

obtained with the help of Lloyd Lanphere of the Madison Station Historical Society from the historical archives of Oakwood College in Huntsville.

From that source, Lloyd provided a copy of **ELKO SWITCH CEMETERY, AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE** by Michael G. Shogren, Kenneth R. Turner, and Jody C. Perroni (1989), as published by the Alabama State Museum of Natural History, Division of Archaeology, Report of Investigations 58.

### THE "ELKO SWITCH CEMETERY"

The Alabama State Museum of Natural History's 1988-89 excavation and study of the so-called "Elko Switch Cemetery" revealed little concrete evidence about the establishment and use of this supposedly historic burial site. Despite extensive research in available written records and numerous interviews with people familiar with the pre-Army communities of Pond Beat and Mullins Flat that became part of Huntsville Arsenal in 1941-42, only one man claimed to have any knowledge of the cemetery in question. However, certain statements made by this individual (which evidently were not corroborated through independent research of *The Huntsville Times* for the 1941-42 timeframe) raise questions about the accuracy of his recollections.

The main difficulty with the archaeological team's approach to identifying this burial site arises from their focus on the age of the remains themselves. Because they were able to place the graves in a date range between 1850 and 1920, the researchers directed their historical records search to that period alone. Despite a thorough examination of the period's land and cemetery records, though, no information about this burial site could be located.

Using general information from the period, similar studies of cemeteries in other areas, historic land records, knowledge about the general time period, and sketchy information from the somewhat questionable memories of a former arsenal worker, the report's authors speculated on the origins of the unmarked, forgotten cemetery. However, their theories raised as many (if not more) questions than they answered, as the authors readily admitted in their introductory chapter (see excerpt below).

Why would property used primarily as farmland have 150 to 200 graves on it without some kind of record about such a sizeable cemetery? Why does no one from the Huntsville community remember this cemetery, especially a 96-year-old man who could provide all sorts of details about the area except the existence of this fairly large burial site? If the site was hidden in order to avoid an inconvenient 1925 local ordinance about the upkeep of cemeteries, why do several former residents have no knowledge of that fact?