

## PREFACE

The time was World War II. The Army owned only one chemical manufacturing plant, Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland. In 1941, Congress approved funds for the Army to construct another chemical manufacturing and storage facility.

On July 3, 1941, fire trucks were used by the *The Huntsville Times* to disperse an EXTRA edition of the paper. The banner headline was cause for great excitement in Huntsville, and for great anxiety for the People of Pond Beat, Mullins Flat, Hickory Grove, Horton's Ford, and other farmstead communities south of Huntsville. The newspaper said a 40 million dollar chemical plant would be built in the area south of the city, extending to the Tennessee River.

This military reservation would be called Huntsville Arsenal, and it would be used for construction of a depot area. In addition, the Army Ordnance Corps was expanding in response to President Roosevelt's proclamation of May 27, 1941, which declared the existence of a state of military emergency.

“Recognizing the tremendous economy of locating the new facility close to Huntsville Arsenal, the Chief of Ordnance acquired a 4,000 acre tract east of and adjacent to the Chemical Warfare Service's installation. In 1941, the Army acquired 32,244 acres to establish Huntsville Arsenal and 4000 acres for the Redstone Ordnance plant. Initially known as the Redstone Ordnance Plant, the new post was redesignated Redstone Arsenal on February 26, 1943 (Hughes 1991:52).”

“Of the 550 families (about 6000 men, women, and children) living in this part of the county, 76 percent were black. Some of the families were tenant farmers, but many, black and white, were landowners who had worked the fertile soil of the region for several decades (Hughes 1991:53).” They were forced to leave their land and their homes when the Army came, and they had very short notice. Some families had to move as early as July and August of 1941.

This book is a collection of interviews and related research about the people who lived on the land that is now the arsenal. It tells of their lives in the setting of the communities in which they lived.