

ALTON E. ("GENE") NEAL
Interviewed in Feb. and Sept. 2005

"Gene" Neal



The Family

Alton E. ("Gene") Neal, born in 1929, grew up in the home of his maternal grandparents, Arthur Clayton (A.C.) Turner (born 1896) and Lucinda (Luci) Jane Ledbetter Turner. A.C.'s father, Jack Turner, who was from the Guntersville, Alabama area in Marshall County, was three-quarters Indian. A.C.'s divorced daughter, Ida Turner Neal and her four sons (Gene, Ernest, Bobby, and Billy) lived with her parents, as did her sister Vernelle. In addition, Gene said he had a cousin "from town," Bud Turner's son, who came out and stayed with them a lot.

A.C. Turner owned the grocery store in Pond Beat (Parcel D-174). Gene described A.C. Turner as a hefty-built man who was bald except for a ring of hair around his head. Gene said, "He raised us boys. Aside from the store, he rented bottomland, and we [Gene and his brothers] farmed it. We shared the profit. We were boys, but we worked hard." [Gene's mother moved from the household before Gene was grown.]



Ida Turner Neal

The House and the Store

Location. Billy Neal said the store was where the Range House on McKinley Range is. James Long described the location as being where "Little Vietnam" once was, prior to McKinley Range.

The store on Parcel D-174 was initially owned by Ruby Eslick, the wife of Lee Woodward. Mrs. Woodward was the proprietor of the store for many years; her husband farmed. They lived in the house to the west of the store until the property was sold to A.C. Turner in the early 1930's when they moved down to the John Woodward house. Before A.C. Turner bought the store, he lived down close to the river.

Gene didn't know if his grandfather had owned the property where he'd lived previously. He did recall that it was on the west side of the road, and they turned off on a lane to reach it—it was not near the road. The Madison County, Alabama General Highway and Transportation Map prepared by the State Highway Department in 1937 shows two different lanes going west from the road going down to the river (now McAlpine Road).

Gene described his grandfather's property as being a 40-acre farm, with a house, barn, and store. They grew cotton on the farm. Gene said: "The store was right along the road. The house was about 200 feet west of the store, and then the barn was west of the house." He added, "They [the Army] tore the porch off the house with a bulldozer before we moved out, making the road. The store was already gone [demolished by the Army]."