

## INTRODUCTION

The author was the Staff Archaeologist at Redstone Arsenal (RSA) from September 1, 1996 to September 1, 2005. She was under contract to the Army from the University of Alabama. In order to be in compliance with State and Federal laws, any time the Army disturbed the ground for what the Army called “an undertaking,” the area for which the disturbance was proposed first had to be cleared from an archaeological perspective. This meant an archaeological survey had to be conducted to discern if any artifacts were present. Basically, “artifacts” meant anything that intentionally had been made or modified by people. Artifacts could be from either prehistoric or historic sites, and could include features. Features are non-movable objects. While features in prehistoric sites on the arsenal are generally found below the ground surface, those of historic times, such as the remains of a house foundation, sometimes are readily visible. The State of Alabama classifies any site containing historic artifacts that are over 50 years old as an historic archaeological site. Based on this, evidence of the remains of every former tenant farmer or sharecropper house that was once on the land that is now the arsenal would be documented as an historic archaeological site. This was a key factor in the instigation of this ethnographic study.

### **The First Interview (1996): Learning about History “First-Hand”**

In November of 1996, Dan Aughinbaugh, the range safety officer on Test Area 3, told the author about an elderly minister who visited the church and land where he had lived. All that remained of the Union Hill C.P. Cumberland Presbyterian Church was part of the foundation and cement steps, grown up in weeds and briars, but the Reverend McKinley Jones continued to visit the site regularly. Aughinbaugh pointed out that this was an opportunity for the Staff Archaeologist to learn about history “first hand.”

The author invited Reverend Jones to her office for what would be the first of many visits. The second time they met, in February of 1997, he brought with him a childhood friend, Mr. Albert Robinson (now deceased). For that meeting, the author invited the RSA Cultural Resource Manager (CRM) to join them. Having witnessed the conversations about places and happenings that took place in the 1930’s and earlier, the CRM agreed that much could be learned about historic archaeological sites on the arsenal by talking with the elders who lived there so many years before.

While the concept of talking with the elders was considered a viable way of learning more about the history of the land on the arsenal, times were busy for the Staff Archaeologist. There had been a paucity of formal record-keeping on the part of prior staff archaeologists, and the focus of the Staff Archaeologist was in mapping all former archaeological surveys that had been conducted on the arsenal, photocopying and compiling a file of all the State site forms for archaeological sites that had been documented on the arsenal, and working with the CRM to plan an arsenal-wide Phase I Archaeological Survey. Simply said, the Phase I survey consists of excavating holes (shovel testing) to sterile soil at specified intervals and screening the soil that is removed