

to reveal any artifacts that might be present. The Staff Archaeologist herself conducted Phase I surveys of areas where immediate undertakings were proposed. The concept of talking with elderly people who had once lived on the land that is now the arsenal went, as the saying goes, “on the back burner.”

Archaeological Surveys

By late 1999, Phase I archaeological surveys had been conducted on many acres of the arsenal. Many of the historic sites documented were thought to represent tenant farmer or sharecropper houses. The Phase I surveys only document the presence of a site, and, at the request of the Army, provide a recommendation as to the site’s National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility. A site is either recommended as eligible or not eligible for the NRHP. The survey report is sent to the Alabama State Historic Preservation Office (AL SHPO) in Montgomery. The AL SHPO may concur with the findings and recommendations as presented or may ask for further clarification or work before concurrence is reached on the determination of eligibility.

If it is determined that a site does not have the potential to offer new information for the archaeological record, then the site is designated as not eligible for the NRHP, and no further archaeological testing is required. The Army can proceed with undertakings. If a site is determined to be potentially eligible for the NRHP, before the Army can move forward with an undertaking that would disturb it, further archaeological testing must be conducted. The second phase of testing usually encompasses excavating 1 meter by 1 meter units and test trenches. The amount and type of testing is proposed in a research design that is submitted to the AL SHPO. If the second phase of testing indicates further research is warranted, a third phase of testing is required. Generally, the Army will endeavor to avoid sites that have been designated as potentially eligible for the NRHP, but in some cases avoidance is not feasible. Additional testing is both costly and time consuming.

Why Not Ask Grandma?

As a result of the archaeological surveys and testing that had been conducted by 1999, many potentially eligible sites had been recorded. It was the opinion of the author that one class of sites, tenant farmer and sharecropper houses, could be understood best by doing another type of investigation. The purpose of the archaeological investigation is to learn about the structures and the life ways of those who lived in them. The author’s position was (and is): “If you want to know about where and how my Grandma lived, why don’t you ask me or my grandmother?”