

and away from reservoirs and wetlands, but communities that took root before the Civil War were made to move off the land in 1941 to make way for the Huntsville Arsenal and Huntsville Depot, later renamed the Redstone Ordnance Plant and known now as Redstone Arsenal.

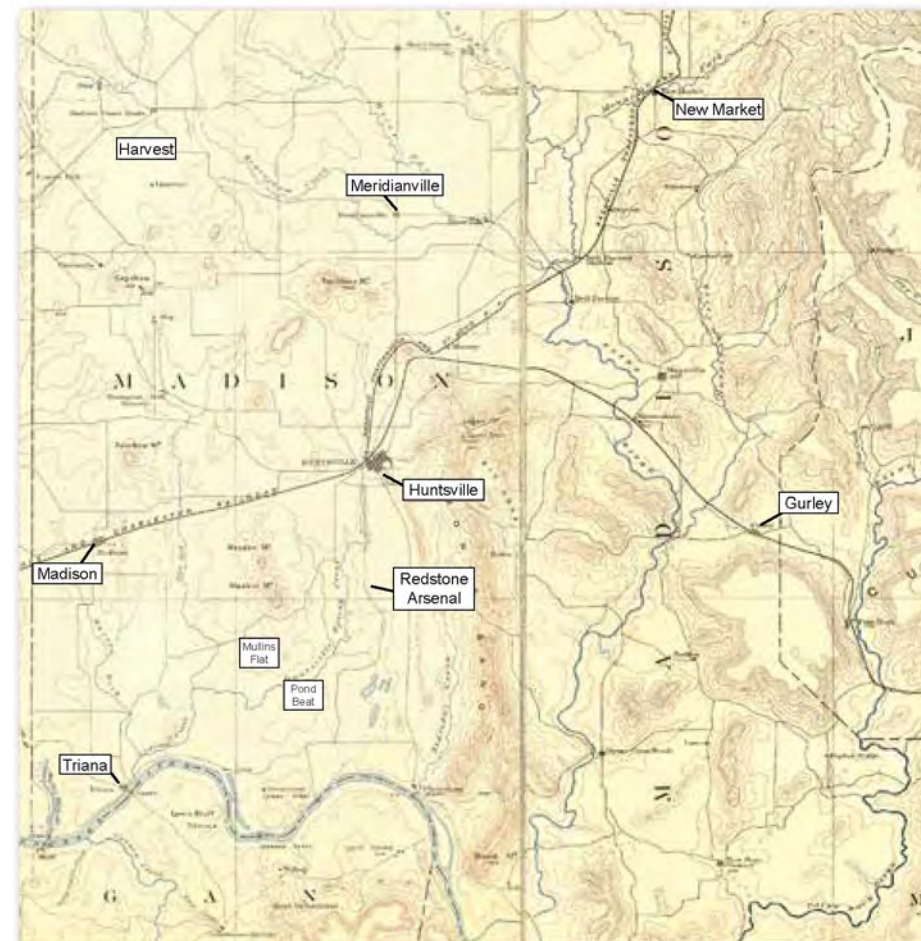
Two of the larger communities of color that used to live on what is now Redstone Arsenal were Pond Beat and Mullins Flat. These communities consisted mostly of farmers, many of them landowners. Together, they established churches, schools, stores, and cemeteries. When studying the history of Pond Beat and Mullins Flat, the same family names come up again and again. By 1940, these communities were considered “colored” communities of poor farmers, but their history traces back more than 100 years to the first plantations of south Madison County. A unique component of the history of these communities lies in a complex family tree consisting of white slave owners, Native Americans, African-descended slaves, and the “mulatto” or mixed progeny of all three.

In the later 20th century, Redstone Arsenal began a large community outreach effort with the communities that once called that land home and their descendants. Between 1996 and 2005, Beverly Curry, Redstone Arsenal Staff Archaeologist, collected oral histories about families, communities, and places of Redstone. Her work resulted in a large collection of family histories, photographs, and interviews known as *The People Who Lived on the Land That is Now Redstone Arsenal: Pond Beat, Mullins Flat, Hickory Grove, The Union Hill Cumberland Presbyterian Church Area, and the Elko Area*. This momentous project strove to capture the multifaceted communities of South Madison County like never before.

Another significant undertaking aimed at recording the history of previous Redstone communities includes the work of local historian and Redstone descendant, John. P. Rankin. A retired electrical engineer in the aerospace industry, Mr. Rankin has found a second life calling as a historian with specific interest on Madison County and Redstone Arsenal. With an understanding that one of the most important connections between descendants and the land of Redstone were the cemeteries, Rankin set out to document and research all cemeteries on

the Arsenal. There are dozens of cemeteries on Redstone, some as old as the state itself, with few markers and little-known information; some with large, impressive monuments; and some small family, church, or community cemeteries. Access to and knowledge of the final resting places of their ancestors is important to much of the living community, especially as many of the families have had a connection to the land and people for over 100 years. Mr. Rankin has conducted field visits, researched, and authored reports on approximately 50 cemeteries located on the Arsenal. All of his reports are available to the public online via the Huntsville History Collection, a public collaboration published in cooperation with the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library.

The communities of Pond Beat and Mullins Flat have hosted family reunions to bring together the many and sometimes displaced family members of those who once lived on Redstone. One such reunion occurred in the summer of 2018. Headed by Ms. Deborah Horton



(Left) Oregon Harris, Landowner in Triana, Circa 1940s (Curry 2006)
(Bottom) Madison County 1892 (1892 USGS Topographic Map of Madison County, Huntsville and Scottsboro, Alabama Quadrangles)

Jordan and a large committee of descendants, the reunion included a reception at the Davidson Center, a tour of historic sites on Redstone Arsenal, and a picnic in Harvest, Alabama. Arsenal Archaeologist, Ben Hoksbergen, spoke about the history and archaeology of the Pond Beat and Mullins Flat communities and led a tour of the sites. The

historians of New South were invited to collect oral histories of anyone who was interested in sharing their family history.

Several descendants of families from Pond Beat and Mullins Flat spoke with historians about their history. They helped continue the conversation and expand the history of the many families. Tools such as Ancestry.com and Facebook are being used by the families to connect, share photographs and information, and increase the drawing of the family tree. When studying such a complicated family history, the deep and tangled roots of Pond Beat and Mullins Flat can be difficult to sort – even for those who are part of that history. Luckily, many of the members of this large family are willing to dig through archives and family records and share with others what they have found.

A special thank you to those who participated in interviews, including: Ms. Maureen Horton Davis Cathey, Ms. Parthenia Joiner Hardy, Dr. Victoria L. Joiner, Ms. Deborah Horton Jordan, Mr. John Jordan, Mr. Thomas Lyle, Ms. Elaine Watkins Patton, Ms. Renee Rice, and Ms. Carolyn M. Wilson.