for the property in Bear Creek Valley that tends to support Luke Hendrix living there at the time of John Hendrix's birth.

### **John Hendrix<sup>8</sup>**

**November 9, 1865 – June 2, 1915**

John Hendrix's great-grandfather was Garrett Hendrix. He came from Wilkes County, North Carolina to Beaver Creek in Knox County before 1794. David and Samuel Hall, who had been Revolutionary War soldiers also came from Wilkes County. The Hall and the Hendrix families lived in the same neighborhoods and intermarried. Samuel Hall's wife was Letitia Hendrix. David Hall is buried in a cemetery near the Bull Run Steam Plant close to where John Hendrix lived at one time.

John Hendrix's grandfather was Morgan Hendrix, one of the first settlers in Morgan County. He moved back to Knox County by 1830 and died there in 1843. Morgan had seven children by his first wife, one being Luke S. Hendrix. Morgan married a second time to Sally Bowman. They had 10 children. Dr. E. L. Hendrix of Oak Ridge is a great-grandson of Tarleton Hendrix, a half-uncle of John Hendrix.

John Hendrix's father was Luke S. Hendrix.

John Hendrix was born November 9, 1865 in Anderson County. He was the eighth son of Luke S. and Jane (Wallace) Hendrix. His family lived in Morgan County at the times of the 1850 and 1860 census. Just prior to John's birth, his father sold the farm in Morgan County and moved to the Robertsville area (John Hendrix may have been born while his parents lived on a rented farm in Bear Creek Valley - the present location of Y-12!). In 1888, John married his first wife, Julia Ann Griffith of Morgan County. She was the daughter of Joel and Cloe J. (Hall) Griffith, and granddaughter of John and Sara Griffith. They had four children: Jessee, Elzora Elizabeth, Lela and Ethel Perrgold Hendrix. Donald L. Gray of Oak Ridge was the son of Elzora, who married Roy Lee Gray.

John and his family lived on the west side of the hill above the present-day site of the Bull Run Steam Plant. Their youngest daughter Ethel who was only two years old died of

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<sup>8</sup> Taken from SmithDRay's Web Pages – John Hendrix at url:  
<http://SmithDRay.tripod.com/or/johnhendrix.htm>

diphtheria. John's wife, Julia Ann, blamed John for her death. It seems John had spanked Ethel sometime earlier and in her mind, Julia Ann somehow blamed John. Ethel was buried in the Black Cemetery that was moved from the Bull Run Steam Plant site. Her grave is in the relocated cemetery, marked by TVA with an "unknown" marker. Around 1900, Julia Ann took her three children and went with her brother to Arkansas. She later wrote John a letter telling him that she and the children were not returning. She later married a Mr. Bradley near Camden, Arkansas.

John took the death of his young daughter and his family leaving him very hard. It was about this time in his life that he began to think more seriously about religion and to see visions. He prayed to God to tell him what these visions meant and a voice said if he would lay with his face on the ground for 40 nights and pray, it would be revealed to him. John stayed in the woods for 40 days and nights, praying and sleeping on the ground. A neighbor lady found him lying with his hair frozen to the ground and brought a quilt to cover him. She stated that hearing him pray would make your hair stand on end. The cold ground contributed to his tuberculosis. When John began to describe his visions, people thought him insane and he was imprisoned for a time at the county farm. John "dug out" and escaped but was spotted by authorities. John shouted to them from outside the fence that the farm was an evil place and that within a month God would strike the building and burn it down. When lightning did strike and burn the building, some people began to fear him as a witch. However, many of the things he said were not taken seriously by those who heard him talk about his special gift of visioning...at least not while he lived, but later they would remember and wonder at the accuracy of what he foretold.

An example of his eerie insight follows:

More than 40 years before Y-12 or Oak Ridge existed, told the future regarding Bear Creek valley that lay between two East Tennessee ridges and Black Oak Ridge just north of that valley.

He first predicted that soon a railroad would be built running from Knoxville through the central part of Anderson County. This prediction proved accurate and caused Hendrix to consider himself capable of even more amazing prophecies. He was told by a voice, he said, to sleep on the ground for 40 nights and he would learn about the future. He did as he was told and on the 41<sup>st</sup> day he emerged from the woods and beginning at the local crossroads general store he told everyone who would listen about the amazing things he had seen in his visions while sleeping on the ground.

"Bear Creek Valley some day will be filled with great buildings and factories and they will help toward winning the greatest war that will ever be."

"There will be a city on Black Oak Ridge and the center of authority will be on a spot middle-way between Sevier Tadlock's farm and Joe Pyatt's place."

"A railroad spur will branch off the main L&N line, run down toward Robertsville and then branch off and turn toward Scarboro."

"Big engines will dig big ditches and thousands of people will be running to and fro. They will be building things and there will be great noise and confusion and the earth will shake."

"I've seen it. It's coming." John also named the people around him that would be alive to see it happen and named the people who would not be alive, including him. He also notched the trees indicating where the main arteries of roads and railroads would be. He also marked the command center.

John Hendrix died in 1915 at age 49 and is buried on a hilltop in a subdivision of Oak Ridge named "Hendrix Creek."

His predictions were uncannily accurate. Twenty-eight years after his death, Y-12 was built in Bear Creek valley. It was constructed in 18 months with nine huge buildings and all the necessary support facilities. The uranium U-235 needed for the first atomic bomb was produced there that led to the end of World War II. The city of Oak Ridge was built on Black Oak Ridge. The "Castle on the Hill" or center of authority was built where approximately between where Tadlock's and Pyatt's place were before they were removed to make way for the Manhattan Project. The railroad spur was placed as Hendrix described it.

Paralee Raby and her husband Perry took Hendrix into their home and cared for him until his death in exchange for his 15-acre farm. This was done at the request of John Hendrix's second wife, Martha Jane (Whitehead) Gregory. Martha Jane Whitehead was born in Happy Valley in Blount County on April 28, 1867 and had first married William A. Gregory of Blount County. They had seven children before they were divorced. Gregory was born in Cades Cove on July 4, 1864 and died March 1, 1910. He is buried in the cemetery at Primitive Baptist Church, Cades Cove, Blount County, Tennessee. Martha Jane and John married in 1908. Martha Jane and John had a son (Curtis Allen Hendrix) born September 4, 1909.

When John came down with "consumption" or what was later known as tuberculosis, Martha Jane, desiring to protect her young son (Curtis Allen Hendrix) from John's sickness, "set him out" to a small building on his farm of 15 acres that joined the property where she and John lived. When he continued to grow more feeble and sick she farmed out the care of John to Paralee and Perry Raby, her daughter and son-in-law. On April 22, 1915, John and Martha Jane deeded half of the 15-acre farm he had bought six years earlier to his stepdaughter Paralee (Gregory) Raby and her husband Perry in return for their taking care of John. The other half of the property was to go to them at John's death. John Hendrix signed the deed by placing an "X" his mark. It is thought that he must have been very sick as the census records of that time do not identify him as being illiterate. Wayne Gregory has provided documentation through a copy of the face of the deed that it was registered in Anderson County at 9 A.M., 17 May 1915. It was noted in book 8, page 137 and recorded in book of deeds "F", Volume 3, page 515. The deed is signed by George T. Riggs, Register. Don Raby provided a copy of the actual deed that shows it was signed on April 22, 1915 and recorded on May 17, 1915. Hendrix had acquired the 15 acres from a neighbor and paid for the land by working at farm labor for 50 cents a day.

Grace Raby Crawford the author of "Back of Oak Ridge" tells the story that John Hendrix said "'I'm going to be with the angels.' and after a few more breaths Hendrix was dead." Crawford also notes that it was during this time of illness that John Hendrix spent with Paralee where she came to know the deeper thoughts and character of her stepfather. Grace Raby Crawford is the adopted child of Paralee and Perry Raby and having come to live with them soon after the death of John Hendrix, she experienced John Hendrix through the remembrances of Paralee and John's widow, Martha Jane. (At this writing Grace Raby Crawford is 88 years of age and her mind is as clear as a bell. I am thoroughly enjoying her help with my research as I am also the help of Wayne Gregory, John Hendrix's step-grandson.)

When John died on June 2, 1915, Perry Raby paid \$8 for the coffin and also chiseled a field stone to mark the grave. It took Perry Raby three years (July 22, 1918) to pay the \$8 for the coffin built by Jim Dunlap (I now have a copy of the handwritten receipt courtesy of Grace Raby Crawford.) In later years, Curtis Allen Hendrix planted a stand of boxwood trees around the grave. The original field stone marker was likely removed when a second marker, the one photographed in 1944 was placed there. This second marker was removed at some time (If anyone knows the whereabouts of the first crude stone or the second stone photographed in 1944, it would surely be a great find and would be an excellent addition to John Hendrix's grave! Please contact the Editor by e-mail at [drsmith@esper.com](mailto:drsmith@esper.com) if you have ANY information

regarding these markers.). The present marker was placed there as a result of a joint class project of the Robertsville and Jefferson Junior High School students in 1967.

When the Manhattan Project began to acquire land for the Kingston Demolition Range, later the Clinton Engineer Works and even later Oak Ridge, among the first to be given notices in November 1942, were Martha Jane Hendrix and her son Curtis. They were told that they would have to move by December 1 in a curt letter from the government dated November 11, 1942. The letter stated: "The War Department intends to take possession of your farm December 1, 1942. It will be necessary for you to move not later than that date." Curtis was given \$300 for his 60-acre farm, home and buildings. Perry and Paralee Raby moved to the Hillvale community near Norris taking Martha Jane with them where she lived for approximately one year. Martha Jane then moved to a home on Brickyard Road in Powell owned by her son Andrew M. Gregory (Wayne Gregory's father) where she lived until her death on October 19, 1945. Her wake was held at Paralee and Perry Raby's house in Hillvale and she is buried in the Hillvale Cemetery beside Paralee Raby and her husband Perry Raby. Curtis moved his wife and seven children to Union County. Curtis was killed by a quarrelsome neighbor on July 9, 1944 and is buried in the Galbreath Cemetery in Anderson County, TN. His widow was Thelma Lee "Linda" or "Lindy" Haney Hendrix.

Curtis was bitter about having to leave his home. He wrote the following free verse poem to express that bitterness:

*The Planned and Organized Society (sponsored by Elinoir)*

*"Come listen to me, people,  
And hear my tale of woe,  
And if you feel it tiring,  
I'll shut my mouth and go.*

*"I had a home in Robertsville.  
They call it Oak Ridge now.  
T'was home for all my younguns  
and their chickens and the cow.*

*"One day a bunch of men rode in  
With papers in their hands  
And great big shining badges.  
They came and took our land.*

*"They read a lot of great big words  
I couldn't understand,  
But when it was all over  
I didn't own the land.*

*"I had seen the Revenooers (sic)  
Come and search and take the stills,  
But I didn't think the government  
Would ever seize our hills.*

*"Of course, we had to get right out  
And start to paying rent,  
But now, what can poor folks do  
Against the government?"*

Back of Oak Ridge

*"Just sixty acres t'was all I had.  
Some rich land and some poor.  
But the check they sent me  
Wouldn't buy a pure bred bore (sic).*

*"Now see I ain't complaining.  
It's just my blamed bad luck,  
For any deal I ever make  
I'm always getting stuck.*

*"Of course the government was right.  
They always are, you see.  
T'was just the land looked worse to them  
Than it ever did to me.*

*"I moved to Union County,  
Once famous for its stills,  
And bought another cabin  
and a bunch of slatey hills.*

*"For I couldn't keep my younguns  
And their chickens and the cow  
Without a little pasture  
And a piece of land to plow.*

*"But I've done seen me a vision  
And it's one I understand.  
In the none too distant future  
Working folks will own no land.*

*"There will be a bunch of planners.  
Everyone will live by plan.  
Plan our work, plan our religion,  
Plan our schooling and our play,  
Won't even have to study,  
'Now what must I do today.'*

*"The thing to do is win the war  
And when we end that strife,  
Stop electing Presidents  
For longer terms than life.*

*"Well I guess I'd better hush.  
I could have said some more,  
But here just let me whisper!  
I'm skeered (sic) of Elinor.*

*"Written by: Curtis Allen Hendrix"*

By: David Ray Smith

June 8, 2003

The above was written based on information provided by Evorie Loe, a descendent of John Hendrix and from genealogical information provided by Dennis Aslinger, John Hendrix's

## Back of Oak Ridge

great grandson. Evorie Loe's uncle, Vernon Hendrix wrote an article for the "Old Time Chronicle" in Pike County, AR. She also provided two articles from old newspapers, one by Marjorie P. Parsley and another by Anne Powell. Finally, I drew on additional information provided by Donald Raby, an avid researcher of the history of the pre-Oak Ridge communities and families. He is providing CD's of early home sites vacated for the war effort. The early photographs of the John Hendrix gravesite are the property of Mae Gregory Weaver who is the grand daughter of Martha Jane (Gregory) Hendrix, John Hendrix's 2nd wife. Recently Grace Raby Crawford, adopted daughter of Paralee and Perry Raby, and Wayne Gregory, step-grandson of John Hendrix and grandson of Martha Jane (Whitehead) Gregory Hendrix and William A. Gregory, have both provided additional information to clarify and confirm much of the above research. I am certainly in debt to both of them for all of their help!

## Back of Oak Ridge

Below are photos of the John Hendrix gravesite. First is the gravesite before the area surrounding the grave was developed into Hendrix Creek subdivision and after the Manhattan Project took over the land.



Back of Oak Ridge

Second is a close up of the gravesite. Note the fence and number of the gravesite (40).



Back of Oak Ridge

Third is the original grave marker. This photograph was taken by Ed Westcott on October 6, 1944. Ed was the official photographer of the Manhattan Project for many years.



Back of Oak Ridge

I took this photo in June 2003 and it shows how the gravesite looks today. The new grave marker was the result of an effort by Robertsville and Jefferson Junior High Schools in Oak Ridge. The earlier grave marker has disappeared, but was photographed in October 1944 by Ed Westcott, see photo on previous page.



## Back of Oak Ridge

Here is a photo of the Martha Jane Hendrix home when it was being taken by the government for the Manhattan Project. The photo was taken by the Corps of Engineers to document all the buildings on the land being taken by the government. Donald Raby has located copies of all the Corps of Engineer's photos and provided this image. He is making CD's of the old home places of the families who had to leave their homes when the government took the land for the war effort.

For more information on the photos and the Kingston Demolition Range Project go to the url: <http://www.kingstondemolitionrange.com/go.pwdg/enter>



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About the Editor

David Ray Smith

An avid historian, Ray has published articles in the Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture and the East Tennessee Encyclopedia of History as well as a series of web pages at [www.SmithDRay.net](http://www.SmithDRay.net) covering such diverse historical topics as John Hendrix, Nancy Ward, Dragging Canoe, Harrison Mayes, and historic trails such as Emery Road and Walton Road in Historic Trails (also published in the above historical publications). He is presently editing a history of his hometown of Delina, Tennessee and has spoken to schools on early East Tennessee History. Ray is a member of the Pellissippi Genealogical and Historical Society, the East Tennessee Historical Society and the Tennessee Historical Society. He lives with his wife Fanny Burns Smith in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where he works at the Y-12 National Security Complex. Ray and Fanny have two grown sons, who make their homes in Franklin, Tennessee along with Ray and Fanny's four grandsons.