

AARON BURNS

(Born 1892)

An Interview by Skip Vaughn

The memories of Aaron Burns, who lived in the Mullins Flat community, are preserved in an interview that was printed in the *Redstone Rocket* in 1980. The interview provides a glimpse of the land that is now Redstone Arsenal through the eyes and from the mind of a man who was born in 1892, almost 115 years ago. The pertinent paragraphs are presented verbatim below.

“Farming was their livelihood,” *The Redstone Rocket*, July 2, 1980.

Aaron Burns remembers walking to church in the Mullins Flat community of what is now part of Redstone Arsenal.

Those who lived farther away from the Center Grove Methodist Episcopal Church would ride to church on horse-driven, two-seat “surreys” or one seat buggies, said Burns, who is 88 years old.

His father, who died in 1918, was one of seven trustees who organized the church in the area where Building 5250 houses the Missile Command headquarters today.

“Now when the war department bought that 40,000 acres, Cedar Grove Church came over here, united and built a church together,” Burns said.

Cedar Grove Church was located to the south across a branch of Indian Creek in what was then called the Pond Beat Community. Cedar Grove and Center Grove churches united to form a church in Huntsville when the Army bought the land for a military installation.

Burns left his community in 1939, two years before the Army came, because of a fire which destroyed his farming livelihood. “If you didn’t farm, you didn’t have a job otherwise,” he said.

He moved to Harvest where he lives today and rents out his land for farming. He was manager at Longview Gin Company in Huntsville before the cotton gin firm folded in 1960.

Burns recalls “three or four” white families and “50 or more, I guess, black families lived in the community where he was born. Most people were tenant farmers who provided labor for a farm owner in exchange for a place to live,” Burns said.

“I’d say they were happy under the conditions because they had no other source of living,” he said. “The arsenal came and employed a lot of those people eligible to get jobs, and most of them, all of them, began to buy little homes, you know.”

The farm land was “alright” but farmers then didn’t have the skill to rebuild their