

THE REVEREND MCKINLEY JONES INTERVIEWS AND RELATED RESEARCH

The researcher was the Staff Archaeologist at Redstone Arsenal (RSA) when she first met McKinley Jones in November of 1996. Dan Aughinbaugh on RSA Test Area 6 told her an elderly Black man who had lived in the TA 6 area prior to 1941 when the Government took ownership of the land regularly visited the place in the woods where “the church he went to had been.” Auginbaugh told Curry if she were interested in the history of the area, she should meet Reverend Jones. The researcher called the Reverend McKinley Jones, and he agreed to come to her office. This was the first of many meetings and telephone conversations with McKinley Jones, the last being in September of 2005.

When the researcher and Jones met, he explained that place he visited was the site of the Union Hill Cumberland Presbyterian Church, which he and his family had attended. Reverend Jones explained that the church “moved out in 1941 when the government acquired the property.” He said that Union Hill’s congregation split: “Some went to Elizabeth in Madison; others lived in the Huntsville area and in 1947 organized the present Union Hill church, located on Nevels Drive, where I am pastor now.”

Reverend Jones agreed to visit again and to take the researcher to the site of the church. He had limited time to spare during each of their visits as he had a full schedule ministering to his parishioners, preparing his sermons, preaching funerals, and doing baptisms as well as being asked to attend other meetings. In the years to come, the researcher learned that Reverend Jones, a quiet, conservative, and wise man, is a well-known figure in the Black community in Huntsville and the surrounding area. He is regarded with great respect and warm affection because of the life he has lived in helping others.

At the second meeting, Jones showed up for the forage through the briars neatly dressed, as he was for the first visit, in a dark suit, top hat, and dress shoes with a mirror shine. Reaching the destination along Anderson Road on Test Area 3, Jones opened his trunk, took out his rubber boots, and pulled them on, up over the cuffs of his neatly pressed suit pants. Curry later learned that the minister was known for always appearing in a suit and top hat.

The Union Hill Cumberland Presbyterian Church

Where the church once stood, only the foundation and steps remain. Curry and Jones measured the foundation area, which was 42 ft. by 28 ft. and 3 in. to the outer wall. The foundation was an 8-inch thick concrete wall with river rock fill. The three front steps remain. They are 5 ft. long and 5 in. wide. The church was one room, with an attached vestibule. “People entered through the square vestibule.” The congregation sat on “rough wood” slats “with supports that came in from the side.” The church had a plank floor. McKinley Jones said that the outhouses were behind the church. He pointed out