

William Pratt

Interview with William Pratt (77)

Newberry, S.C. RFD

—*G.L. Summer, Newberry, S.C.*

"I live with my children on a farm in Newberry County. I have a good place to live and plenty to eat. I work on the farm. I moved from Chester County in the year 1898, the year the Spanish-American War started.

"I was born in Chester County in April 1860. My parents belonged to the Pratts, but my mother belonged to the Kennedys before she married. They went to Robert K. Kennedy and was with him as his slaves. He was a good man but his wife was mean. She sure could 'cuss out slaves if they made her mad. She whipped me once when I was a small boy. I couldn't do much with her. My daddy's family belonged to the Pratts who lived seven miles from Chester. They was good folks to slaves. They always had lots to eat from their big garden. The white folks went hunting, and it was said some wild turkeys was around Price's Mountain, about nine miles south of Chester.

"We got up before day and went to work and worked till sundown. My mammy cooked for the family; and one day the mistress got mad at her and hit her on the head with a coffee paddle. We worked all day on Saturdays but didn't work on Sundays. On Christmas we had a holliday and had frolics and big eats.

"The patrollers once caught my daddy out at night without a pass and whipped him a little, just for mischief. He was always allowed to go about where he wanted to go without a pass, but next time he asked Miss Polly for a paper to take out with him.

"After the war the Ku Klux didn't bother us but the Red Shirts come and wanted us to join them, that is they wanted my brother to join. He wouldn't join though. My brother-in-law joined and wore one of the shirts with them. He wanted Wade Hampton elected as he believed it was best for us. He was a Democrat and said they all ought to wear them. Once some mischief was played on a Negro who was a Republican and voted for Chamberlain. He was given a card and told to go to a certain merchant and show the card to him, that the merchant was a Chamberlain man and would give him supplies. He showed the card to the merchant who got mad and told the Negro if he didn't get out of his store he would kill him.

"Some of the old folks sometimes saw ghosts. A negro went to church one night on a horse, and somebody slipped up behind and spurred the horse. The Negro went home as fast as he could, saying that he had seen a ghost.

"When Freedom come, Old Man Kennedy took it well and said we was all free, but his wife just cursed us and said, 'Damn you, you are free now'. Old Marse Kennedy had some sons killed in the war. James and Douglas Kennedy lived in Chester County after the war.

"We used to dance jigs by ourself, and we danced the 'hack-back', skipping backwards and forwards facing each other. When one danced a jig he would sing, 'Juber this, Juber that, Juber kills a yellow cat'. My brother used to sing a cotton picking song: 'My mammy got meat skin laid away; grease my belly three times a day'.

"We was Baptist and baptized by immersion. An old Baptist song that was sung at the baptism was: 'Trouble water today, trouble water today, trouble water today. He will save you, He will save you; come to Jesus today, come to Jesus today, come to Jesus today. He will save you, He will save you, just now.'

"An old wood-chopping song which is yet sung by negroes is:

Come on baby, let us go down;

Come on baby, let us go down;

Ten-pounder hammer stove my head;

'nough to kill my body dead.

"I married Rosy Kennedy, a daughter of Mose Kennedy, and had five children, but only two are now living. I have several grandchildren living in Chester County. I worked first on the Kennedy place. Their daughter, Miss Julie, was good to us. She married Robert Orr of Chester. She didn't have many beaux before because her mother was so mean nobody wanted to come around her. Miss Julie helped at my wedding. When my wife wasn't able to get breakfast so I could go to work, Miss Julie would tell me to come to her house and eat. That was after her mother died.

"I think Abraham Lincoln didn't do just right, 'cause he threw all the negroes on the world without any way of getting along. They was helpless. He ought to have done it gradually and give them a chance to get on their own. I think Booker Washington is a great man and has done great work, because he says negroes must have education and learn to work, too, and not sit down and expect more because he is educated.

"I joined the church because I believe there is a 'here-after', and I wanted to learn more about Jesus and get His forgiveness for what I had done wrong. We need Him always, because St. Matthews says the last state of man is worse than the first."