

Lloyd C. Blackwell and the Bob Watson bus story

(as published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on June 7, 2011)

This is a story taken from an Oral History of Lloyd C. Blackwood of Knoxville, done under the City of Oak Ridge Oral History auspices and captured on video by Keith McDaniel. The interview was done on April 6, 2011 at 412 New York Avenue with Oak Ridge City Historian, Bill Wilcox, as interviewer. Permission has been granted by the interviewee to publish this excerpt in The Oak Ridger's *Historically Speaking* column.

Bill wrote the story as follows:

"Ray and I often get phone calls from folks asking questions about Oak Ridge or wanting to share their personal stories. I was delighted recently to talk with a hale and hearty, 94 years-young old timer who was a treasure house of information.

"Lloyd C. Blackwood, now living in Knoxville, was unusual in that his memory is so keen, and physically he seemed remarkably healthy, suffering mostly from poor eyesight. He said that after our interview he was going back home to get started on this year's vegetable garden.

"Lloyd is one of the earliest Y-12 workers I've met, coming to work on June 28, 1943 as a journeyman plumber working for Stone & Webster putting in Building 9731's water and sewer systems. That was the first building to be finished at Y-12, needed in a hurry because that's where they set up the first Alpha and Beta Calutrons to debug and improve them as well as to train the new Shift Superintendents who were to operate the big Calutron buildings then being built.

"Lloyd remembers the day that summer at 9731 when heavily armed guards showed up and surrounded the place. He later found out the guards were there because the silver had arrived for their big Calutron magnets. He recalls watching the workmen drilling holes in the 3" wide silver strips to mount them, with one man holding something under the piece to catch all the silver drilling dust.

"Lloyd worked in turn on each of the Alpha and some of the Beta buildings, then in 1944 moved to K-25 where he worked for Midwest Piping, J. A. Jones' prime piping contractor. Again he worked at first as a pipe fitter, but soon was promoted to foreman. He then advanced up the ranks to General Foreman, General Superintendent, and then Field Engineer in positions at K-27, then at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and finally came back to Y-12.

"His recall seemed to me nothing short of fantastic - he remembers dates and people's names and conversations so well. This was a City of Oak Ridge Oral History interview captured on video by Keith McDaniel. When available to the public, it will be a most interesting historical record.

"After the war, Lloyd went into politics in Oak Ridge, being elected to what I think must have been our second Advisory Town Council, that of 1948-1949. That Council was the first to work with Mr. Frederick W. Ford, the Community Affairs Director for the newly formed United States Atomic Energy Commission. Ford was effectively our post war's City Manager from 1948 to 1960, the 13 long years of the City's transformation from a subsidized 'Secret City' to a 'normal' City.

"Lloyd told me one grand story that needs to be added to our City's Black History. The Advisory Town Council in 1948 had only five members, each representing five town districts. The Scarboro district was represented by Bob Watkins, who Lloyd remembers well as a really fine person, very likeable.

"Bob came to Lloyd in the fall of 1948 and said he'd like Lloyd to help him by going with him to talk to Fred Ford about a problem. It had to do with the dozen or so of 'his' kids that had to ride the bus to Knoxville every day to go to the black Austin-East High School.

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"The busses always started out from Oak Ridge's main terminal downtown (where Security Square is now), and were invariably full of passengers before they got to Scarboro. So his kids always had to stand with their book satchels or whatever all the way over the then twisty and rough roads to school, being jostled and putting up with chatter from the other riders.

"Then at night it was the same story, the busses coming back from Knoxville all filled by the time his kids got on. So Bob wanted to go to Ford, tell him this story, and ask him for a small bus or vehicle to take his kids to school and bring them back.

"Lloyd said sure, he'd be very happy to help, and the two took their case to Fred. He listened to their pleas at length, but ended up the meeting shaking his head, 'No, Bob, we just don't have any money to give you that bus.'

"Silence followed. 'Well,' said Watkins, 'Then I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr. Ford. After the Christmas holiday break, I'll just take my kids over to the Oak Ridge High School and enroll them there. It is a federally funded school so they can just go there instead of all the way over to Austin East.'

"What!' said Ford, 'Are you trying to threaten me, Bob?' Bob said, 'Oh no, Mr. Ford, I'm just making you a promise.'

"The kids got their bus.

"And of course that was just the beginning of that story. In 1950 a small group of prominent Ridgers pulled together a group of 25 volunteers, most of them with advanced degrees, to offer high school classes at Scarboro, which became the first and only high school for blacks in Anderson County. In September that year there were 40 students enrolled in that program.

"Thanks Lloyd for this great story.

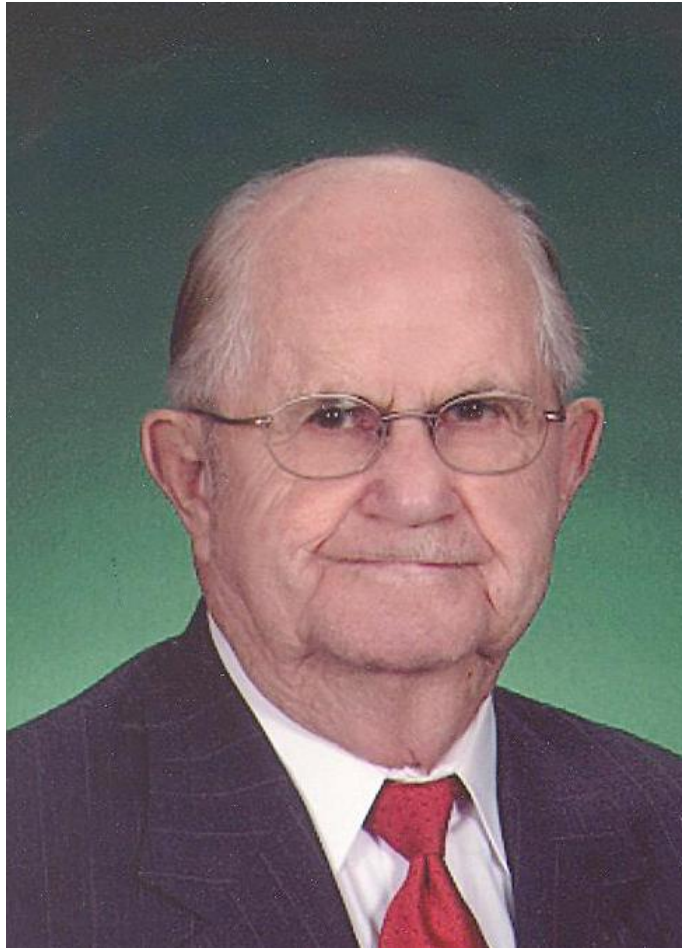
That concludes Bill's story based on the oral history interview. At my request, Bill obtained the following details from Lloyd along with a recent photograph included with this article.

In 1950, Lloyd was elected Anderson County Court Clerk. He said, "As County Court Clerk of Anderson County, I opened a deputy office Oak Ridge in September, 1950. It was located on Bus Terminal Road in a small building near the old Police Station."

This allowed citizens of Oak Ridge to purchase auto tags, driver's licenses, marriage and merchant's license as well as all other license required by Anderson County or the State of Tennessee. This would keep Oak Ridge citizens from having to drive nine miles on a two lane road to the Court House in Clinton. After more than 60 years, this office is still open. The office is now in the County Building just off Emory Valley Road.

The office opened with one employee, a Mrs. Bonnie Hicks, the wife of the Postmaster. The present office has four permanent employees who have thanked Lloyd for creating their jobs more than 60 years ago.

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