

# 8 Changing Identity

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FOR RELEASE IN TUESDAY  
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NOON (EST) NOVEMBER 28, 1950

AEC ANNOUNCES NEW PRODUCTION SITE TO BE LOCATED  
IN AIKEN AND BARNWELL COUNTIES, SOUTH CAROLINA

The United States Atomic Energy Commission today announced that its new production plants to be designed, built and operated by the E.I. du Pont de Nemours Company of Wilmington, Delaware, will be located in Aiken and Barnwell counties, South Carolina near the Savannah River. About 250,000 acres will be acquired for the site. Exact boundaries remain to be determined. The new site will be known as the Savannah River Plant.

As was noted by the President last July in asking the Congress to appropriate \$260,000,000 to start construction, these additional plants, like the existing facilities, will provide materials which can be used either for weapons or for fuels potentially useful for power purposes. The Commission emphasized, however, that the operations at the Savannah River plants will not involve the manufacture of atomic weapons.

Acquisition of the land will be undertaken by the Corps of Engineers.

The specific boundaries of the site will be announced later after completion of detailed engineering studies. However, the general area in which the Commission proposes to build the plants and related facilities with their security areas is shown on the attached map.

To make way for the plants and the surrounding security and safety zone, it will be necessary for about 1,500 families to relocate in the next 18 months. The Federal-State agricultural agencies are organizing to give help to the families who must relocate. The first families affected will be those in Areas 1 and 2 on the map. These general areas will be vacated at an early date to make way for construction. Exact boundaries of these areas cannot be defined until engineers have established the location of the facilities.

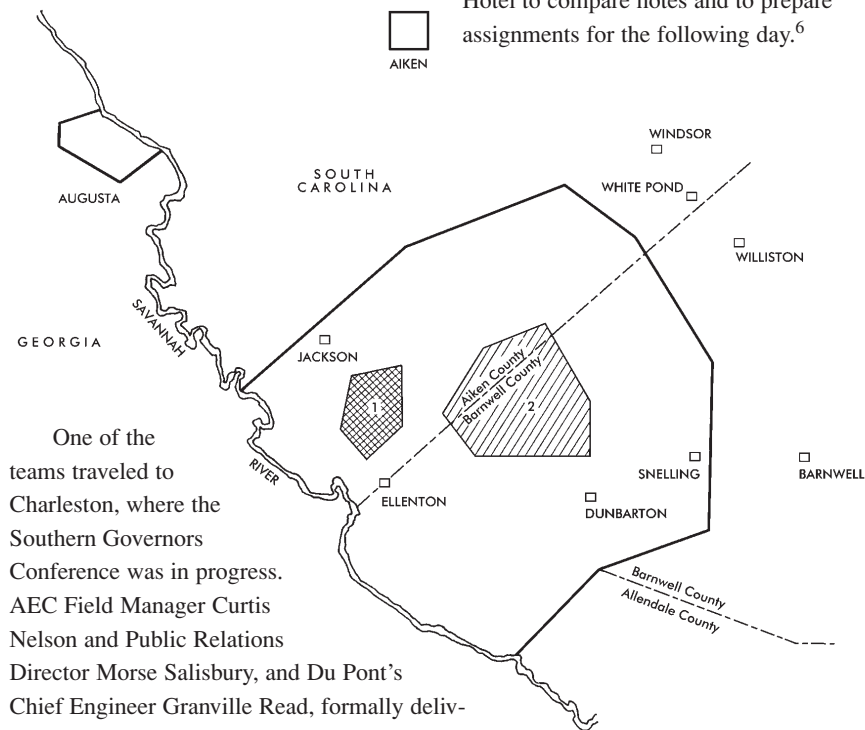
At 12 noon on Tuesday, November 28, 1950, a carefully worded announcement accompanied by a map of the proposed plant area was released to the press and to radio stations. Flash radio announcements brought the news into homes and businesses in the CSRA, interrupting regularly scheduled programming. The incredible announcement was repeated at regular intervals throughout the day. Billy Tisdale of Ellenton and his co-workers at the Leigh Banana Crate Company had heard that an important announcement was to be made for people in their community. "At noon we went out to listen to our car radios. It was hard to believe; in fact we didn't exactly believe it. But we didn't get much work done the rest of that day."<sup>1</sup> Teacher Louise Cassels heard it second-hand in her Ellenton classroom from a student who went home for lunch.<sup>2</sup> The announcement was one of the region's top news stories, making headlines across the South. Newspaper extras were run in Atlanta, Augusta, Savannah, Columbia, and Charleston, and the *Barnwell People-Sentinel*, a small weekly paper, ran its first special edition in its 74 years of news reporting.<sup>3</sup> Major American papers also carried the story, mostly providing little more information than was given in the press release, but some accounts correctly likened the new operations plant to Hanford.<sup>4</sup>

Word had leaked out that morning as AEC and Du Pont officials, working in twelve teams, began with military precision to inform state

and city officials in Atlanta and Augusta in Georgia and in Aiken, Columbia, and Barnwell, in South Carolina through simultaneous interviews scheduled for 11:00 a.m. The week's frigid weather would no longer be a topic of conversation as South

Carolínians and Georgians learned about the new plant. The contents of the announcement had been carefully crafted over a three-week period, as well as the plan for its delivery.<sup>5</sup> A parallel program was unfolding in Washington, DC, so that members of Congress were equally informed. The teams, probably both exhilarated and tired, gathered that evening in the office of the Du Pont Field Project Manager Bob Mason at the Richmond

Hotel to compare notes and to prepare assignments for the following day.<sup>6</sup>



One of the teams traveled to Charleston, where the Southern Governors Conference was in progress. AEC Field Manager Curtis Nelson and Public Relations

Director Morse Salisbury, and Du Pont's Chief Engineer Granville Read, formally delivered the news to South Carolina's Governor Strom

Thurmond and Governor-elect James F. Byrnes. Read had made an appointment with the state executives the preceding day for 11:00 a.m. Upon hearing the good news, Governor Thurmond invited Georgia's Governor Herman Talmadge to join in a regularly scheduled press conference for the annual meeting where the announcement was made at noon.<sup>7</sup> The timing of the announcement for what could only be forecasted as a regional economic success story was excellent for all concerned. All three men were major figures in national and regional politics and it is unlikely they watched the "secret" site-selection process unfold without knowledge or interest.

The announcement team would spend the following day in local communities, particularly those to be acquired: Jackson, Snelling, Ellenton, and Dunbarton. The teams consulted the mayor or commissioner of each town and reviewed the press release and map, along with the acquisition procedure and the "acquisition time element." Jackson and Snelling were still included in the plant area at this point in time. Teams visited elected officials of neighboring communities such as Williston, White Pond, Windsor, and Blackville with the press release and map in hand to discuss the scope of the project and housing needs and to request the community's cooperation and assistance.

(Opposite Page) The announcement of the location of the new production facility on November 28, 1950, made headlines in all the area's newspapers. The carefully worded announcement, that outlined the project and the more immediate concerns for those who would be displaced, was delivered to the press and radio for distribution. Source: United States Atomic Energy Commission, Washington, DC, Press Release No. 322, November 28, 1950. Courtesy of SRS Archives.

(Left) The first map of the proposed project area was released by the AEC with the November 28 announcement. The stylized map showed a roughly irregular area within Aiken and Barnwell counties bounded by the Savannah River on the west. Four towns were within the original boundaries: Jackson, Ellenton, Dunbarton and Snelling. The hatched areas within the project boundary were priority areas needed to begin construction. They would be targeted for immediate acquisition. Source: *Aiken Standard and Review*, November 29, 1950.

(Below) Front page of *The Augusta Chronicle*, November 29, 1950, reported on the announcement from several angles reflecting the many meanings the new plant would have for the country, the CSRA, and for those to be displaced by the proposed land acquisition.



While teams were dispatched to the above locations, H. Magoon of Du Pont and Edwards of the AEC were sent to Augusta to locate office and warehouse space on a rental basis for a four- to six-month period. City officials made space available initially at Augusta's Bell Municipal Auditorium. Thursday and Friday were reserved for meetings

## Inside Story

Horace A. Andrews, a member of the Safety Division in 1955 well remembered the day in 1950 when he was summoned hurriedly to Wilmington from his home in Walla Walla, Washington and told of a new atomic energy plant to be built by Du Pont.

About ten sites were still being considered for the plant at that time, and Mr. Andrews, who had done housing work for Du Pont Construction at Hanford during World War II, spent the next few weeks collecting housing data on various sites.

It was Nov. 26 when Mr. Andrews boarded a train for Augusta, a good tip-off to him that the South Carolina site had been selected. This was confirmed in a secret briefing with other Du Ponters and AEC rep-

resentatives the next day in a hotel room in Augusta. The group had registered with different home addresses to avoid suspicion and had avoided congregating in the hotel.

Then the visitors paired off, and Mr. Andrews and an AEC representative flew to Atlanta. At 11 a.m. the next day (Nov. 28) they met with newsmen and handed them an announcement.

Source: Plant Announcement Five Years Ago Set Stage for 'Biggest Project,' *Savannah River Plant News*, Vol. III, No. 21, November 25, 1955.

with the director of the F.H.A., U.S.E.S., transportation officials, state and county highway officials, city police and local sheriffs, boards of education, local selective service boards, S.C. Power and Light Company, Bell Telephone, Western Union, Atlantic Coast Line and West Charleston railroad companies, retail merchants associations, heads of realtors asso-

ciations, local contractor's associations, and hotel managers concerning housing.<sup>8</sup> The weeklong schedule was rigorous and the coverage thorough as the announcement team and an unknown number of secretaries and support personnel removed the cloak of secrecy, taking Georgia and South Carolina by storm.

### "SENATOR BROWN'S WELL KEPT SECRET"

Reaction to the public announcement of the site selection was jubilant

in Georgia and South Carolina. Barnwell's Senator Edgar Brown and Augusta's Chamber of Commerce secretary, Lester Moody, had been working for months to secure the new plant for the CSRA. The two "economic statesmen" for the Clarks Hill Project had turned their attention to the AEC project when approached, and then linked the completion of the federal dam project to the new Savannah River Plant.

Augusta's Bell Municipal Auditorium, circa 1950. This Art Deco style Augusta landmark served as the AEC and Du Pont's first "office" during the winter of 1950-1951 until the first administrative buildings were constructed in the project area. Courtesy of SRS Archives.



State Senator Edgar A. Brown has a smile on his face and relief in his voice, now that the best kept secret of the year has been shared with the public. Senator Brown was the only public official in South Carolina who knew what was going on behind exploratory investigations which had residents of Barnwell and Aiken counties in a mild state of suspense for six months or more.<sup>9</sup>

State Senator Edgar Brown and Representative Solomon Blatt, known recruiters for economic development in their home county of Barnwell, received a personal visit on the day of the announcement.<sup>10</sup> Brown had been part of the site-selection process, acting as South Carolina's sole point of contact. After the meeting, Senator Brown gave an *Aiken Standard and Review* reporter his story: "There were no politics involved in this at all."<sup>11</sup> The reporter indicated that readers would find this hard to believe as most people associate the senator's every move with politics, yet Brown's statement seemed to be borne out by the facts.

Brown pointed out that Du Pont had already accumulated information on the Ellenton area during the site-selection process for their Orlon factory. The state's Research, Planning, and Development Board had prepared brochures and summary data describing the Ellenton vicinity as a candidate site for an industrial plant, and Du Pont had received the promotional materials. Government officials and Du Pont used this informational packet in their decision-making for the 1950 project.

Clarks Hill Dam, Hartwell Dam, and the new H-bomb plant were evolutionary steps in the shaping of the CSRA's industrial future. In November 1950, the Clarks Hill Dam was 80 percent complete. Its first generator capable of producing 280,000 kilowatts was projected to go into operation in October 1952; all seven generators would be scheduled for completion to provide power for the new plant. The engineer at Clarks Hill admitted that the remaining ten Savannah hydroelectric projects that had been proposed were needed to handle the upsurge of industrial development. Hartwell was next on the list of Savannah River projects. It would be sorely needed now that the AEC plant would share power with the new cotton mills and other industrial growth projected for the future of Horse Creek Valley.<sup>12</sup> The AEC announcement rewarded all involved with the state and region's efforts to bring industry and growth to the area. The Clarks Hill Dam was a significant factor in the site-selection process. The presence of the smaller fish had enticed a larger fish into the pond. A good portion of the \$260,000,000 first appropriated for the construction of the AEC plant would find its way to the CSRA.

Newspaper headlines clamored that Augusta would become a metropolis, Aiken a "fast growing city," and Barnwell and environs would quickly follow suit. Lester Moody, the Augusta contact for the site-selection team, helped put the future in perspective in a *New York Times* interview, noting that the plant's economic impact would equal "the simultaneous installation of fifty small factories in Augusta" where he envisioned an additional 25,000 individuals would settle. Aiken's Mayor H. Odell Weeks estimated an increase of 4,000 for his city, voicing the concern that Aiken needed to handle the population explosion without losing its character. Aiken, the county seat and small resort town, supported 7,500 "year-round residents." State Representative John A. May, interviewed in Aiken's Chamber of Commerce, then housed in a remodeled log cabin, offered that



Undated photograph of State Senator Edgar Brown and Representative Solomon Blatt, both from Barnwell County. Edgar A. Brown Collection, Mss 91. Courtesy of Special Collections, Clemson University Libraries, Clemson, South Carolina.

## Just Can't Escape, Mourns Ellentonian

Ellenton, SC (UP) Waitress Mary Derry was aghast yesterday at the news a plant to make hydrogen bomb materials will be built there. She came here from Oak Ridge, Tenn., several years ago to get away from the atom bomb. "It looks like you can't go anywhere any more," she said.

-*The Augusta Chronicle*, November 29, 1950.



Aiken's development could be controlled by zoning "to prevent a 'shantytown' like that at Oak Ridge. We don't want any hoodlums or honkytonks or labor racketeers."<sup>13</sup> Some

Aiken businessmen worried about the town's fortunes such as W. I. Smith, an Aiken barber, who commented, "we haven't waked up yet." Aiken druggist H. E. Blake dooly predicted that Aiken's days as a popular resort could be ending and reported that he might sell out if he could find a "sucker." However, other Aiken businessmen, like their Augusta counterparts, were expecting to reap economic profit from the huge payrolls that would energize local commerce.

About 2,500 Northern "wealthy and socially prominent sportsmen" wintered at the beautiful resort town of Aiken. *New York Times* correspondent Ira Henry Freeman commented that the South Carolina city's tax rolls read like an abbreviated version of New York's Social Register. The Whiskey Road area contained scores of estates anchored around three

tracks and six polo fields, where hundreds of racehorses were trained and polo was played for high stakes. The plant's executives, technicians, scientists, and "better paid employees" were expected to chose home sites in the Aiken area according to one report "by preference." The Nelsons, for example, would find a home in Aiken's Highland Park; the Blairs also resided in Aiken. However, Du Pont Field Manager Bob Mason and his family resided in Augusta during the construction of the plant.

While the economic promise of the plant was eagerly discussed, the social changes it would bring in an era of national social change received less mention. It is not surprising that Georgia's Lester Moody would tackle the topic:

This development will revolutionize the Savannah River basin. It will make Augusta a minor metropolis. . . The new plant will bring in many educated people, technicians, professional men, highly skilled workers, Yankees and Middle Westerners with other viewpoints on race relations, labor relations, and world affairs. We may not enjoy all the changes, but it is impossible to be conservative about our future.<sup>14</sup>

Others saw change occurring that reversed the traditional order of Southern agricultural life. Amos Ward, an agricultural economist responsible for relocating farmers for the Department of Agriculture,

commented on a group of farm hands and wood cutters shielded by felt hats and clothed in overalls who were already gathering outside AEC offices in Augusta looking for work. Ward observed that uprooted agricultural workers would never return to the soil. A share-cropper who worked even in an unskilled labor position at the project would receive cash for his work and would have money in the bank perhaps for the first time. His family would leave the farm, buy a jalopy, and "live like townfolks."<sup>15</sup>



One *New York Times* correspondent commented that Aiken's tax rolls read like an abbreviated version of New York's social register. The winter colony estates within the Whiskey Road area were nestled around a set of tracks and polo fields. Trails within Hitchcock Woods were also well used by the equestrian set.



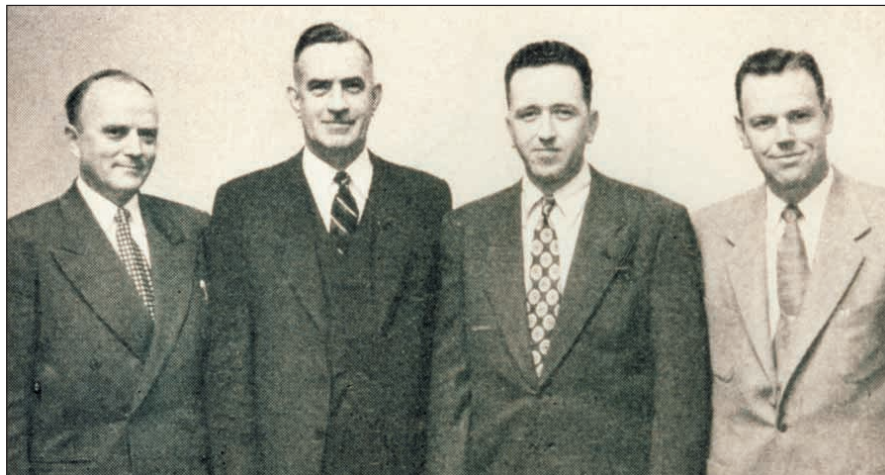
Postcard, "Taking the Hurdles in the Hitchcock Woods, Aiken, S.C." Courtesy of J. Walter Joseph

Postcard, "Rosebank, Residence of E. G. Grace, Aiken, S.C." Courtesy of J. Walter Joseph.

In the weeks after the announcement, reporters came from all over to get an inside line on the project. Others just wanted a final glimpse of the towns that would disappear to make way for the bomb plant. Newspapers were filled with news reports, commentaries, and editorials about the new plant, its importance to the Cold War, and its meaning for the CSRA. While many debated that meaning, it was clear that the direct impact of the Cold War on this community would be dramatic, forming in historian Jim Farmer's words, "the dividing line between what was and what is."<sup>16</sup>

## THE VARIOUS MEANINGS OF THE NEW PLANT

SRP's management team—Curtis Nelson, Robert Blair, Bob Mason, and Don Miller—appeared to be everywhere in the days following the announcement. Speaking on radio and at farmer's meetings, in public meetings, and at Rotary Clubs, they shucked their previous anonymity. Their photographs and credentials were presented on the front pages of the local papers and their words were closely followed in the press. Each showed polish, presenting a well-crafted, shared narrative. Curtis Nelson had instituted a plan for a public information and community relations program as early as August 1, and the success of the announcement was likely an outcome of this early planning between AEC and Du Pont officials.<sup>17</sup> The public announcement of the project and the care with which it was executed signaled that the AEC recognized that the project would be under public scrutiny. It also indicated that the AEC was aware that the transformation between what was and what is would be watched by an increasingly aggressive media.



On November 29, radio station WGAC of Augusta aired a half-hour roundtable discussion on the plant's meaning to Augusta and its environs, featuring prominent local leaders and SRP officials. *The Augusta Chronicle's* Managing Editor Louis C. Harris moderated the discussion. Aiken's secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, Sara Bush; Camp Gordon's Brigadier General H. G. Maddox; Henry Darling, Jr., director of plans and training for Augusta's civilian defense program; the AEC's Curtis Nelson and G. O. Robinson; Du Pont's Howard Miller; and the Corps of Engineers Assistant Real Estate Officer, Harold Robinson took part.<sup>18</sup>

"As far as I could see, cars almost bumper to bumper were milling around like ants. My heartbeat slowed down after I realized curiosity seekers had come to scrutinize the little town destined to die. "What better entertainment could they want on a cold, gray Sunday afternoon?" I asked in sarcasm, forgetting I was my only audience. Ellenton had never before had a traffic jam."

Source: Louise Cassels, *The Unexpected Exodus*, (Aiken, SC: Sand Hill Press, 1971), 24.

Savannah River Plant's original management team, 1950. From left to right, Curtis A. Nelson, Manager of the new AEC operations office; Robert C. Blair, Deputy Manager; Robert K. Mason, Du Pont Field Project Manager responsible for the plant's construction; and Donald A. Miller, Du Pont's Manager of the Plant's Operations. Source: *Aiken Standard*, December 6, 1950.

## Who are the AEC and Du Pont officials in charge?

### For the Atomic Energy Commission:

Curtis A. Nelson, Manager  
 Arthur L. Tackman, Personnel  
 Clarence A. Bergan, Labor Relations  
 W. C. McKelvey, Housing  
 James Hopkins, Property and Procurement  
 George O. Robinson, Public Information

### For the Du Pont Company:

Robert K. Mason, Field Project Manager  
 Howard M. Miller,  
     Administrative Assistant to Mr. Mason  
 H. A. Andrews, Housing  
 J.W. Mercke, Employment  
 Harry Magoon, Engineering  
 J. W. McAuliffe, Control Department  
 E.B. Riffin, General Accounting

The need to inform the public about the project was paramount and the AEC and Du Pont officials in charge continually instructed the public on the proper contact points for the Savannah River Operations Office and Du Pont. Source; Savannah River Operations Office, Atomic Energy Commission, Augusta, Georgia, Information Sheet No. 1, December 7, 1950. Courtesy of SRS Archives.

Several concerns emerged from the forum. Each shows that the new plant had multiple meanings depending on one's home place and livelihood. Would the new plant make the CSRA a primary target for the enemy? How would the land to be acquired be appraised? Would highways need to be relocated? Would local labor be hired? In answer, tenant farmers were encouraged to contact their county agents for instructions. General Maddox assured listeners that if defensive measures were needed the Third Army would respond in accordance with orders. Mrs. Bush stated that the City of Aiken had already passed resolutions to control rents and to lend aid to employees of federal agencies and the Du Pont staff. The Corps of Engineers would conduct the acquisition program. Curtis Nelson closed the program reiterating patiently that the new plant would make not only materials to be used in the manufacture of the H-bomb, but also materials for peacetime use. This last statement was very important for all concerned. A diversified plant that had multiple products translated into longevity.

While Curtis Nelson and Howard Miller answered questions on the radio, Robert C. Blair and Bob Mason attended an equally important meeting in Augusta. The Georgia Power Company auditorium was filled with over 100 representatives of agricultural agencies from ten counties who came to learn about the project and its impact on local farmers.<sup>19</sup> Representatives of the Production Marketing Association, Farmers Home Association, National Farm Loan Associations, Production Credit Associations, Rural Electrification Administration, Soil Conservation Service, vocational agricultural programs, the veterans' agricultural training program, and county agents of the Agricultural Service were in attendance. Arthur Miner, assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture and Amos Ward, a housing specialist with the Farmer's Home Association, had called the meeting. Their intent was to inform these groups and

enlist their aid in helping farming families, owners, tenants, and sharecroppers within the plant area find new homes and assist in their relocation.

The most difficult meeting was yet to come. The map with the press release had shown very approximate project boundaries with two irregularly-shaped priority areas that needed to be vacated "at an early date." Residents within the proposed plant area listened carefully to news releases in which the South Atlantic Corps officials began to outline the acquisition procedure. Gordon Britton, the Corps of Engineers real estate officer responsible for the land acquisition, conducted a public meeting in Ellenton's school auditorium on December 6 at 8:00 p.m. A representative of each family was asked to attend the question and answer session, and the hall was filled with more than 500 individuals.<sup>20</sup>

When eight o'clock finally crept in, people crowded the school auditorium, even standing against the walls, in the aisles, and barely within the doors. Naturally the first question asked was what concerned everyone most: What was the Government's acquisition policy for land and property?<sup>21</sup>



Louise Cassels, who attended, described the discussion as long but peaceful. For some in the audience the plant's coming was an opportunity. For others who had generations invested in the land and their homes, a deep well of patriotism was needed to go forward. Cassels began to realize how hard the months ahead were to be that night. She correctly pinpointed that the definition of "hard" would rest on the agreement of the people and the government on "just compensation."

## COE ACQUISITION PROCEDURE

The South Atlantic Real Estate Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) was given the responsibility for the acquisition program. Authority was formally conveyed in a letter from the Chief of Engineers to the Division Engineer that was dated December 1, 1950. A letter from the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission to the Office of the Chief of Engineers, dated November 28, 1950, authorized the Corps to handle the work. The program that included cemetery relocations was legally authorized by the 81st Congress as Public Law 843, approved on September 27, 1950, and as Public Law 911, approved on January 6, 1951.<sup>22</sup>

Meeting at Ellenton Auditorium, December 6, 1950. The U.S. Corps of Engineers real estate officers responsible for the land acquisition called a public meeting in Ellenton. A representative from each family was asked to attend the question and answer session. Reportedly, over 500 individuals attended what appears to have been a segregated meeting with attendees, both black and white, spilling out of the main hall into the building entries and lobby. Courtesy of SRS Archives, negative 1221-1.





Dunbarton's train depot is the focal point of this downtown view circa 1952. A small commercial district with frame and brick commercial buildings lined the railroad corridor. Courtesy of SRS Archives, negative M-642.



Lewis A. Pick, the Chief of Engineers, the AEC press release and a map showing the area under consideration. The COE immediately developed a planning report, outlining their approach to the acquisition of land for the Savannah River Plant. The Division Engineer submitted this report to the Chief of Engineers on December 9, 23

The COE had been brought into the site-selection process in June. The AEC had requested the assistance of the Chief of Engineers in site selection and in acquisition of the plant property when the site was selected. In November, AEC General Manager M.W. Boyer sent Major General



Meyers Mill's town square including (from left to right) the depot, Bob Peeples's store, Olan Meyer's cotton gin and the post office circa 1950. Courtesy of SRS Archives, negative 6683-1.

farms appeared to be non-owner-operated and many were sharecropped or rented to tenant farmers. It was reported that the acquisition would affect up to 8,000 farmers of whom the majority were African American.

The planning report generally described the project area from the perspective of a buyer, noting both the area's advantages and the challenges the Corps would face over the coming months. After a brief physical description, the report moves to population data and descriptions of improvements in the areas. The initial estimate suggested that about 2,300 farms were in the proposed area. The larger

The project area was home to crossroad communities such as Hawthorne and Hattieville as well as four larger communities, two of which were incorporated. It is sig-

nificant that only four communities are mentioned in the report: Ellenton in Aiken County, and Dunbarton, Meyers Mill, and Leigh in Barnwell County. Snelling and Jackson were not discussed. This suggests that the COE was working with better-defined boundaries than those announced to the public. Ellenton was the largest with a population of 760 and Dunbarton was home to 300 individuals. Ellenton was briefly described as a typical southern trading center in the extreme southwestern part of the county through which the Charleston and Western Railroad ran. Municipal improvements included a city hall and jail; the city had no bonded indebtedness. Dunbarton was similarly described but with no municipal improvements nor a high school. Its incorporated land area was larger than Ellenton. Meyers Mill was described as a cluster of a few stores and a cotton gin, and Leigh’s focal point was a box factory around which a small village had grown. A list of the improvements in each of the four communities was given:

|                  | Ellenton | Dunbarton | Meyers Mill | Leigh |
|------------------|----------|-----------|-------------|-------|
| Commercial       | 31       | 15        | 3           | 2     |
| Residences       | 190      | 35        | 10          | 52    |
| Gin              | 1        | 2         | 1           |       |
| School           | 2        | 1         |             |       |
| Church           | 5        | 1         | 2           |       |
| Railroad Station | 1        | 1         |             |       |
| Saw Mill         | 1        | 1         |             |       |
| Fraternal Halls  | 3        |           |             |       |
| City Hall        | 1        |           |             |       |
| Box Factory      |          |           |             | 1     |

State and county roads served the project area, rural mail delivery service was available throughout, telephone service was available in Ellenton and its surrounds, and limited telephone service was available beyond that.

COE staff had reviewed recent land sales in this area in December to identify comparable properties to establish “value trends” that would help inform the appraisers. This review was not successful, as many sales were conveyances between family members or sales by unknowledgeable absentee property owners. For example, in 27 conveyances in Aiken County the price per acre ranged from \$2.00 to \$162.50. Thirteen transactions required a consideration of \$25 per acre or less, twelve at \$75 or less, and two required \$100 and over an acre. Given this fluctuation in price, the COE concluded that the recent sales data was too erratic a source for comparable sales information.

The proposed project area was considered to have minor outstanding interests. The report noted the presence of a rich kaolin deposit immediately to the north and peat bogs along the river. As no one had yet developed these interests, they did not present a problem. Only timber deeds or leases and hunting leases might pose problems. Hunting licenses, the majority of which were given for five years, covered ten percent of the project area. Large timber holdings owned by the International Paper Company and the Leigh Banana Crate Company would prove problematic as each had centered their operations in specific localities, and the interruption of their work would entail severance damage. In the case of the Leigh Banana Crate Company that assessment would be prophetic.

## African-American Displacement

Barbecue for Buist Eaves farmhands at the "Owens Place," Dunbarton vicinity, Barnwell County, 1951. Courtesy of Lois "Yarby" Eaves and the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program.



Eli and Lena Meyer Anderson, Meyers Mill vicinity, circa 1945. Courtesy of Laura Meyer and the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program.

(Right) Willie Floyd Farmhouse, 1951. Courtesy of the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program.



The story of African American displacement caused by the making of the site is little known. While population figures from 1950 suggest that African Americans were in the majority within the future project area, the exact number of those affected has not been tallied. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers originally estimated that the proposed land acquisition program within the rural agricultural area could affect up to 8,000 farmers, the majority of whom were black landowners, tenant farmers, and sharecroppers. The AEC later refined the total estimate to a projected displacement of 6,000 individuals, white and black, or 1,500 families based on the presence of 19 persons per square mile within the 315-square-mile tract (see compiled 1939 Barnwell and Aiken County Highway Map). This refined figure did not project how many or what percentage of

that population were African American, how many lived in small towns or farms, and occupational data. A University of North Carolina study conducted in 1951 surveyed 78 white families and 81 African American families. Accurate population statistics are difficult to extract from the existing data that is weighted toward describing mainstream history or is focused upon the site's Cold War history. The absence of primary documentary sources that relate to the black communities also plays a role in this bias.



St. Luke's Church, Meyer Mill vicinity, Barnwell County, circa 1945. St. Luke Baptist Church was constructed in 1880. The founders were Simon Lafette, Lewis Sanders, Andrew Jackson, Nero Jackson, Ishmel Schaver, Offie Williams, Henry Burke, Stephen Robinson, Robert Ingram, Bob Dunbar, Joe Dunbar, Daniel Allen, Jeff Ashley, Payton Brown, Charlotte Burke, Janet Robinson, Sophie Allen, Amenda Ingram, Mollie Dunbar, and Katherine Dunbar. Reverend Commodore Dunbar was the congregation's first pastor. Courtesy of Alean Meyer Hay and the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program.

The Savannah River Archaeological Research Program's (SRARP) community studies have looked intensively at the pre-federal communities, telling through oral history and documentary data the story of the small towns and their citizens, white and black. In particular, their work on Barnwell County's Four-Mile High School and the Dunbarton and Meyers Mill communities is significant, weaving

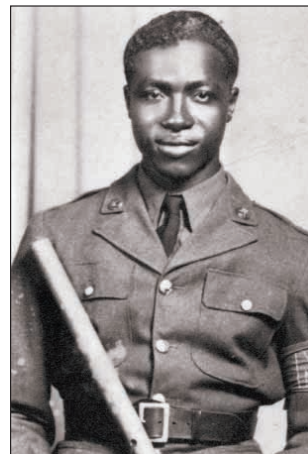




Meyer Family Reunion, Warren Meyer Homeplace, Meyers Mill vicinity, Summer 1952. This photograph captures the "1952 Meyer Family reunion when we had to sign the papers." The reunion allowed family members a last visit at their family homeplace and an occasion to gather the signatures needed to sell their property to the AEC. Courtesy of Laura Meyer and the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program.

African American history into broader cultural themes. SRARP archaeologists have also excavated archaeological sites historically associated with African Americans to help illuminate the African American experience at SRS, such as the study of the Willie Floyd Farm in Barnwell County.

Despite these efforts, no systematic study has addressed how African Americans dealt with the changes required of them in 1950 and where these changes led them. Black ownership of farms was on the increase, particularly in Barnwell County, but sharecropping and tenancy was still a fact of life. For the new African American property owner, the announcement of the plant could only have been heartbreak. For the tenant and sharecropper, the news would have been equally grim and, as non-landowners, little help was available to guide them through the relocation process. The specific parameters that were involved with the relocation of African Americans and their communities, the reshaping of neighborhoods and the reestablishment of church organizations, is all a part of this unexplored experience. Savannah River was responsible for a new landscape in and outside of the plant area. The role that African Americans took in the creation of the post-1950 cultural landscape in Aiken and Barnwell counties is yet to be told.



Albert Foreman in World War II uniform, note baton and Military Police armband. Courtesy of Laura Meyer and the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program.



Lena Anderson, Ruth Meyer Corbett and Caroline Meyer Moody, Meyers Mill, Barnwell County, circa 1950. Courtesy of Laura Meyer and the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program.

(Left) Council Meyer, circa 1925. Courtesy of Laura Meyer and the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program.

Leigh Banana Crate Factory circa 1950. This concern, located south of Ellenton in Barnwell County, was the largest industrial venture within the future Savannah River Site. Courtesy of SRS Archives, negative 6690.



A gross appraisal of land and improvements was attempted based on the reported information.

| Item                 | Amount        | Value               |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Farm Properties      |               |                     |
| Timberland           | 20,000 acres  | \$1,000,000         |
| Cut-over Woodland    | 40,000 acres  | 800,000             |
| Cropland and Pasture | 140,000 acres | 5,600,000           |
| Farm Buildings       | 2,000 acres   | 3,000,000           |
| Community Properties |               |                     |
| Residences           | 300 units     | 1,000,000           |
| Commercial           | 60 units      | 200,000             |
| Industrial           | 6 units       | 1,200,000           |
| Schools              | 21            | 300,000             |
| Churches             | 50            | 150,000             |
| <b>Subtotal</b>      |               | <b>13,250,000</b>   |
| Severance            | 2%            | 265,000             |
| <b>Subtotal</b>      |               | <b>13,515,000</b>   |
| Contingencies 10%    |               | 1,351,500           |
| <b>Total</b>         |               | <b>\$14,866,500</b> |

The authors of the planning report noted that the acquisition of large areas by the government typically inflates surrounding land values and that the dispossessed owners are affected as a result. Therefore, the gross appraisal price was slightly higher than under normal conditions. The need to relocate telephone systems, railroads, roads, and cemeteries was also estimated. Ellenton's Cassels Telephone Company, a private franchise, had to be dissolved and at least 4,500 graves relocated. Relocation costs were estimated at \$300,000.

Disposal of existing improvements was defined in the report. If neither the owner nor the AEC were interested in retaining a building or improvement then it would be sold at a public sale on a sealed-bid basis. The COE hoped to accrue \$50,000 from such sales. The

report also noted the need for help from other federal agencies in relocating farmers. The COE stated that they would follow the AEC's lead in hiring local personnel where possible on the acquisition program. They would also write a weekly bulletin to be mailed to all "boxholders" in the area that would offer information and advice about the land acquisition program and related issues.

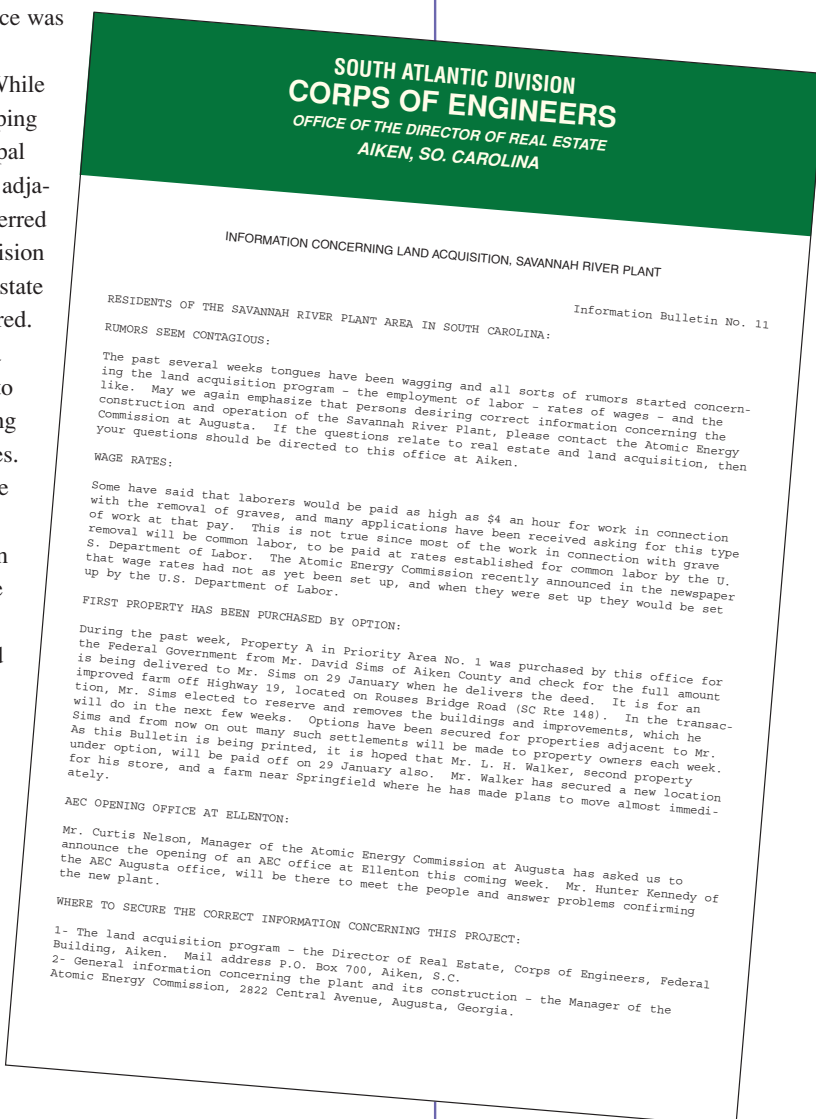
The acquisition program formally began the day after the announcement so that the government would have the necessary lands either by declaration of taking or through actual purchase by June 30, 1952. Gordon Britton and his assistant, George L. Fryer, established the Real Estate Office in the United States Courthouse in Aiken. Burton J. Bell was the COE's public relations director and probably was the author of the information bulletins mailed to area homes.

Sixty-four graded employees were initially assigned to the program and at least three additional local appraisers were to be hired according to the planning report. Until the U.S. Courthouse office was fully staffed, appraisers were borrowed from the Columbia, SC, Office of the Federal Land Bank. While the U.S. Courthouse was the main office, the Mapping and Survey Branch was located in Aiken's Municipal Building and the Appraisal Branch in an unnamed adjacent building. Key COE personnel had been transferred from other positions within the South Atlantic Division and several persons who had worked in the Real Estate Office of the COE during World War II were re-hired. On December 29, a contract was let to a Columbia firm styled as James D. Walters, Title Examiners, to provide the legal legwork involved with establishing accurate title information on the acquired properties. Like the COE, the title firm opened an Aiken office for the project's duration.<sup>24</sup>

COE personnel had actually begun to arrive on November 29, and by December 12 they were able to open the Aiken office. The COE office lived up to its promise. Of the nineteen staff members hired locally, twelve were Aiken County residents and five were from Ellenton.<sup>25</sup> Over 120 persons had been interviewed for clerical and survey work. By January 26, four (more than the initial announcement of three) local men had been added to the field appraisal staff.

The first project area map published in the newspaper had shown the approximate boundaries and two priority areas for acquisition. From the beginning it was clear that the acquisition would occur in stages set by construction requirements. Landowners outside the first priority areas were advised "to go about their reg-

Circulars were sent out by the U.S. Corps of Engineers Office in Aiken to keep landowners informed about the land acquisition and their progress. Source: Prepared by the office of the Director of Real Estate, South Atlantic Division, Corps of Engineers, Aiken, S.C. Savannah River History Project.



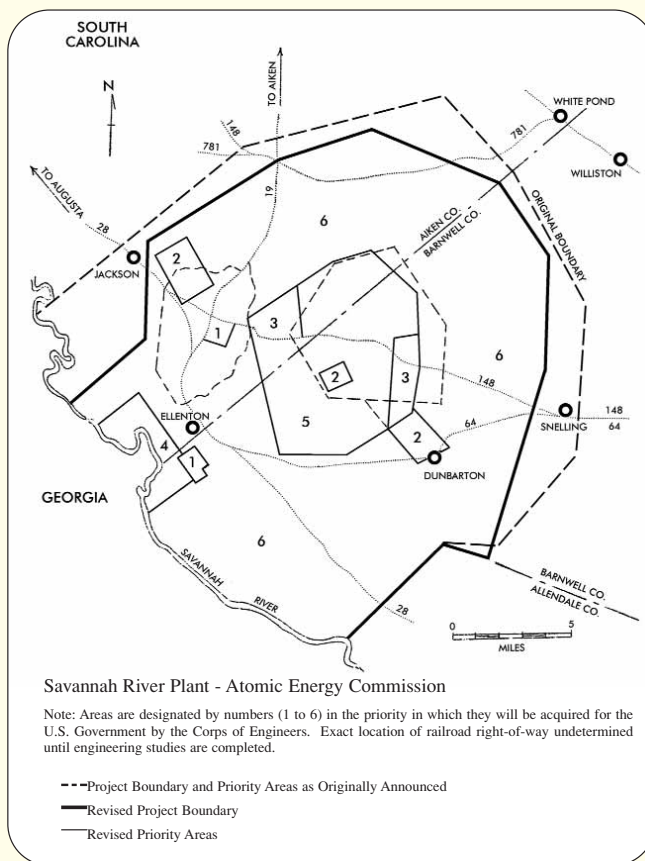


ular business.” Their properties would not be affected until the end of the year, and farmers were further advised that the proposed action should not affect the production of their 1951 crop.<sup>26</sup>

Appraisal of the tracts in Area No.1 began on December 18. All residents within Area No. 1 had to leave before March 15; residents of Area No. 2 had until June 1 to relocate. Chief Appraiser Spencer R. Cooley was in charge of the appraisals of Area No. 1. His team included Y. H. Daniell, Clark B. Honold, and Andres L. Mauney.<sup>27</sup> Rights of entry to 54 properties and 3 cemeteries were acquired by December 21. The first property transfers occurred on January 29 for 582 acres of land and 20 buildings.

## Boundary Definition

Between January 29, 1951, and June 30, 1952, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completed the land-acquisition program, acquiring by declaration of taking or by actual purchase 1,706 tracts of land. Ultimately 123,100 acres in Barnwell County, 73,462 acres in Aiken County, and 4,084 acres in Allendale County were acquired. Boundary alignments occurred as the acquisition program progressed. The first major change occurred on January 11, 1951, when the AEC and Du Pont reached a compromise on the acreage needed for an exclusion area and for safe reactor spacing. This change spared the towns of Jackson and Snelling from the plant boundaries. A second change occurred on September 5, 1951, when approximately 1,800 acres in Barnwell County were eliminated from the planned site and 1,650 acres in Allendale County were added. This change affected the plant area’s southern boundary. A third major change in the project boundaries occurred in May 1952 when a 4,453-acre corridor of land on both sides of Lower Three Runs Creek in Barnwell and Allendale counties was added to the plant area. The addition of the creek and its banks allowed for a more efficient drainage system for the proposed facilities.



This map with revised boundaries for the plant area was released by the AEC showing the elimination of Jackson and Snelling from the project area. Source: US AEC Press Releases.

The names and experience level of the appraisal team were released in an information bulletin so that all involved would be aware of their professional experience, particularly their work in South Carolina. It also served to identify the men to the larger community. *The Augusta Chronicle* reported that individuals posing as federal agents or Du Pont employees were canvassing property owners in the vicinity. A bogus agent posing as a Du Pont employee told one North Augusta property owner that she was personally representing Mr. Du Pont.<sup>28</sup> Luckily, the owner declined the offer.

One of the challenges that the COE recognized at the outset was the inflationary effect the program would have on land prices. Reports in both South Carolina and Georgia surfaced early of the “greed and chop-licking” of Aikenites who had raised the price of housing and land in the weeks after the announcement. One Ellenton man commented in



disgust, “We’re just clay pigeons and these people are shooting at us.”<sup>29</sup> While some community members acted out of self-interest, others offered a helping hand. Sol Blatt of Barnwell welcomed those who were displaced into his home county. “We would like to have them come to Barnwell. If they do every effort will be made to assist. We want them in our churches, our lodges, our clubs.”

The invitation to Barnwell County was somewhat compromised by the actions of State Senator Edgar Brown

and an “option” committee. *The Barnwell People-Sentinel* reported that a group of local landowning citizens, including Brown, had optioned their contiguous properties along with adjacent smaller tracts to reserve the acreage for use as a housing project. Brown cleared the air, explaining that prior to the announcement he had committed to the COE Barnwell County’s help in housing those displaced as well as the incoming operation and construction forces.<sup>30</sup> The local paper commented that the timing of the options might have looked like bad judgement but noted that civic good was the aim of all involved.<sup>31</sup> A more serious incident occurred earlier when an AEC official tipped off a Salt Lake City grocer about the new plant location. The grocer made a quick profit on two parcels that he sold to a lawyer and developer, J. C. Long of Charleston. The AEC official resigned and a FBI investigation was undertaken.<sup>32</sup>

Other communities, near and far, extended a welcome to those affected by the project. The newspapers contain scores of invitations, letters of condolence, and even editorials that called for “just compensation” for the properties to be taken:

Even if a man owns a little ramshackle barn, and a tumble-down house, this property means far more to him than the market value which some appraiser might place upon it. It is his home; his roots are there.



Area newspapers were filled with invitations to those who were displaced by the plant.

Free Lots! Source: *Aiken Standard and Review*, January 22, 1953.

Bombed Out? Source: *The Augusta Chronicle*, December 4, 1950.

## OUR WARMEST WELCOME

Our deepest Sympathy and warmest welcome are extended to our friends in hydrogen plant reservation area – our friends, who will vacate their homes and leave their friends, churches and schools.

We the undersigned firms and individuals offer you a hand of understanding. We invite you to the City of Aiken where you will find neighborly folks, excellent schools, and friendly churches:

W. Herbert Stiefel, Contractor  
Owen & Thomas  
American Oil Company  
Buchanan Home and Auto Supply  
Thomas Laundry and Dry Cleaning, Inc  
B. C. Moore and Sons  
Bank of Greenwood  
Swingle Chevrolet Co., Inc  
Commercial Pharmacy  
Holley Tractor and Implement Co.  
D. M. George Funeral Home  
Nelson Implement Co.  
Redd-Mc Lain Furniture Co.  
Holley Motor Co.  
Hutson-Etheredge Insurance Agency  
Wise Hardware Co.  
Auto Supply and Appliance Co.  
Eulalie Salley and Co.  
Lyon-Croft Mutual Insurance Agency  
Belks Department Store  
Farmers & Merchants Bank  
Ram’s Theatres

Source: *Aiken Standard and Review*, December 6, 1950.

The task of creating an accurate site map was considerable. Joseph E. Hovas, Chief of the US COE Mapping Section, and his multiple survey crews were responsible for completion of the field survey. Hovas had signed on with the Corps of Engineers in 1948 working as a cartographic engineer on the Clarks Hill Project. He was transferred to the Savannah River Project in 1951, later joining the AEC as a civil engineer. The original survey's accuracy is still commented on by later surveyors and Joseph Hovas' signature is present on all original maps. Source: Savannah River Operations Office, Atomic Energy Commission, News Release No. 956, December 16, 1974.

(Below) Unidentified surveyor in peach orchard, August 13, 1951. Courtesy of SRS Archives, negative M-241.



In our opinion, the only fair thing for the government to do is to pay every one of these displaced South Carolina residents the replacement value on their property. What with the skyrocketing prices, and the fact that these people are going to have to start life all over again, they should be paid enough for their property so that it can be replaced somewhere else without any monetary loss to them.<sup>33</sup>

The appraisers sent out to inspect the properties were intrepid. Their orders were to appraise and evaluate the affected properties according to federal regulations that made no mention of sentimental value in the evaluative process nor “replacement value.” To do their jobs, these “government men,” armed only with the credentials that identified them as official appraisers, entered into the lives of rural and urban families and placed a value on what they possessed, regardless of its meaning.

The acquisition program moved forward. For those who had the financial wherewithal to move regardless of the financial outcome on their land in the project area, it was fairly straightforward. These individuals or families were able to move quickly before inflation set in and had a better selection of available house sites or farms. For those who share-cropped or rented, choices were to move elsewhere and continue farming or to apply to the project's employment office. From the first, displaced persons were given first consideration in the plant work force that was developing. The COE information bulletins always included information on where and who to contact for a job. Many residents found jobs that changed their lives and the future of their families, as second and third generations of these families would later work at the site. For those residents who needed the purchase money to acquire a new home, the appraisal process and the speed with which it happened was crucial to their chances to establish satisfactory new lives elsewhere.

## SURVEY AND APPRAISAL

Based on the premise of “negotiated purchase,” the land acquisition involved several steps.<sup>34</sup> First, the engineers were given specific boundaries for the area to be acquired. In the case of the Savannah River Site, these boundaries were not fixed until January 11; approximate boundaries were used initially. The acquisition map showed six areas that were prioritized according to the construction schedule.

The first task was to create an accurate map of the project area, based upon field survey and aerial photography. Joseph Hovas, the Chief of the Mapping Section, led six to eight survey crews in the field to accomplish this task. The surveyors, using aerial photography supplied by Aero Service of Philadelphia, located recognizable property lines on larger tracts, typically those along the river. From these known points, the surveyor could better ascertain the boundaries of the smaller tracts.

The COE organized the plant area into 33 sections, listed alphabetically. The COE staff would then identify individual tracts and their

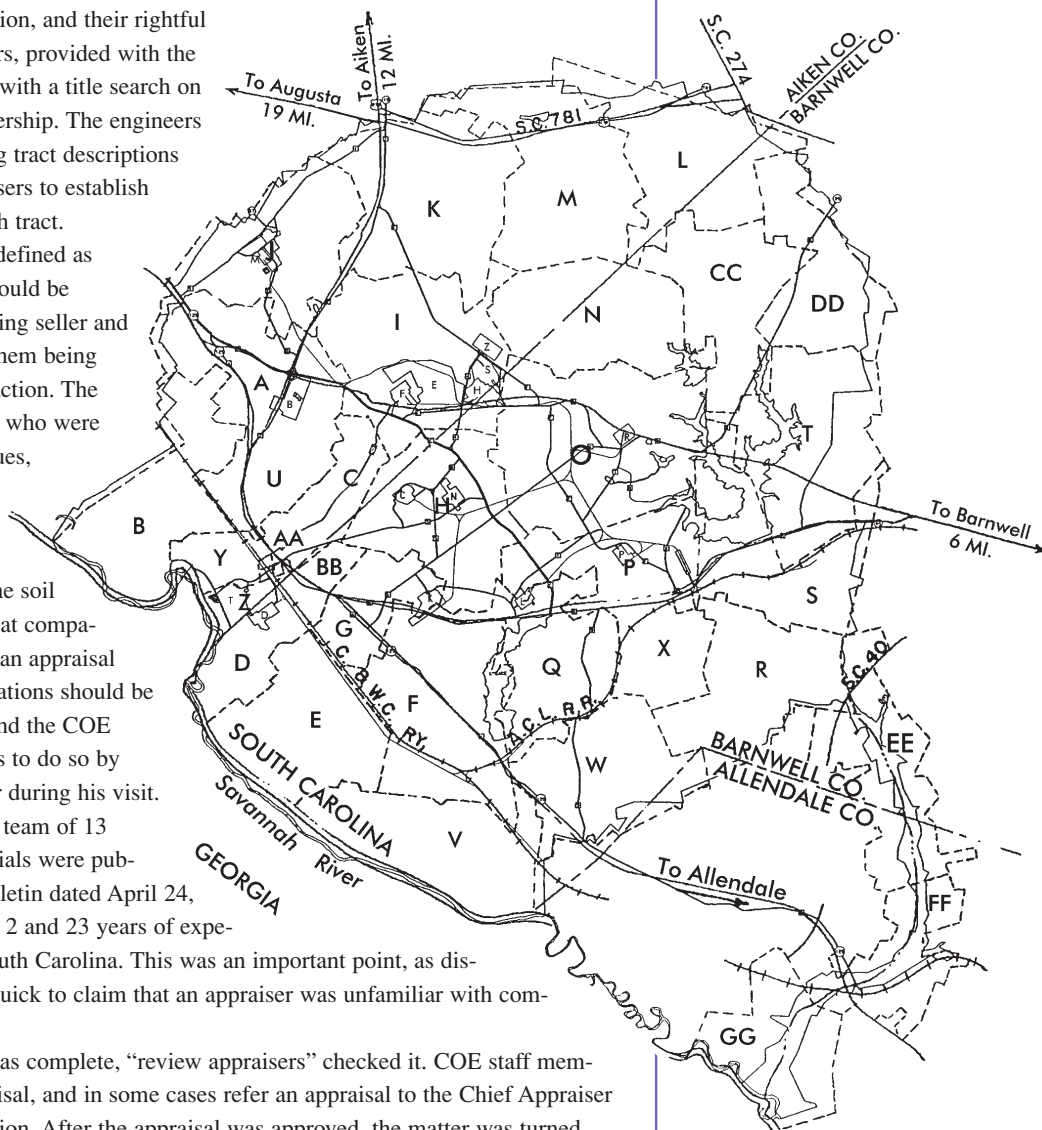


boundaries within each section, and their rightful owners. Government lawyers, provided with the field information, followed with a title search on the property, verifying ownership. The engineers could then begin assembling tract descriptions that would allow the appraisers to establish the fair market value of each tract.

Fair market value was defined as the amount of money that could be agreed upon between a willing seller and a willing buyer, neither of them being obligated to enter the transaction. The COE hired local appraisers, who were familiar with local land values, to prepare the first appraisals. These men were asked to look at the buildings, the timber, and the soil on each tract and then look at comparable properties to arrive at an appraisal value. Any special considerations should be brought to their attention, and the COE encouraged property owners to do so by accompanying the appraiser during his visit. The identities of the COE's team of 13 appraisers and their credentials were published in an information bulletin dated April 24, 1951.<sup>35</sup> Each had between 2 and 23 years of experience as an appraiser in South Carolina. This was an important point, as disgruntled landowners were quick to claim that an appraiser was unfamiliar with comparative farm prices.

When each appraisal was complete, "review appraisers" checked it. COE staff members would check the appraisal, and in some cases refer an appraisal to the Chief Appraiser for the South Atlantic Division. After the appraisal was approved, the matter was turned over to the U.S. Department of Justice, which was responsible for approaching the rightful owner with the appraisal and legal documents in preparation for acquisition. Due to federal regulations, the owner was not provided a breakdown of the appraisal, and the appraiser was not permitted to quote a price higher or lower than what was considered the full fair market value as disclosed in the appraisal. The latter regulation was invoked for the property owner's protection against being a paid a price less than the Government believed the property was worth.

If both parties were in agreement, an option contract was signed. If there were improvements on the property—i.e., a house, barn, shed, office—the value of these improvements was reflected in the appraisal. If the owner elected to keep any or all of the buildings on their property, he or she could reserve them at their salvage value in the option contract. When the option contract was finalized, a timetable for the removal of the



Acquisition map for Savannah River Site used by US COE for acquisition tract register dividing the site area into 33 sections. Courtesy of Savannah River Site Archives.

Strom Thurmond in downtown Aiken law office, 1951. Strom Thurmond Collection, Mss 100. Courtesy of Special Collections, Clemson University Libraries, Clemson, South Carolina.

“reserved improvements” was provided. If an owner chose not to reserve homes or any other types of improvements, the government had the right to dispose of them to the highest bidder.

If the owner disagreed with the appraisal, then the Real Estate Office would request that the Federal Court decide what the property was worth in a condemnation proceeding. At the outset of such a proceeding, the appraised value of a tract was deposited with the Court so that the owner could petition the Court for 80 to 90 percent of the amount deposited as a credit against the final award. All sellers had the right of a jury trial to ascertain whether an appraisal was fair. A ruling later passed in August “replaced a jury

## Strom Thurmond

Born in 1902 in Edgefield, South Carolina, Strom Thurmond began his career as a farmer and an educator. He was a product of the Edgefield County public school system and had obtained his degree from Clemson College (now Clemson University) in 1923 in horticulture. His political career began when he became Edgefield County's superintendent of education in 1929, a position he held through 1933.

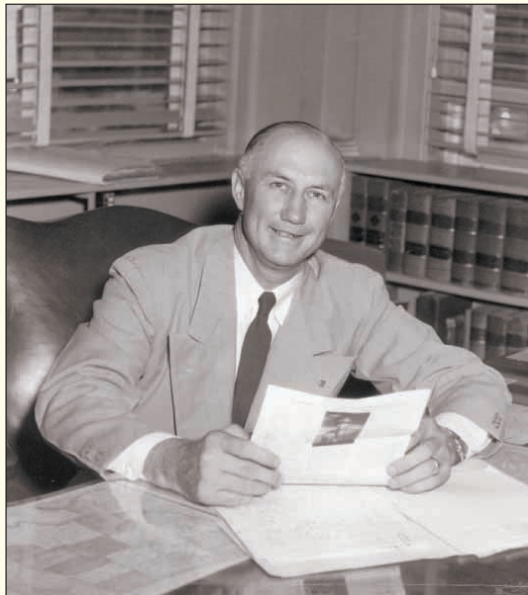
Thurmond read law with his father, John William Thurmond, and was admitted to the South Carolina Bar in 1930, after which he served as the Edgefield Town and County attorney from 1930-1938. During the 1930s he held positions in the state legislature and the U.S. Court of Appeals, followed by service in the army during World War II. A member of the Civil Affairs section of the First Army headquarters, Thurmond was a part of the Normandy invasion while on assignment with the 82nd Airborne Division. After a stint in the Pacific, he returned to his home state where he was successful in his bid for state governor in 1946.

In response to the nomination of Harry Truman for President in 1948, he sought the presidential nomination of the States Rights' Democratic Party, a race in which he won 39 electoral votes. His later race against Olin D. Johnston for U.S. Senator in 1950 was unsuccessful. After his tenure as governor he retired to private life in Aiken where he practiced law. He was instrumental in helping many landowners secure better prices for their property during the

land acquisition program for Savannah River. In 1954, he was the first person in U.S. history to be elected as a write-in candidate for the state senate seat, defeating Edgar Brown. He has served as a member of the United States Senate from South Carolina since 1954. He switched to the Republican Party in 1964, helping Barry Goldwater in his campaign for president and played a significant role in the Nixon

presidential campaign strategy, marshalling the Southern vote.

Thurmond's senatorial career includes a number of committee appointments to the Armed Services, Judiciary, and Veteran's Affairs committees. He was the President Pro Tempore between 1981-1987 and 1995 of the U.S. Senate, and has served as chair of the aforementioned committees. In these contexts, Senator Thurmond has been a strong supporter of Savannah River and atomic energy, looking for ways early on to deepen his home state's edge in atomic energy, supporting projects such as the Parr Shoals Nuclear Reactor and other private power projects. Later he and other influential South Carolinians would go to bat for Savannah River in 1963 when



the closure of R reactor loomed large, protecting the State and region's interests.

Source: "Strom Thurmond Biography," The Strom Thurmond Institute. <http://www.strom.clemson.edu/strom/bio.html>.

trial with three judges who would go direct to a Claimant's lot in order to make the final decision."<sup>36</sup> Land that was needed immediately was obtained through declaration of taking, which uses the government's power of eminent domain. Where this happened, the government took land by court proclamation after paying for it.

As Louise Cassels had pointed out, the appraisal value of land would be the sticking point. On March 27, at a public meeting in Aiken, about 200 persons met with Representative John J. Riley and Colonel Gordon Britton to express their dissatisfaction with the AEC appraisals.<sup>37</sup> Two resolutions were formed. In the first, those affected by the AEC plant asked to be exempt from capital gains tax on property sold to the government for the plant. The second resolution requested that the COE condemn land to be used in 1951, serve notice, and place the money with the clerk of court so that those who were forced into an early removal would have the financial wherewithal to relocate. The second resolution also asked that the COE provide a complete breakdown of a property's appraisal to anyone appealing his or her land transfer to the court. J. Strom Thurmond, former governor, was in the audience. Thurmond advised that the people should receive fair and just compensation for their properties and that they have recourse through the courts to obtain what they thought was fair.

Two days later a second meeting was held in Ellenton. State Senator Dorsey K. Lybrand joined Congressman Riley at this meeting along with 200 attendees. William E. Bush, an Augustan and landowner in the project area, spoke forcefully asking state officials—governor, senators, and representatives—to work in their behalf by passing an act that stated clearly that a property owner must be paid the full replacement value for property. Also, each property owner should have a breakdown of his/her property's appraised worth. The latter should be signed by two appraisers and approved by the head of the COE's acquisition program.<sup>38</sup> No resolutions were generated at the Ellenton meeting. Despite the dissatisfaction with their efforts, the COE forged ahead. On April 20, condemnation proceedings began on 22 tracts. As promised, funds equaling appraised values were deposited with the clerk of court, and landowners with clear title to those tracts could draw down the full amount accorded their property. An answer also came on the first resolution formed at the Aiken meeting. The House Ways and Means Committee approved a bill to eliminate the capital gains tax clause from the proceeds from seized property that was condemned by government agencies.<sup>39</sup>

Some of those who were unhappy with the COE appraisals followed the course of action suggested by Strom Thurmond. The former governor had become an Aiken resident in 1950, practicing law with Charles Simons and Dorsey Lybrand from their downtown Aiken office. Styled Thurmond, Lybrand, and Simons, the local firm handled a number of suits against the government brought by area landowners.<sup>40</sup> *The Aiken Standard and Review* reported on several cases in 1952 where the Aiken firm successfully represented the landowners, sometimes doubling the original appraisal offer.<sup>41</sup> Other local attorneys such as Fabian Keirce of Bamberg and Henry Busbee also provided legal advice to project-area landowners.<sup>42</sup>

In May a special three-member commission appointed by Federal Judge George Bell Timmerman heard the Leigh Banana Crate Company's suit against the government. The appointees were Dean Samuel L. Prince of the University of South Carolina Law School, Louis O. Rast of Swansea, and C. D. Barr of Leesville. Carl G. Leigh sought \$3 million dollars for his production plant, which was sited on land owned by the Cassels Company,



which in turn lodged a suit against the government, contesting the appraisal amount.<sup>43</sup> As the COE mentioned in their planning report, the relocation costs of this business would cause problems. The Corps would end up paying \$1,280,965 for the Leigh Banana Crate Factory, almost \$500,000 more than its appraised value.<sup>44</sup>

In July 1953, the District Engineer, Savannah, took over responsibility for completing all remaining real estate transactions. The COE Aiken office closed in May 1954; personnel would be sent up to Aiken when needed from this point onward.<sup>45</sup> At the close of the land acquisition program, 46 percent of the property acquired resulted from condemnation proceedings. The largest single condemnation action was filed in the Federal District Court by the government in September 22, 1952, and it embraced 19,302.35 acres in all three counties. Faulty title was attributed to one-third of the 698 tracts that were condemned.<sup>46</sup> When completed, the COE would purchase all the land and necessary improvements for \$15,582,026. The State of South Carolina was to be reimbursed \$471,621 for its costs in relocating highways affected by the project. The cost of relocating the major utilities, not including the railroads, was \$270,673. The utilities were Aiken Electric Cooperative, Salkehatchie Electric Cooperative, S.C. Gas and Electric, Cassels Telephone Company and Williston Telephone Company. Finally, the cemetery relocations totaled \$168,749. The entire program was estimated in 1959, prior to the final audit, to cost \$19,000,000.<sup>47</sup>

## "EVEN THE DEAD"

The Corps was also asked to handle cemetery removals. An inventory of the site area identified 161 cemeteries, some of which dated to the late 1700s. One hundred twenty six cemeteries were removed, and 5,984 graves were relocated outside the project area with the approval of the next of kin. The reports written by the COE show the care taken with this aspect of the land acquisition program. Relatives were involved in the decision-making and the AEC bore all costs involved. Notably, area historical societies were contacted for discussions about removing graves that had historical significance. Cemeteries that were located within the site's outer boundary were left in place, and visitation privileges were established.<sup>48</sup>

Between 1951 and 1954, the Corps contracted with private firms to handle the removal and reinterment. E. H. Moody of Bryson City, North Carolina, handled the first group, which were located in the northwest section of the plant area. Colburn and Shumaker of Wagoner, Oklahoma, handled the second group located in the center of the plant area, and Scherwin and Jessen of Charleston handled the remaining three groups. Final removals were completed in February 1954.<sup>49</sup>

## FROM "WHAT WAS" TO "WHAT IS"

Agriculture was the area's economic backbone. Farmers reportedly occupied 73 percent of the 1,706 tracts acquired.<sup>50</sup> This fact, reported in 1960, was probably based upon the field observation of the

Dunbarton Grammar School with schoolbuses and children lined up for school photograph in 1926. Courtesy of Margaret Anderson and the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program.





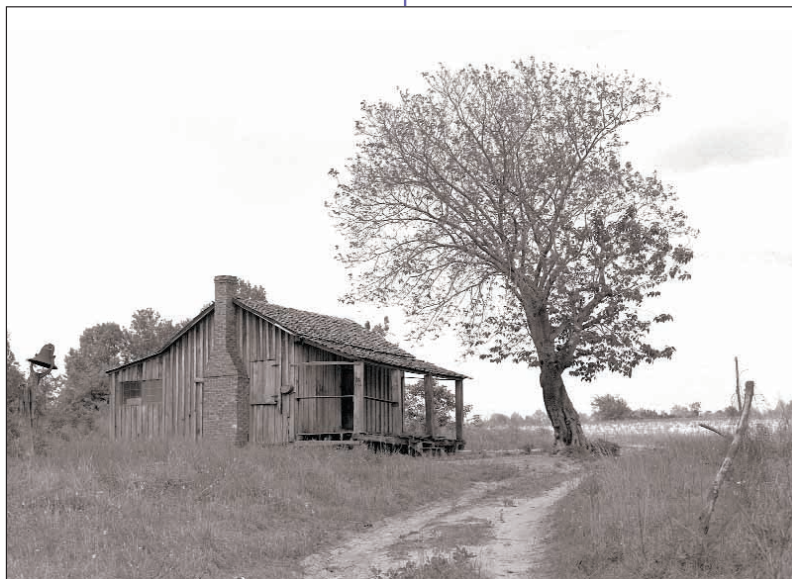
appraisers. However, a recent study has shown that even individuals involved in commerce operated or rented farm property. This study, conducted by the SRARP, identifies 99 percent of all SRS land as agricultural lands, containing home places, cultivated fields, idle fields, pastures, and woodland. The average size of a rural property on

Dunbarton Grammar School converted for use as a weather station furnishing needed weather information for construction crews, 1951. Courtesy of Savannah River Archives, negative M-144.

the site in 1951 was 197 acres.<sup>51</sup> This was larger than average farms in Aiken and Barnwell counties in 1950. Aiken County farms averaged 123.9 acres in size and Barnwell 138.8 acres. For both counties sharecropping was on the decline, and an early report noted many vacant buildings on the area farms as a result.<sup>52</sup> Also for many of the younger generation, the job market was slim. As a result, there was a steady out-migration of younger men and women who made their homes in regional cities where work could be found.<sup>53</sup>

While some large tracts owned by lumber companies would traditionally be considered commercial properties, they were not extensively timbered, but used dually for agricultural pursuits. The SRARP land-use study considered them as agricultural properties as well.<sup>54</sup> The lumber company landholdings included the following: International Paper Company (15,204.3 acres), Aiken Lumber Company (72 acres), Savannah River Lumber Corporation (256 acres), United States Plywood Corporation (101 acres), West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company (245 acres), and the Woodward Lumber Company (362 acres).

The appraisal records detail through photography and written descriptions the assemblage of buildings that were typical of the many rural properties on these tracts. Rural vernacular house types characteristic of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries were all present. I-houses, shotgun houses, hall and parlor houses, cottages of all types, and bungalows were architectural styles that suited the area's residents. Tenant homes tended to be simple in plan and construction. For both the main house and the ancillary dwelling, unpainted frame buildings with porches were in evidence, shaded by a stand of trees. Surrounding fields of corn, cotton, peanuts, orchards, and vegetables provided the livelihoods of the occupants. Small southern barns, sheds, smokehouses, corn cribs, chicken coops, and privies were familiar companions to the main house. While the COE appraisers recorded 32 different types of outbuildings, chicken houses, barns, and privies



Agriculture was the economic mainstay of the project area with farmers occupying the majority of the land acquired for the new plant. Modest vernacular residential and farm buildings like this frame tenant home were commonly found shaded by a single tree, surrounded by fields. Courtesy of SRS Archives, negative M-199.



This sequence of photographs shows the appraisal record captured on film for one tract of land. Each building was assigned a number. Seven buildings are shown including a main house denoted as a six-room unpainted dwelling on brick piers with twelve windows and five doors with a kitchen ell on its back elevation, a privy, stable, corn crib, barn and shed. In addition a five-room tenant house with a barn and shed was also recorded. Courtesy of Department of Energy, Site Acquisition Appraisal Records.

### Appraisal Report for Land and Improvements for the J. B. Large Tract (F-546–296 acres)

#### VALUATION OF LAND

| Present Use       | Soil type | Topography       | Area | Unit Value | Total Value |
|-------------------|-----------|------------------|------|------------|-------------|
| Cultivated & Idle | DSL       | Level-Undulating | 73   | 45.00      | 3,285.00    |
| Cultivated        | OSL       | Undulating       | 6    | 40.00      | 240.00      |
| Cultivated & Idle | OLS       | Undulating       | 25   | 30.00      | 750.00      |
| Idle              | OLS       | Level            | 23   | 25.00      | 575.00      |
| Reverting         | DLS       | Level            | 57   | 15.00      | 855.00      |
| Woodland (Upland) | OLS       | Undulating       | 24   | 10.00      | 240.00      |
| Woodland (Swamp)  | PLS       | Level            | 88   | 6.00       | 704.00      |
| TOTAL             |           |                  |      | 171.00     | \$6,649.00  |

Source: Cabak, Melanie A. and Mary M. Inkrot. *Old Farm, New Farm An Archaeology of Rural Modernization in the Aiken Plateau, 1875–1950*. Savannah River Archaeological Research Papers 9, Occasional Papers of the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program, South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of South Carolina.

were the most prevalent. If a property had a tenant or sharecropper’s home on their farm, this secondary dwelling probably had its own “area.”<sup>55</sup>

Churches, cemeteries, and schools anchored the scattered rural communities. While an occasional poker game, cockfight or “snort” of moonshine was tolerated, area residents placed a high value on church attendance and membership.<sup>56</sup> Baptist, Methodist, and Methodist Episcopal churches predominated among the 44 church congregations and religious societies that owned land in the project area.<sup>57</sup> Rural and urban, frame and brick, these buildings provided structure to the landscape and the people they served. A University of North Carolina study of urbanization in the area in 1954 describes the





#### VALUATION OF IMPROVEMENTS

| Kind   | Size  | Construction | Roof         | Foundation  | Condition | Present Value     | Salvage Val.    |
|--|-------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 6-rm dwelling (3379)   | 14x42 |              |              |             |           |                   |                 |
| Ell  | 22x24 | Frame        | Metal        | Brick Piers | Fair      | 2,000.00          | 350.00          |
| Privy (3380)   | 4x4   | Frame        | Wood Shingle | Wood        | Poor      | 5.00              | XXX             |
| Stable (3381)  | 8x14  | Frame        | Board        | Wood        | Poor      | 15.00             | XXX             |
| Corn Crib (3382)   | 14x18 | Frame        | Metal        | Wood Block  | Good      | 125.00            | 20.00           |
| Barn (3383)  | 10x40 | Frame        | Metal        | Brick Piers | Poor      | 135.00            | 25.00           |
| Shed   | 10x12 |              |              |             |           |                   |                 |
| 5-rm Ten. House (3384)   | 20x25 | Frame        | Metal        | Wood        | Poor      | 300.00            | 40.00           |
| Barn (3385)  | 10x12 | Pole         | Metal        | Wood        | Poor      | 50.00             | 10.00           |
| Shed   | 10x12 |              |              |             |           |                   |                 |
| Main house – 1 story unpainted – 12 windows – 5 doors – no electricity – 2 chimneys 1 flue |       |              |              |             |           |                   |                 |
| Sills 6 x 6 Floor Joists – 2- 10"x 30" cts   |       |              |              |             |           |                   |                 |
| 190' deep well – 2" casing hand pump   |       |              |              |             |           | 175.00            | 10.00           |
| Approximately 410' 1" pipe galvanized A.15   |       |              |              |             |           | 61.50             | 20.00           |
| <b>TOTAL *</b>   |       |              |              |             |           | <b>\$2,866.50</b> | <b>\$475.00</b> |

\* Estimated contribution improvements to appraised market value of the property as a whole.

mechanics of the many small close-knit communities in the project area at the point of change:

Communities have been small and unchanging. Families of whites and Negroes have worked together for decade on decade, the one guaranteeing a minimum of physical security, the other providing hands to till the soil, and the labor for the stores, the yards, the homes. Neighbors and relatives have valued highly the personal, close ties of life on settlements where everyone knew everybody else's joys, sorrows, scandals, and hopes.<sup>58</sup>

## Excerpt from C. S. Anderson Diary

Another day of comotion all day don't Suppose there will ever be another day of Happiness here Since the Government has come in and hit a death blow on this part of the world see nothing and hear nothing else - December 4, 1950

don't think there was ever a Saturday night Since Dunbarton was in existence that there was so few people here all stores closed before the regular time no money and no one knows what to do or where to go - December 30, 1950

Things have changed up a little in the place with the government they come in today and informed Henry Moody Bo Corley and Lane they would have to be out by April the 1st has got things all up in the air we don't know what to expect next. - January 12, 1951

Ham Dicks had a sale today at his farm they say there was quite a crowd there Margaret had to go up with Ham to keep records - January 31, 1951

I cleaned up the backyard this AM and opened up the flower pit and taken out what was left in it. think I will fill it up. don't suppose they will ever need it again here. there has been a good deal stirring around here today. guess things will soon be different - February 12, 1951

They had a regular election to see what should do with the church funds and parsonage a lot of confusion too - February 18, 1951

Today has been a busily day around here they had a bake sale on Clarence Dicks all daylong there was quite a crowd attended the Sale they sold Clarence Albert Ellis & Geddings Farm implement I went over for a few minutes this AM don't think they finished up. I could hear them at Sun Set. - February 28, 1951

We all went to ride taken Jule up to see the Burned Area up by Rouse Bridge and on up to New Ellenton and back by Ellenton. - March 18, 1951

The Government Man was here this PM and settled up for the old Homeplace after being in the family for 80 years or more it don't seem fair that Such a thing could happen. - July 5, 1951

They started up with the House (old Home Place) today got the Kitchen & dining Room as far as the Bay just below Hams Fertilizer House the dwelling got as far as Clarence Dicks Corn Field. - August 1, 1951

They moved Thomas Grove Church today taking it out about Elko. September 13, 1951

Done nothing all day. Dupont work in full blast from the way the machines are passing through here during the day. the House movers are busiy too. Wallace Harley house got this far in PM that makes 3 I have seen pass

through today. Beatty Gin House caught on fire this PM. Dupont fire Truck put it out. - October 12, 1951

One year ago today the Government announced they was going to take over everything in this part of the country there has been quite a change Since Tuesday November

1950. old Homes that had been in the family for generations has been vacated and they have moved to new Homes. Some locaitys there is nothing left to mark the old Home Site. never in the History has people been so demoralized as they have been during the past year. They have not taken Dunbarton yet but we are expecting it to happen any day. One year ago today the Government taken Over. - November 28, 1951

Clarence Dicks moved his clubHouse from his fish pond to Barnwell today. - December 6, 1951

No doubt today was the quietest Christmas Day that was ever seen here. and as we stop to think this will be the last Christmas that will ever be spent in Dunbarton. enough to make all feel Sad for Soon it will a thing of the past like the song, I use to hear that my old Daddy did love to hear Jerry Snelling Sing the words of it was (Far Away). - December 25, 1951

Today winds up the old year 1951 and none of us can realize the many changes that has been made this year. and Soon (there) will be more as it (is) just a question of time (until) Dunbarton will be like other places. a thing of the past. Meyers Mill passed out today. the PO and mail Route was closed today. we can all see now what the Government has done for us. Dupont will Soon blot Dunbarton (off) the map. it is hard for the people to understand why we have to give up our Home and locality Somewhere else. (we) do not know where we will live to see it closed out if I am living. hope God will give me the courage and strength to leave the old familiar places with a Smile instead of sheding tears. - C.S. Anderson Diary, December 31, 1951

Source: Richard Johnson, Jr, Tonya Algerine Browder, Richard David Brooks, and David Colin Crass. *Memories of Home: Dunbarton and Meyers Mill Remembered*. Savannah River Archaeological Research Heritage Series I. Occasional Papers of the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program, Community History project, South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology and University of South Carolina, 1993: 56.



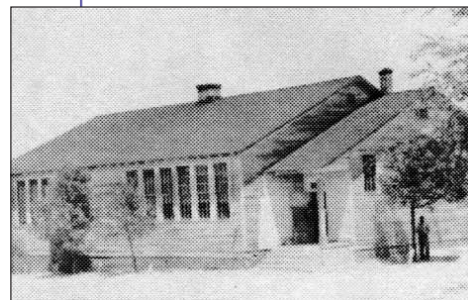
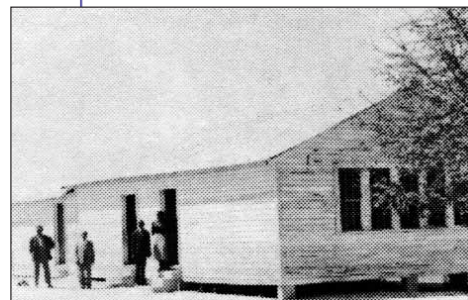
C. S. Anderson and son Randolph, circa 1920. Photograph courtesy of Margaret Anderson and the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program.

Attesting to this sense of community, many of these churches would be moved to new locations where a majority of their congregation was relocating.

Community schools were listed in the acquisition records. There were 23 schools of various sizes in the project area that served the area's children. Their names, enrollment for the beginning of the 1950/51 school year and number of teachers are shown below.

| Name                 | County   | Pupils       | Teachers  |
|----------------------|----------|--------------|-----------|
| Ellenton             | Aiken    | 290          | 12        |
| Ellenton             | Aiken    | 123          | 4         |
| Brinkley             | Aiken    | 73           | 3         |
| Bloomingtondale      | Aiken    | 47           | 2         |
| Fairfield            | Aiken    | 27           | 2         |
| Oakview              | Aiken    | 12           | 1         |
| Greendale            | Aiken    | 43           | 2         |
| Willow Pitt          | Aiken    | 25           | 1         |
| Mill Branch          | Aiken    | 11           | 1         |
| Mossy                | Aiken    | 17           | 1         |
| Dunbarton            | Barnwell | 44           | 3         |
| Thomas Grove         | Barnwell | 330          | 12        |
| Union Branch         | Barnwell | 29           | 1         |
| Fair Branch          | Barnwell | 34           | 1         |
| Union Branch         | Barnwell | 40           | 2         |
| (Four-Mile District) |          |              |           |
| Haley Branch         | Barnwell | 28           | 1         |
| Craig Pond           | Barnwell | 22           | 1         |
| Ashley Grove         | Barnwell | 45           | 2         |
| St. Luke             | Barnwell | 31           | 1         |
| Gum Pond             | Barnwell | 60           | 3         |
| Ned Branch           | Barnwell | 68           | 2         |
| Four Mile Park       | Barnwell | 119          | 4         |
| Spring Branch        | Barnwell | 50           | 2         |
| <b>Total Pupils</b>  |          | <b>1,568</b> | <b>64</b> |

Only two of the above schools were attended by white students; the remainder served African American students. The Ellenton schools closed in February; their closure was delayed until a new school in Jackson was completed. Unlike the Ellenton students, students at the Dunbarton School completed their school year in June 1952.<sup>59</sup> Places for all children had to be found at either new schools or at already established outer community schools. Local school boards began to work with AEC officials almost immediately in planning closures and in realigning school districts to accommodate the substantial changes in their school populations.



"The school was constructed in the early 1920s and was built by a Mr. Rosenwall as a gift to the people. The school was known as the Academy. Then a group of black churches, called the Association, took over operation of the school and changed the name to Thomas Grove. Later the state took over and that was when the name was changed to Four Mile, because of the Four Mile Association. Four Mile also had a boarding house, because it was the only black school in the area. Children came from all over the county to come to the school. They would come to school on Sunday and go back home on Friday." Source: Richard Johnson, Jr, Tonya Algerine Browder, Richard David Brooks, and David Colin Crass. *Memories of Home: Dunbarton and Meyers Mill Remembered*. Savannah River Archaeological Research Heritage Series I.



"The first of the house movers, a man by the name of Ralph South, set out for these parts from Ordway, Colorado, on November 28th, the day the government announced the project."

Daniel Lang, "Camellias and Bombs," *The New Yorker*, July 7, 1951.



## TOWN CLOSURES

On April 23, 1951, the AEC asked the COE to move forward with appraisals of Ellenton and Dunbarton. The need to expedite the process stemmed from changing construction requirements and from a request from town officials to get the process underway so residents could begin planning their futures. Mapping the town was their first priority, and this was forecasted to be a two-month proposition. The maps and appraisal records prepared by the COE along with the comments of the residents quoted in newspapers or captured in oral history accounts offer an incomparable image of these towns and their environs before they disappeared.



## The End of a Hometown

Mike Cassels, the proprietor of the Long Store turned UPI correspondent, wrote a story about the end of his hometown:

"It wasn't a very beautiful place except to the people who lived there. The railroad ran through the middle of town, and the folks who had nothing better to do met the 4:30 passenger train, which we called 'Fido.' Lord knows why.

The depot was right across the street from my father's general store....That was the center of town because the fire bell was there too. In the winter, the farmers would stand around the pot-bellied iron stove in the long store and wonder whether it would ever quit raining. In the summer, the fields turned white with cotton and the sun that baked down so intensely that it was hard to find energy enough to do anything except go swimming in the creek, or eat a cool watermelon or plan a possum hunt for the cool of the evening.

That was the way it was when my grandfather was a boy, and that's the way it still was when I took my son there for the first time a few years ago.

I am afraid my son won't remember it that way, though. What little Mike will remember, I suspect, is all the noise and confusion and feverish activity which has descended on Ellenton when he made his last visit to grandmother's house last Thanksgiving. Armies of bulldozers were snorting through the cotton fields, turning them overnight into flat expanses of land."

Source: *The Augusta Chronicle*, November 29, 1950.

Photograph Source: Louise Cassels, *The Unexpected Exodus*, (Aiken, SC., Sand Hill Press, 1971).



Ellenton, incorporated in 1880, was a railroad town 25 miles southeast of Augusta founded by a number of wealthy land-owning families including the Bush, Dunbar, Ashley, and Buckingham families.<sup>60</sup> These same surnames occur in the 1950 acquisition records, joined by the Cassels, Brinkley, Risher, and Smith families. All appear to have



deep roots in the community in which they and their extended families lived. Ellenton's half- and one-acre rectangular lots within a one-mile-square incorporated area, reached back away from the tracks of the Charleston and Western Railroad. River, Jackson, and Dunbar streets paralleled the railroad; Evergreen, Center, Fair, and Church streets

paralleled Main Street. South Carolina State Highway 28 also sliced through the eastern edge of town. Some roads, such as Main Street, were paved while side streets were typically unimproved. The town's 1950 population was 746 prior to the announcement.<sup>61</sup> Housing ran the gamut from large mansions to smaller frame vernacular buildings such as central-hall homes or hall and parlor types. The presence of bungalows and cottages attest to Ellenton's twentieth-century growth. County tax records show that Ellenton had 56 merchants whose respective businesses were housed in 33 buildings in 1950. Main Street was the place where businesses clustered. The Cassels Family, a major force in modernizing Ellenton and wielding considerable influence in town affairs, operated the

"Long Store" on Main Street. The frame commercial building, 210 feet long and 41 feet wide, was a town fixture; most residents and farmers from outlying areas remembered the store that had everything from "toothpicks to coffins."<sup>62</sup> In addition, this family built and operated a power plant and owned a Standard Oil and Gas franchise, two funeral homes, a dairy farm, a sawmill, several large farms, the telephone company, and the bank. Other Ellenton businesses included barbershops, a dry cleaner, auto garages, a movie theater, a drugstore, two icehouses, auto parts store, a Chevrolet dealership, a post office, several restaurants, and a hotel.

Churches, such as Ellenton Baptist Church, Ellenton Christian Church, Ellenton Methodist Church, Four Mile Baptist Church, House of Prayer, Mount Mariah Baptist Church, and Runs Missionary Baptist Church, served the town's white and black congregations. Children were educated at two schools. African American children attended a grammar school in town that ended at the seventh-grade level. For their high school education, these children attended Four Mile High School in Dunbarton or Schofield School in Aiken. Attending either

(Opposite Page) February 29, 1952, the last day for postal service for Ellenton Post Office, is reported on live by Augusta's radio station WGAC crew. Courtesy of SRS Archive, negative M-581.

(Inset) Cassels' Long Store, was an Ellenton landmark on Main Street. The 210' general store built circa 1900 heated by a pot-bellied stove was an important gathering place for the townspeople. "From early morning until late afternoon, male customers coming into the store would take time to 'set a spell' in these chairs. They debated how to correct the evils of the world, the nation and the state. Somehow I doubt there was much wisdom imparted around that hot stove, but judging from the laughter, there must have been a lot of wit..." Source: Louise Cassels, *The Unexpected Exodus*, (Aiken, SC., Sand Hill Press, 1971), 54. Courtesy of SRS Archives, negative 6675.

(Below) Oswalt House Moving Company of Batesburg, S.C. jacks up a house to prepare it for moving offsite. Courtesy of SRS Archives, negative 9273-1.



required traveling long distances. White children attended both grammar and high school in a new complex that featured a gymnasium and other new improvements, indicating that Ellenton was building for its future.

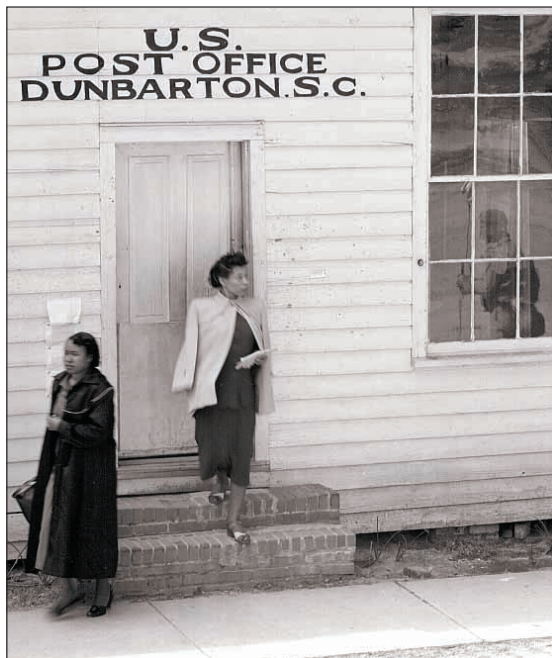
After the appraisals began, change rapidly occurred in Ellenton. The business people were the first to evacuate, followed by their employees. Louise Cassels described Ellenton in the spring of 1951 as a “well groomed corpse.” Residents spruced up their homes, gardens were well tended, and interiors kept immaculate as residents waited for the appraiser’s knock on the door.<sup>63</sup> Over the next year, the town and its environs would take on a “snaggletooth” appearance as houses and other improvements were moved away. Du Pont assigned an engineer–coordinator, D. M. Murphy, to aid those who wished to move their homes to other sites and to coordinate those moves with their construction schedule. Murphy was responsible for removing overhead wiring in Ellenton and on certain highways to assure that the houses were safely moved through the plant area, and for scheduling and coordinating the expected 200 to 300 house moves from Ellenton and Dunbarton. By January 1952, one source reported that owners had removed only 75 buildings of all types from Ellenton.<sup>64</sup> This was almost half of the town’s total building stock. A subsequent report noted that five other buildings had been removed and several more still were to be moved.<sup>65</sup> The new owner left municipal buildings in place for use. Curtis Nelson reassured all that any building that remained on the AEC plant area would be used not indiscriminately razed.<sup>66</sup> He also noted that buildings with historical significance would be protected.<sup>67</sup>



Dunbarton Baptist Church, circa 1950.  
Courtesy of the Zobel Family.

Ellenton was to be evacuated by March 1 and Dunbarton by April 1. Dunbarton, a nineteenth-century railroad community named after the Dunbar family, was incorporated in 1910; its town limits extended one mile in all directions from the Atlantic Coast Line railroad depot in its center. The majority of the town was situated south of the tracks of the Atlantic Coast Line along Main or Hickory Street and off the three blocks that were south





of Bay Street. The town's commercial area and public buildings were contained on about 17 lots that were sandwiched north of the railroad but south of SC Highway 64.

Dunbarton was home to about 300 people in 1951; the majority of the population were old time residents. Sixty-six landowners were contacted about Dunbarton property. The Anderson, Brailsford, Dicks, Doe, Eaves, Greene, Hiers, Moody, Rountree, Schumpert, Tisdale, Wall, Whaley, and Williams families are well represented in the acquisition register. While the COE acquisition planning report counted 15

commercial buildings, 35 homes, 2 gins, a church, a sawmill, a school, and a railroad station, the actual acquisition records show there were additional buildings in the small agrarian community. The two-story brick grammar school and the high school were open from 1920 through 1950 for white children. Four-Mile High School, which taught eleven grades for the black community, was also in the general community. This single-story frame school had dormitories so that students who had to travel to get to school could be accommodated during the week.<sup>68</sup> Churches, particularly Baptist churches, were plentiful in and around the community. Cypress Chapel–Dunbarton Baptist Church, St. Luke Baptist, Bethlehem Baptist, Joyce Branch Church, Pleasant Mountain Baptist Church, Ned Branch Baptist, and Steele Creek/Meyers Mill Baptist Church were all described in a community history.<sup>69</sup>

Dunbarton's house types reflected the community's rural origins and primarily consisted of I-houses and vernacular farmhouses such as hall and parlor types. Photographs shown in a community history show up-to-date remodeling, as older house types are discernible behind more fashionable bungalow details. A small brick jail comprised the sole municipal improvement. The town was electrified but had only two telephones. Its post office was perhaps its most well known building. The Rountree, Hiers, Anderson, and Dicks families operated several general stores, and in 1950 Barnwell County's first department store, the Western Carolina Trading Company, opened in Dunbarton.<sup>70</sup>

Meyers Mill stretched along the Atlantic Coast Line. The Ellis, Halford, Hankinson, Meyer, Peeples, Phenix, Simon, and Swett families owned small lots in the mill area, all one acre or less in size. Olan Meyer's cotton gin was the major business in the community. Leigh, an industrial village that produced crates and boxes, was also taken. The only large industrial operation in the plant area, the banana case factory, was in operation from 1926 to 1952. Mill housing was available for workers, and the mill village also had a church, store, and hotel. Up to 350 people would work at the plant during their springtime peak

Detail of Post Office entry where postal customers pause to look at COE surveyor at work. Profile of surveyor is reflected in window glass.

Dunbarton Post Office was a local landmark and community gathering spot. Courtesy of SRS Archives, negative 6684.



Mrs. Ida Jones, at age 87, was one of Ellenton's oldest residents. Courtesy of SRS Archives negative M-455.



season in preparation for the peach harvest.<sup>71</sup> Other smaller crossroad communities or “whistle stops” were also in existence such as Hawthorne, a community of dispersed farmsteads, and Talatha, Robbins, Greenland, Skinface, Hattieville, and Bush.

Although they constituted only one percent of the land area, the removal of these communities—Ellenton, Dunbarton, and to some extent Meyers Mill and Leigh—captured the nation’s attention. Some residents held onto the hope that the two larger towns could be saved, some even inquired about whether their land could be bought back

when the government was done with it.<sup>72</sup> Reporters chronicled the process, writing objective stories about their plight and more emotional pieces that went right to the heart. Historian James O. Farmer’s study of the impact of the plant on Aiken shows that as the meaning of the plant finally sunk in, reactions varied among the displaced from anticipation, patriotic resignation, resentment, to self-pity.

The young, who saw excitement in the many changes, and those who profited from the plant’s coming, were the happiest. H. M. “Mike” Cassels, one of the latter, would tell a *New York Times* reporter that “I haven’t got a gripe in the world.” The government purchased his store and his gas station. He then liquidated his stock, bought the gas station back at the salvage price of 12 percent and moved it to New Ellenton, a community forming at the plant’s northern rim. The AEC was buying 9,000 gallons of gas from his new operation per day.<sup>73</sup>

The elderly, both black and white, were the least happy. Their emotional investment in their homes and communities was too great to measure in dollars.

Eighty-seven-year old “Miss Ida” Jones had lived in the same house for sixty-seven years. She met her fate with the quiet resignation of the powerless. Dr. Fred Brinkley took the news harder. Also a lifelong resident, he had been present at the births and deaths of many of his neighbors, and had treated them as long as many could remember. *The Times* reporter who interviewed him wrote that “he cannot reconcile himself to the evacuation.”.... Another local doctor, Paul Culbreath, predicted that most of the evacuees would not long survive the trauma of their forced uprooting. Many, including himself, would bear out his prophecy.<sup>74</sup>

By the end of June all former inhabitants, about 1500 families, were evacuated. Louise Cassels stated with irony that the railroad was the impetus for Ellenton and it also

brought its death as she watched the huge shipments of construction materials offloaded at the Ellenton station. By the time she left her home in March, neighbors' homes had become "pipe shops" or storage buildings for other construction materials. Familiar places and placenames were fast disappearing. Even the composition of her classroom, now in Jackson, had changed. "Trailer children" attended classes along with the local children. The construction force had arrived.



"It is hard to understand why our town must be destroyed to make a bomb that will destroy someone else's town that they love as much as we love ours. But we feel that they picked not just the best spot in the U.S., but in the world. We love these dear hearts and gentle people who live in our home town."

Bonner Lee Smith's words of protest written in December 1950 and mounted on an Ellenton town sign have become an icon at SRS. "In December 1950, I was working for Leigh Banana Case Company. When I went home to lunch that day, I went by Cubie Hill's Home & Auto Supply and bought a bottle of Griffin shoe polish or dye for 15 cents. When I got to the mill, I went over to the Cleat Mill and got five 13/16 black gum boards. I went back to the box factory, laid the boards on the floor and started writing. I had no script or plan as to what to say.... That afternoon, when I went home, I nailed the boards on the sign." Source: Maureen B. Chavis, *Aiken Standard*, November 27, 2000.