



(Series Above) Fields and Soil on the Horton Family Compound in Harvest, Alabama (Photographs by Jenna Tran, Courtesy Ms. Jordan)

Just as important as the ancestors of Pond Beat and Mullins Flat is the land. Originally the land of the Cherokee and Chickasaw, North Alabama was settled by white planters from eastern states such as Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia. Some of the earliest landowners not only established plantations but also relationships with people of color, either American Indian, African-descended, or a mixture of both. But Alabama is not where this began. Many of the enslaved women who had children with their white masters were often described as “nearly white.” Being born to an enslaved mother was enough to enslave the child, and over time, there were many women and men of color who could “pass” as a white person in society. Unlike other areas of the South, in North Alabama, it appears that one of the benefits of such a close relationship was the recognition of children produced by the enslaved women. White slave-owning fathers might give land to their sons or bequeath them some funds in their will. Evidence of these relationships are visible in the history of Pond Beat and Mullins Flat through cemeteries and landownership. Whereas it might appear odd that people of color were purchasing and farming land that was once a plantation – the very land worked by slaves for decades – their family histories connects them to that land in even stronger ways. The people



of Pond Beat and Mullins Flat take pride in ownership of the land and its history. This is the land of their ancestors – white, black, and Native – worked and cherished by the families, sustained by hard work and dedication, and maintained for over 100 years.

“I was always told who I couldn’t date. Couldn’t date a Jacobs, Joiner, Horton, which basically you took to mean [everybody]. My wife’s from New Jersey because everybody was related to me.”

– John Jordan

A Family Reunion

While there were many families in Pond Beat and Mullins Flat, several of them are entwined in one large family tree that is so extensive, it is not fully understood even by the members of those families. But everyone in the community understood that if they recognized the family name, they were probably related in some way.



The descendants of families from Pond Beat and Mullins Flat came together in the summer of 2018 for a reunion. The families met in Huntsville, first for a reception at the Davidson Center at the Marshall Space Flight Center, followed the next day by a tour of the home sites and cemeteries now on Redstone Arsenal, and concluding with a large picnic at the home of Ms. Deborah Horton Jordan and sisters in Harvest, Alabama. Attendees were offered to participate in oral history interviews by historians from New South Associates. Some interviews were conducted at the reception at the Davidson Center, some at the picnic in Harvest, and a large group interview was conducted the following week at Ms. Jordan’s home.

Everyone who shared their family history added a piece to the overall narrative of Pond Beat/Mullins Flat. Participants were excited to share what they knew of their direct family and what they had found through research. Many descendants have used new technology, digitized archival records, and social media to connect their family trees and share family photographs and documents. Because of the displacement of these families from Redstone and the subsequent in-depth research, the communities of Pond Beat and Mullins Flat are arguably better researched than most family histories.