

Carrie Pollard

Interview with Carrie Pollard

—*Ruby Pickens Tartt, Livingston, Alabama*

A HUSBAND COULDN'T BE BOUGHT

Carrie Pollard was born in slavery time but she was never a slave. Her grandmother was a free woman who came to Tuscaloosa as a servant in the 1820's and was rescued from a man who claimed ownership, but whose claim was disallowed. The grandmother went to Gainesville, with her slave husband for whom she bought freedom.

One of her daughters, who was Carrie Pollard's Aunt Cynthia, was not so lucky. She couldn't buy her husband free. The story, told so often to Carrie when she was a child, is still a bright memory to the mulatto woman who was born in 1859 and still lives in Gainesville in the house of her birth.



Carrie Pollard, Gainesville, Alabama

"My Aunt Cynthy," said Carrie, "was free born in North Carolina. She come down here to Gainesville, an' though the deed sez you can't take a blue veined chile an' make a slave outa her, de man whut brought her made like he owned her or sump'in'. She lived on one plantation wid her guardian. Tom Dobbs, a slave nigger whut belonged to Mr. Dobbs here in Gainesville, he lived on another farm cross de road. An' dey couldn't marry, 'caze Mr. Dobbs wouldn't sell Tom an' Aunt Cynthy's white folks wouldn't let her marry, so dey jes' taken up an' went ahead. Her an' Tom had nine chillun, as fine looking mulattoes ez you'd wanta see. An' old Mr. Dobbs wanted 'em an' he couldn't get 'em.

"Aunt Cynthy was a good midwife, so a white lady sent fer her to come to Sumterville, Alabama, to nuss her an' she went. An' while she was dere, she dream't sump'in' done happened to her chillun an' dat dey was in trouble. So she tole de white lady she was nussin' 'bout whut she dream't an' she said, 'Mammy, iffen you is worried 'bout your chillun I'ze gwine ter send you to a fortune teller an' see whut's de matter.'

"De fortune teller cut de cards, an' den she looked up en tole Aunt Cynthia 'All yo' chillun an' your husband done gone an' I can't tell you where dey's at.' So Aunt Cynthia run back an' tole de white lady. She called her husband an' he had one of his niggers saddle up two hosses an' ride wid Aunt Cynthy back to Gainesville. When she foun' her guardian, Mr. Steele, he met her wid de news dat dey was tuck to DeKalb, Mississippi.

"He got on his hoss an' tuck some other white men wid him, an' dey captured old man Dobbs right dere wid Tom an' de nine chillun. Dey done stopped an' camped an' was cookin' supper. So Mr. Steele tole him he could keep Tom, 'caze he was hiss'n, an' a slave, but Cynthy was free born an' he couldn't have her chillun. But Mr. Dobbs sez he didn't want Tom nohow, caze he was part Indian an' no 'count an' wouldn't work. So Mr. Steele bought Tom for Aunt Cynthy an' brought 'em all back to live wid him. An' he give Aunt Cynthy an' Tom an' de chillun a nice house right 'cross de branch here after surrender."

Carrie tells of how her grandmother used to send them to the mill in Gainesville with wheat, "jes' lack you do corn nowadays, to git flour. An' us git de grudgins an' de seconds an' have de bes' buckwheat cakes you ever et."

She says there are more black Negroes now in Gainesville than she has ever seen. She says, "Hit use to be a sight to see 'bout fifty bes' lookin' mulatto girls up in de public square here listenin' to de ban' an' nussen' de chillun, not five black ones in de bunch. An' dey had good sense, too. Us didn't have no clocks, so us white mistis would say, 'Yawl come home a hour by sun to do de night work,' an' us didn't hardly ever miss it." She says her grandmother sent her two daughters to school in Mobile, and they went down the river from Gainesville in a river boat called *Cremonia*.