

HISTORY

FIRST DRAFT

Grand Junction residents had few clues about secret Manhattan Project

When atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, in early August of 1945, most Grand Junction residents likely learned details about the



BOB SILBERNAGEL

bombing the same way their counterparts around the country did — through articles in their local newspapers.

“TRUMAN ANNOUNCES REVOLUTIONARY NEW ATOMIC BOMB DROPPED ON JAPS,” read the blaring headline in the Aug. 6, 1945, evening edition of The Daily Sentinel, the day the first bomb was detonated over Hiroshima. Below was a story about the bombing by the Associated Press.

But almost nobody living here at the time knew some of the uranium used in those two atomic bombs may have been processed right here on the outskirts of Grand Junction, at a site along the Gunnison River where the Department of Energy facility now sits. In 1942, that site was purchased for the extremely secretive Manhattan Project, which developed the first atomic weapons.

I say some of the uranium for the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs may have been processed here, because it isn't clear, even 68 years later, exactly where the material for the bombs originated.

Records show the Manhattan Project acquired uranium for



Photos by MUSEUM OF WESTERN COLORADO/Special to The Daily Sentinel

Overview of the Atomic Energy Commission compound (originally the site of the Manhattan Project facility) along the Gunnison River near Grand Junction, as it appeared circa 1965.

its weapons from three sources. The first, and perhaps the most important, was the Belgian Congo, which had extremely high-grade uranium. The second was from Canada and the third from old vanadium mill tailings in Colorado and Utah, which were processed in part at the Manhattan Project property in Mesa County.

But there are questions if any uranium other than that from the Belgian Congo went into those first two bombs, said Bill Chenoweth, a retired ge-

ologist who worked for the old Atomic Energy Commission in New Mexico and Grand Junction and has written several articles about the Manhattan Project and its connection to Colorado.

“We just don't know for sure,” he said this week about the source of uranium that went into the bombs. “There was a graduate student in Utah a few years ago who wrote that he didn't think there was enough time for the uranium from this area to have been processed and sent back east to be used in those bombs.”

Additionally, Canadian officials later adamantly denied that any of the uranium they supplied to the United States was used in either of the bombs dropped on Japan.

But other historical articles about the bombs say uranium from all three sources was used in them.

One thing's for certain: the War Department at the time was actively searching for domestic sources of uranium, not wanting to depend on it coming from foreign countries.

It found a readily available, already mined source in this region. The tailings piles from old vanadium facilities in Durango, Uravan and Moab, Utah, proved to be high in uranium. The tailings only required some processing — first at mills in Uravan, then at the Manhattan Project facility near Grand Junction and finally at facilities in New York and Oak Ridge, Tenn., — to provide weapons-grade uranium.

that Leahy said he understood why the uranium was needed.

Furthermore, censorship during the war made it difficult to discuss such matters. According to an Aug. 8, 1945, article in the Sentinel, “For the past year or more, wartime censorship restrictions have been such that the word uranium could not be mentioned in any news story dealing with mining activities in this region.”

Carnotite — a mixture of potassium, vanadium, uranium and radium — was the accepted code word, Chenoweth said.

Still, there are hints in some Sentinel articles that a few folks in the area had an inkling of what was going on. The same article that mentioned censorship featured an interview with Blair Burwell, vice president of the United States Vanadium Corp., which would later become Union Carbide. His company performed some of the preliminary processing of the old vanadium tailings for the Manhattan Project.

“New attention is being drawn to the carnotite mining region on the western slope of Colorado by the revelation of the use of atomic power of uranium ... For the first time it has been revealed that carnotite ore is one source of this vast

energy,” he told the Sentinel. But Burwell was careful not to say anything about local ore being used in the bombs.

Another column in the days following the bombings, by Alva Swain, the Sentinel's Denver correspondent, overhyped local resources but still linked them to the bombs: “Colorado has the only mines in the world that produce some of the precious metals that are used in the new explosive unit,” he wrote.

But it wasn't all breathless enthusiasm for the new bombs and atomic energy. An Aug. 8 editorial in the Sentinel, titled “Awesome responsibility,” discussed the immense power of atomic weapons, and expressed concern that such power must remain closely guarded so that it didn't fall into the wrong hands. “Atomic combat on a global scale would soon reduce the earth to a heap of rubble with all life extinct,” the editorial said.

Such concerns, at least, haven't changed in the past 68 years.

Thanks to Michael Menard and Dave Bailey of the Museum of Western Colorado for their assistance, as well as to Bill Chenoweth.



Atomic Energy Commission office building at the compound along the Gunnison River, probably from the 1960s.



The compound along the Gunnison River near Grand Junction as it appeared in the early 1950s, not long after the Manhattan Project turned the facility over to the new Atomic Energy Commission.

PEOPLE & TELEVISION

SENTINEL WIRE REPORTS



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Miss Kay Robertson, left, and Phil Robertson renew their vows in a scene from the season 4 premiere of “Duck Dynasty.” A&E says nearly 12 million birds of a feather caught the season premiere of the hit unscripted series on Wednesday night.

Fans flock to ‘Duck Dynasty’ premiere in record numbers

NEW YORK — A&E says nearly 12 million birds of a feather caught Wednesday's season premiere of its hit unscripted series “Duck Dynasty.”

The network said the episode took its place as the No. 1 nonfiction series telecast in cable history in total viewers as well as all key demographic groups.

The fourth-season premiere grew by more than one-third in total viewers over last season's debut. Set in Louisiana bayou country, “Duck Dynasty” follows a brood of brothers who manufacture duck calls and love to go bird hunting.

New episodes air every Wednesday at 8 p.m. Mountain time.

Timberlake to perform at MTV Video Music Awards

NEW YORK — Justin Timberlake is set to perform at the MTV Video Music Awards later this month.

The pop icon will also receive the Michael Jackson Video Vanguard award at the Aug. 25 awards show, the network said Thursday. Timberlake is tied with Macklemore & Ryan Lewis for the most nominations, with six each.

Timberlake's nominations include video of the year, best male video and pop video for “Mirrors.” His comeback album, “The 20/20 Experience,” is the year's best-selling album. He'll release “The 20/20 Experience: 2 of 2” on Sept. 30.

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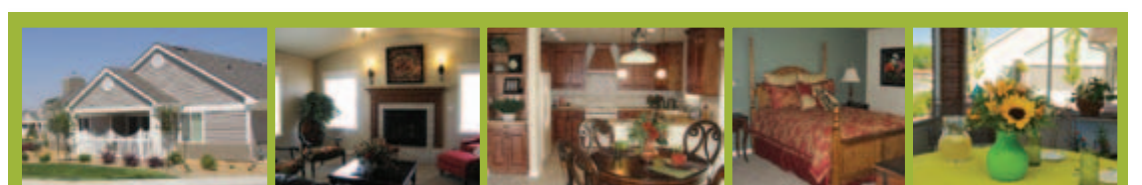
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