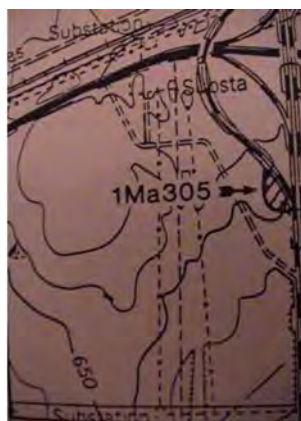


THE FIRST MAJOR RESEARCH PROJECT ON PARCEL A-17

Parcel A-17 and the history of its ownership became the subject of intense research in late 1987 when the Alabama Highway Department contracted the Office of Archaeological Research at The University of Alabama to evaluate the cultural impact of the proposed redesign of the interchange of Rideout Road and U.S. Alternate 72, now more commonly known as Highway 565.

Almost two decades earlier, in 1965, the Alabama Highway Department had inadvertently disturbed several unmarked graves during the construction of Rideout Road. The graves were located on the border between the southwest limits of the city of Huntsville and Redstone Arsenal. The work was halted. The soil was immediately replaced to an adequate depth to protect the remains impacted, and the highway was relocated 50 ft to the east of the burials.

When the Alabama Highway Department decided to redesign the interchange in 1987, the Office of Archaeological Research (OAR) was contracted first to conduct a preliminary archaeological survey to discern the area of the burials and then to remove the burials that were in the area of proposed impact. The cemetery was named Elko Switch Cemetery by the authors of the OAR project report (Shogren, Turner, and Perroni 1989) because it was near the switch of the Southern Railway located near Elko.



As a part of OAR's research design for removal of the cemetery (1Ma305), in-depth historic research was conducted in an effort to determine an association between the cemetery and past occupants of the land. The ownership of the land was traced through deed research, examination of countless other types of documents, and interviewing of elderly local residents. No record of a cemetery could be found, and none of the oldest people from the pre-arsenal community who were interviewed could recall seeing a cemetery there.

While Jody Perroni conducted the historic research, Michael Shogren supervised the excavation of the part of the cemetery that would be impacted. Fifty-six burials were excavated. All materials, including coffin hardware, found within the context of the burials were meticulously recorded and then analyzed in an effort to date the burials. Dr. Kenneth Turner, an osteologist from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alabama, who was known for his meticulous methods, analyzed the skeletal remains from the 56 burials. The details of the analyses are too lengthy to present here. The summation of the report said:

In summation, the socioeconomic structure of the community that utilized the Elko Switch Cemetery appears to be that of black freedmen and their descendants who earned their livelihood as tenant farmers and who lived a life not greatly improved from the days of slavery. The very real possibility of slave interments in the cemetery also exists with the