

## Carrie Davis

### Interview with Carrie Davis

—*Preston Klein, Lee County, Alabama*

#### PLANTATION PUNISHMENT

Carrie Davis said "Honey, dere was a lot of cruel things done in slavery times."

She was washing when I arrived at her shanty near Smith's Station, Alabama. She asked, as so many of the old Negroes do, "Has you come to help me?" I said: "No, Carrie; I want you to tell me about slavery."

She shook her gray head, recalled: "Dem was good an' bad times, Mistus; good an' bad. I had a purty good marster; but de marster on de plantation dat j'ined our'n was mighty mean. He was a bad man, no matter if de slaves behaved or not.

"Honey, I 'members dat he had regular days to whup all de slaves wid strops. De strops had holes in 'em so dat dey raised big blisters. Den dey took a hand saw, cut de blisters and washed 'em in salt water. Our Ol' Mistus has put salve on aheap of backs so dey could git deir shirts off. De shirts'd stick, you see. De slaves would come to our house for water an' Mistus would see 'em."

Asked about her life as a slave, she said: "I was borned in Harris County, Georgia, an' was 'bout ten or twelve when freedom come. My mammy an' pappy was Martha an' Nathan Perry and had seben chillun. Besides me, dere was Amy, Ida, Knoxie, Jim, Abraham, an' Franklin.

"Us lived in de Perry quarters. De cabins was made of split logs, put up edgeways and daubed wid mud inside an' out. Dey was 'bout a hundred yards from de big house, whar Marster Billy an' Mistus Nancy Perry lived. Deir chillun was Clara Maria, Malinda, Sara, Alec, Jim, an' Bill. Dey was real good to us, too. Us et at de big house. 'Course de food was cooked on de fireplace, but us had meat and greens but not much biscuits. Us had collards an' cabbage, too.

"Sometimes us would have wild game, 'ca'se de men hunted lots an' kotched rabbits, 'possums and coons. Dey also kotched a lot of fish.

"No'm, our beds warn't so good. Dey was homemade and de sides was scantlings wid legs nailed on. Den slats was nailed on top of it to put our shuck-and-straw mattresses on.

"My grand-parents was from Virginny. When I was a slave I was used as a house-girl and to help keep de yards clean and bring in water. Us wore mostly slips, wove in homemade looms; an' dey was osnaburg an' homespun. We wore 'em Sunday and Monday de same. Us shoes was made at a tanyard and dey was brogans as hard as rocks.

"I 'members dat some of our white neighbors was poor and didn't have no slaves. Dey would help us work. De overseer couldn't whip dem, but he would make dem work hard and late. I 'members, too, dat de overseer waked us up wid a trumpet.

"Dey useta tell us dat if us didn't work dey was going to sell us to help feed de rest; and bless yo' soul, us niggers'd go to work, too. Marster wasn't mean. He would jest lock de slaves in de crib fer punishment. When slaves was sold, I seed many a nigger put on de block for five and six hundred dollars.

"Us couldn't leave de plantation widout a pass; and you better not let 'em kotch you wid a book. Us walked to de white church an' set in de back. Mr. Davey Snell preach and baptize, and dey had foot-washin's. Sometimes de niggers'd git so happy dey would shout. Den dey would keep shoutin' in de fields next day and git a whipping.

"If a nigger got out widout a pass, dey sot de hounds on you; and de patrollers'd tear you up too, if you stayed out too late.



*Carrie Davis, Smith's Station, Alabama*

"Us had sech good times on Sattidy nights; frolic, dance an' cornshuckin's. Most of 'em would be drinkin' and sing and holler:

Sheep's in de cotton patch;

Got 'im out Monday.

Had it been a white man;

Got 'im out Sunday.

"Kid Kimbrough was our leader, and he could sing 'Dixie,' too.

"Christmas mornin' us'd have a better breakfast and dey would give us rations at de big house. When any of de slaves got married dey went up to de white folks' house an' jumped over de broom. Dat was de ceremony at de weddin'. And if marster wanted to mix his stock of slaves wid a strong stock on 'nother plantation, dey would do de mens an' women jest lak horses. I 'members dat when two niggers married, dey got a big supper.

"All us chilluns had a big time; played 'Pretty Pauline,' 'Turn, Charlie,' an' sech-lak.

"No'm I never did see nor b'lieve in ghosts.

"When us got sick Mistus'd give horse-mint, life-everlasting, goldenrod, an' holly teas, yessum. And us wore asafetida and pop-ball seed.

"When de Yankees come, dey handcuffed our folks and took 'em off. Marster had his meat, corn, fodder, and sech hauled in de swamp near de plantation. Dem Yankees went as straight to it as if dey had seed us put it dere. Dey burned it all up and took some niggers from de other farm.

"When freedom come, I 'members dat marster told us dat us was free, but dat we could stay on if we lacked. Most of us stayed on wid him for a spell. Now and den de Ku Klux Klan'd come around and beat on a nigger.

"I married Charlie Gibson and had two chillun, twelve grand-chilluns and nine great-grandchilluns.

"Honey, I's heard Abraham Lincoln's name, but don't know nothin' 'bout him. I got tired livin' 'mong wicked peoples; and I wanted to be saved. Dat's why I j'ined de church and still tries to de right."