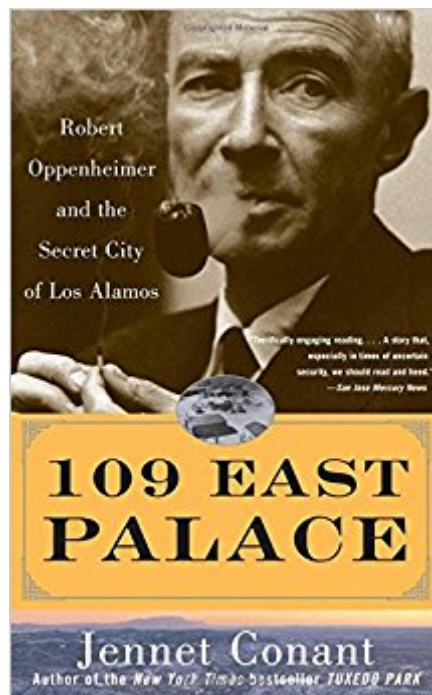


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# 109 East Palace: Robert Oppenheimer And The Secret City Of Los Alamos



## Synopsis

In 1943, J. Robert Oppenheimer, the brilliant, charismatic head of the Manhattan Project, recruited scientists to live as virtual prisoners of the US government at Los Alamos, a barren mesa thirty-five miles outside Santa Fe, New Mexico. In 1943, J. Robert Oppenheimer, the brilliant, charismatic head of the Manhattan Project, recruited scientists to live as virtual prisoners of the U.S. government at Los Alamos, a barren mesa thirty-five miles outside Santa Fe, New Mexico. Thousands of men, women, and children spent the war years sequestered in this top-secret military facility. They lied to friends and family about where they were going and what they were doing, and then disappeared into the desert. Through the eyes of a young Santa Fe widow who was one of Oppenheimer's first recruits, we see how, for all his flaws, he developed into an inspiring leader and motivated all those involved in the Los Alamos project to make a supreme effort and achieve the unthinkable.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Conant, author of the bestselling *Tuxedo Park*, offers a human look at the brilliant physicists who for more than two years, along with their families, lived, laughed, despaired and rejoiced in a secret, sequestered, for some claustrophobic city in the New Mexico desert. Despite its grand name, 109 East Palace was the nondescript office in Santa Fe that served as a gateway to the Los Alamos complex. The narrative is framed by the perspective of Dorothy McKibben, who, in running that office, issuing security passes and coordinating logistics, was, says Conant, the "gatekeeper" to the hidden world of Los Alamos. Conant focuses on the day-to-day experience of the scientists, technicians and families stationed at Los Alamos, fleshing out their history in unexpected ways.

While her protagonists are brilliant men and women, they're also vibrant characters who chafe at authority, fall in love, argue over housing and drink to excess. Less about the science of building the bomb, the book highlights the creation of a unique place and time in which that bomb could be built, and Conant (the granddaughter of a Manhattan Project administrator) brings to life the colorful, eccentric town of thousands that sprang up on a New Mexico mesa and achieved the unthinkable. Agent, Christine Dahl. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In 1943, a young widow named Dorothy McKibbin was hired as Oppenheimer's assistant to run the Santa Fe office of the secret weapons laboratory at Los Alamos. At 109 East Palace Avenue, she greeted newly arrived scientists, reminding them to use their aliases while in town and never to identify themselves as physicists. Conant, whose grandfather was a Manhattan Project administrator, mostly sidesteps political issues to focus on the absurdities of day-to-day life at the desert lab. McKibbin fielded numerous complaints from the scientists' wives, who had to struggle with massive coal-belching stoves, hand-churned washing machines, and a chronic shortage of diapers. Meanwhile, their husbands, when not handling plutonium, drank heavily and played pranks: once, the operator of the P.A. system was heard paging Werner Heisenberg, who was otherwise engaged, in Germany, designing the Nazi bomb. Copyright © 2005 The New Yorker --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

What a great read. I can't say enough about the insight Jennet Conant puts into this work. She has done a masterful job weaving the intricacies of the bomb development, political up-heaval and meshing of over inflated egos into a precise, easy to digest, complex subject matter. We all know Oppenheimer was dubbed, the "Father of the Atomic Bomb," but how was he able to do it is the real story. We were in a race to beat Germany to the draw. Everyone knew, if Hitler got there first, he'd waste no time nuking Moscow, London, Warsaw or any other target in Europe. General Groves chooses Oppenheimer to lead the charge at Los Alamos. Talk about two diametric individuals, Oppie is the quintessential academian while Groves is hardcore military. War does make strange bedfellows. But the glue that holds this tenuous enterprise together is Dorothy McKibbins whom Oppie hired. Without her organizational skills and calm demeanor, it's questionable whether the Manhattan Project would have succeeded. She was the prop master behind the curtain that allowed the performers to shine. You name it and she saw it was handled even it wasn't in

her job title: housing, food, transportation, entertainment, lost luggage, passes, credentials. No one stepped foot into the compound until she vetted him or her. The only time she allowed a stranger onto the base was when a B-29 pilot arrived late for a meeting. She sized him up in a few minutes and decided, he was okay. The pilot? None other than Colonel Paul Tibbets. I think she said she was a good judge of character. No matter what task Oppie asked Dorothy to perform, she never balked. She, like many women were mesmerized by this soft spoken giant in the world of Physics. Whether he knew it or not, he had quite an effect on the female persuasion, yet stay true to his wife Kitty. Without going into too much detail, she loved this man for his energy, kindness, compassion and wit. Oppie's drawback was his intelligence and superior attitude. Many of his colleagues embraced it while others, who felt his harsh wit, held high resentment, including the military. After the war, we are aware of the McCarthy hearings and how they were designed to weed out any and all people who were remotely connected to the Communist Party. Many of the scientists who worked on the bomb, for whatever reasons had joined the party, but were not active. It was the thing to do. The identification of Fuchs and the Rosenbergs as Russian spies added salt to the wound. Oppenheimer would be grilled at congressional hearings for not releasing the name of a would-be informant. His naivety of political workings would be his temporary downfall in the public eye. No textbook or theorem could prepare him for the inner workings of Washington. This is an excellent read for anyone interested in the inner workings of Los Alamos and the individuals who launched the world into the atomic age. Five Stars!

This book is so interesting and engaging I felt I was right there in Santa Fe and Los Alamos with Oppenheimer, his secretary, Dorothy, and all of the scientists and other characters. It is a fascinating read historically and is told in such a personal way I could really be there during the hectic and funny times as well as during the gut wrenching dilemma the scientists found themselves in working on such a project and its unknown future. I lived in New Mexico for ten years and knew very little of this. For anyone who's interested in the Manhattan project, WW11 or just wants a really good story I highly recommend "109 E Palace".

A wonderful read. Extremely well written. It brought back the drama of America's secret A-Bomb and life on the "The Hill", Los Alamos, N.M. I was a post war schoolboy and we lived there. My father, an eminent radiologist, headed the fledgling radiation and cancer therapy department in the new Los Alamos Hospital. Radiation was magic. Anyone privileged to see an isotope in a darkened room marveled at its glow. At our social level we hobnobbed with international scientific luminaries

befitting my father's status. Adults still wore badges in the tech areas and labs and to clear the guard posts at both city entrances. Jennet Conant recreates all the kooky Los Alamos society, the hectic lifestyle and the mystery of radioactivity and nuclear bombs. The Lodge was there steak dinners and cocktail parties. In the surrounding forests and arroyos lived game, including deer, bear and rattlesnakes. On weekends my brother and I, grade schoolers, strapped on hunting knives and hunted blue belly lizards. It was taboo to cross No Entry signs. Conant captures it all: the Navajo Indians, Santa Fe and the La Fonda Hotel, the silver and turquoise belts and bracelets. I still wear Indian turquoise belt buckles. This is a really great read and I salute Jennet Conant.

With family living in the Taos area for some time, we have had the pleasure to travel throughout New Mexico cities and pueblos many times. With each visit we learned more about the history and culture of New Mexico and its people. The story of the Manhattan Project hovers over the Santa Fe area in the same way that Los Alamos looks down on the area from high atop the mesa. Much of the early development of New Mexico in the 20th century stems from the massive government spending and, in particular, the Manhattan Project for development of an Atomic bomb for deployment during the war. The story of the Manhattan Project is one of great American technical genius led by Dr. Robert J. Oppenheimer. However, within the genius we have the tragedy. The post deployment era of the bomb, the post war hysteria of the Red menace led to the destruction of Oppenheimer and many of his co-workers. Some of these wounds were self inflicted by Oppenheimer and by the politicians who prosecuted so many before the American people. We also have the tragedy of the Japanese people who still live with the tragedy to this day. Dorothy McKibben was Oppenheimer's doorkeeper at the small office in Santa Fe. Through her door passed every employee and family member of the project in transit to the Los Alamos site. This story is compelling and shows in the detailed research of the author. This is the book she would have written had she been able to complete the manuscript. With such brilliance on the part of the technical team, we beat the Germans by producing a deployable weapon. However, with its use on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we cannot escape the unintended consequences of the Atomic age to this day.

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