

Anderson County

Established 1801 County Seat: Clinton

Early History

Prior to European settlement, Native Americans lived in the area. With the Treaty of the Holston, settlers were prohibited from settling in the area, but settlers eager for land quickly violated the treaty. By 1801 enough people were living in the area to merit the creation of a new county. Anderson County received its name from Joseph Anderson, a former U.S. Senator and judge from Knoxville. It was formed from parts of Knox and Grainger counties. The first county seat was called "Burrville" in honor of Vice President Aaron Burr. However, after Burr killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel and was accused of treason for plotting to separate the western territories from the United States, the name of the town was changed to Clinton. The name was likely in honor of Vice President George Clinton.

Civil War and Reconstruction

The people of Anderson County relied on agriculture to support themselves prior to the Civil War. Most farms were small due to the mountainous terrain, and few used slave labor. Tennessee's secession in 1860, led to bitter divisions in Anderson County. The county, like most in Tennessee, suffered during the war years. Following the war, agriculture slowly reemerged, and coal mining became an important industry.

In 1865, John Hendrix, one of Anderson County's most well-known and eccentric native sons, was born. Following the death of his young daughter and his separation from his wife, Hendrix became very religious. Hendrix heard a voice that directed him to go into the woods and sleep on the ground for forty nights. When Hendrix emerged from the woods, he had many stories to tell of visions of the future. His friends and neighbors feared he was insane and sent him to a hospital for the insane. Hendrix quickly escaped and told the authorities that "God's going to destroy that place." A few weeks later, lightning struck the hospital, and it burned to the ground. Hendrix later remarried and continued to speak of his many visions to his stepchildren. John Hendrix, nicknamed the Prophet of Oak Ridge, died in 1915 before many of his visions seemingly began to come true.

The Great Depression and World War II

Anderson County underwent significant changes during the Great Depression and World War II. In 1933, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) began its first dam in Anderson County. It was named Norris Dam in honor of Senator George Norris, who had long championed development in the Tennessee River Valley. Thousands of people had to be moved from their homes because the project flooded several communities. Norris Dam created jobs, electricity, flood control, and public parks for the region. The planned community of Norris, TN was also created as part of the project.

“There will be a city on Black Oak Ridge. Big engines will dig big ditches and thousands of people will be running to and fro building things.” In 1942, these words spoken years earlier by John Hendrix seemed to be coming true. Overnight, families were moved off their lands, and a large secret city was built to house the world’s first large-scale uranium enrichment facility. The city known as Oak Ridge would churn out the enriched uranium used in the “Little Boy” bomb, which was dropped on Hiroshima in August 1945 and brought about the end of the war with Japan.

Oak Ridge was an ideal location for part of the Manhattan Project for a number of reasons. The recently completed Norris Dam could generate the vast amounts of electricity necessary to power uranium enrichment. Oak Ridge also had access to railroads for transportation, but it was isolated enough to allow the true scope and purpose of the project to be kept secret. Ultimately, Anderson County gave up almost one-seventh of its land area to the secret facility that was first known as the Clinton Engineering Works.

Work on the Manhattan Project generated thousands of jobs and brought people from all across the country to East Tennessee. After the war, many of them stayed in Oak Ridge and developed a world-renowned scientific community. Partnerships between the private sector and government in Oak Ridge continue to result in scientific innovations.

The Civil Rights Movement

Anderson County also received national attention during the Civil Rights Movement. In 1956, Clinton High School was the first public high school in the south to desegregate following the Brown vs. Board of Education decision. Twelve brave African –American students, known as the Clinton 12, walked past jeering crowds to enter Clinton High School. The National Guard was called in to keep order for two months. In 1958, the building was dynamited, and students had to attend school at the previously abandoned Linden Elementary until 1960, when Clinton High School reopened. The Clinton 12 has been honored with a statue at the Green McAdoo Cultural Center. The Green Mc Adoo Center, housed in the formerly segregated Clinton Colored High School, recounts the story of the Clinton 12 and preserves Anderson County’s heritage as an important Civil Rights site.

For more information, see

[Y-12 National Security Complex Library](#)

[Green McAdoo Cultural Center](#)

[Anderson County Chamber of Commerce](#)

The Girls of the Atomic City by Denise Kiernan

City Behind a Fence: Oak Ridge, Tennessee 1942-1946 by Charles Johnson