

WALTER COONEY PENLAND (born 1902)
An Interview by Ed Peters



Walter Cooney Penland. Source: *The Redstone Rocket*, Nov. 2, 1983.

In November of 1983, Walter Cooney Penland visited Redstone Arsenal. He wanted to see the places he had left over 40 years before when the Army took ownership of the land. Writer Ed Peters accompanied Penland. Penland pointed out places and, through his words of remembrance, gave Peters a glimpse of “what Redstone Arsenal was like before the Army came,” back in the days of Pond Beat and the many other small communities that were once there.

In this interview, Penland provides a wealth of information in discussing his former home site and the structures there, the Indian burials that were by the home site, the absence of the monuments that were in family cemetery when he left in 1941, the community, hunting, crops, and the results of TVA damming the river.

Penland said that in 1935, TVA took a large amount of the Penland family’s bottomland, leaving them with only 17 acres. At the time the Army took ownership, his father, David Penland, is shown on the Army Real Estate Map as owning Parcel D-162. It is reasonable to assume that the home Walter described was located there.

Penland’s comments about the “Lee House” where the Harris family lived have been presented in a previous section that focused on the life of the Harris family on the arsenal. Those paragraphs will not be repeated here. The remainder of the article, with the exception of those excerpted paragraphs, is produced verbatim below. The article gives us a glimpse of the land that is now Redstone Arsenal through the eyes and from the mind of a man who was born 104 years ago (as of 2006).

Source: “Former arsenal resident visits old home place,” *The Redstone Rocket*, Nov. 2, 1983

Walter Cooney Penland, a former resident of the Pond Beat Community that once thrived on what is now Army land, revisited Thursday the place several generations of Penlands called home.

His grandfather, David Alexander Penland, was one of the areas first settlers. Before the Civil War, he came down from Tennessee and bought or homesteaded 600 acres of bottomland by the Tennessee River and Indian Creek.