

Richard Mack

Interview with Richard Mack, 104 years old

Rosemont School, Charleston, S.C.

—*Martha S. Pinckney, Charleston, S.C.*

Richard Mack, a happy philosopher, 104 years old, in perfect mental and physical condition, is still working as janitor of the Rosemont school. He is of the aquiline type, with eyes bright and deep set, and a black skin with a red light shining through, showing Indian relationship.

"I was born in Limestone, Va. My first master was Green Bobo. I was sold when I was ten years old; not really sold, but sold on a paper that said if he didn't take care of me, I would come back—a paper on me—a kind of mortgage—speculators bought negroes and sell um. Missis, I never had a stripe put on me. I had a privilege of being among all people." (Richard Mack enjoyed every experience of his life and has no root of bitterness in his nature). "Then I come to South Carolina. My mother, Jane, she live to be 108; she come to South Carolina too. We got back together again," (he paused with a bright smile) "Orangeburg, at Captain Cherry's—Captain Cherry here in Charleston is related to him—Cherry Plantation is there now; Captain Cherry had plenty of money.

"Tony was my father, a carriage driver; he wore his tall hat and fine clothes (livery) and he was a musician—played the violin at the Academy on the 'old Ninety-Six Road'. All the white people educated their children there, and they had parties. Oh, the beautiful ladies—they wore long dresses then and had long hair—the beautiful! My father—Daddy Tony, they call him—he was a musician—always played the violin." Here he mentioned the names of songs of that day, before the War of 1861, and repeated these words with much merriment:

Would have been married forty year ago,

If it hadn't been for Cotton Eye Joe

"Songs—lots of um—

Run nigger, run, de Patrol ketch you

He roared with laughter—"When de patrol come, I had my badge; I show him my paper and my badge! I got it still. I love dem days—I love dem people.

"My mother was a good woman—she used to get down on her knees, like this, and get up like this," (he knelt with agility, and rose unassisted, quickly, and without the least difficulty). "My aunt lived to be 141; she saw George Washington—she told me so.

"Cherokee—Kickapoo—I don't remember—my great grandfather was an Indian Chief—my nose is straight, see here." He went into the pocket of his overall, brought out a pair of eyeglasses, put them on the end of his nose, and looked over them.

"I loved dem days, I loved dem people. We lived better—we had no money—we had nothing to worry about—just do your task. Spin wheel and reel and reel for the yarn. I filled my arms full of quilt—hand made. Had task; I done all my task, and I help others with their task so they wouldn't get whipped; if people lazy and wont do, they got to be made to do; if children bad they get whipped—if nigger bad, they get a whipping.

"Old Satan wear a big shoe—he got one club foot. He can disguise himself—he make you think he got power, but he ain't got any power. He get you in trouble and leave you there. I always pray for wisdom and understanding like Solomon. I pray all the time to our good Father. People say—'Why you call him Good Father?'" (Quoted from the Bible) "I love everybody—'Love thy neighbor as thyself.'

"Yes Ma'am! Oh Heaven!—we got to be clean—we change out of the flesh to the spirit; a crown prepared for us; all we save and help are stars in our crown; you go from Mansion to Mansion—higher—higher." (He raised his arms with a rapt look)

Then he was told about "Green Pastures" and asked what he thought of it. "Why my Lord have Mercy! The Lord is a Spirit—we are changed.

"I roll the carpet for Missis to get in the carriage; a two-foot carpet from the house roll to the stoop for the carriage.

"My mother—yes Ma'am—108 years old—a smart woman in the house. Oh my Lord, Missis—cook! She wouldn't kill a chicken out of the yard; she had a coop to put them in, and it was cleaned out every day. My mother would fix the flowers; she would take this little flower, and that little flower, and put them together, and make up a beautiful bouquet, and hand them out to everybody. My father knew all about planting; the people would come to ask 'Daddy Tony' how to plant this and when to plant that.

"I heard all the War talk, I saw a comet." (Indicating its position in the heavens, he seemed inspired, forgot his surroundings, looking back). "I saw the curtain-cloud—and snow clouds—rolls and rolls. In the War I was with my master, Capt. Cherry, and Dr. Knox, Captain in the Civil War, and Capt. Dick McMichael—all those fine gentlemen. They had hog-skin saddles that creaked—Crench—crench—as they rode;" (He was enthusiastic) "the way they could ride! Those hosses were as sensible as people; they could jump from side to side; they knew everything.

"Capt. Cherry said to me—'Why weren't you white! Why weren't you white! Why weren't you white!' I lost my old Captain—then I was with Gen. Frank Bamberg, and with his brother, Capt. Isaac Bamberg—I was Orderly. Sometimes in the War we had one hardtack a day, and had to drink water on 'um, to make 'um swell. We had to get out salt out of water, most anywhere."

"I saw Gen. Lee many times; I knew him; he had his close beard around his face; he looked fine and sat his horse so splendid." Mack was asked the color of the horse, and described the gray. Here he remembered the battlefield—"I did this"—he enacted silently—dexterously—the placing of the dead and wounded on the stretchers and bearing them away—worked so rapidly that his breath was labored. "I made the balloon flight—my eyes were good—they carried me because any object that I saw, I knew

what it was; a rope ladder led up to the basket—the beautiful thing—we went up on the other side of Beaufain street; there were no houses there then, and we came down on the Citadel Green."

Mack had spoken several times with enthusiasm of the officer's cavalry 'pump sole boots'. After he had polished them, "Capt. Edwards (of Ellore) gave me a \$500.00 bill for cleaning his 'pump sole boots'." Mack proudly enacted the Captain's jolly but pompous manner, as he gave the bill, and added, "I had thousands of dollars in Confederate money when the War broke up. If we had won I would be rich."

After War period: "The time Capt. Wade Hampton was stumping I followed him all over the State; I led 500 head; was with him to Camden, Orangeburg and all the way to Hampton County; led 500 Negroes through the County; I was Captain of them; I rode 'Nellie Ponsa' and wore my red jacket and cap and boots; I had a sword too; my 'red shirt' died year before last."

Asked if he knew 'Riley', Mack answered promptly—"Democrat Riley', yes Ma'am, used to drive that fine carriage, and old Col. Cunningham's family." Riley was an ex-slave, a tall black man, devoted to the South, as he was, a Democrat of high principle, and respected by all—hated by many—a power in himself.

"I lose all my ancestors. I got a niece, Queenie Brown, in Orangeburg; I got a daughter in New Jersey; one in New York, married to a Clyde Line man; lost sight of both; both old.

"Bless the Lord! I got friends! Mr. Pooser came to see me yesterday; been in South America four years; just got back and hunt me up right off! Married Miss Dantzler of Orangeburg—I raised them all"—with a benign look of love end ownership.