

## Frank Menefee

### Interview with Frank Menefee

—*Preston Klein, Opelika, Alabama*

#### *BROOM-STICK WEDDIN'S*

Frank Menefee of Opelika is eighty-four years old and still healthy. He says, "Kids was brought up right in dem days but don't have no sich now, 'caze de switch was one of de best medicines ever made."

He was born in Loachapoka, Alabama. His mother and father were Susan and Monroe Menefee. They had six other children, Patsy, Sally, Lula, Mary, Melvina, and Philmore. Susan Menefee came from Jefferson County and Monroe from Gold Hill, Alabama, and belonged to Willis Menefee, near Roberson's Mill.

"My mother's father an' mother was Milton and Patsy Footman whut come frum Meridian, Miss., and dey paid \$3500 for dem," Frank boasts.

"I'se never seed inside a jail, never paid a nickel in council, ain't never gwine to steal nothin' whut don't belong to me an' ain't never used a cuss word in my life. I always tried to do whut was right an' I plowed ever' day us could. Us cooked on dem great big fireplaces, 'bout six feet wide an' two an' three feet deep, with pots an' kittles hangin' out over hickory an' oak fires. Nobody better not spit in dat fireplace neither. Sho' never was better eatin' collards dan dem. All the chillun had a tin plate an' a tin cup with buttermilk in hit.

"I was whut dey called a shirt-tail fellow, had long shirt dresses of osnaburg dyed with red mud an' cinnamon bark. In winter dey doubled de osnaburg to be warmer. My daddy was a shoemaker. He made dem outer cowhides an' even lef' de hair on dem sometimes. Yuther times he clean 'em in de wash-pot to git de hair offen 'em.

"Us had good Marsa and Mistiss, iffen you wukked an' 'haved yourse'f. Dey was marsa Willis an' Miss Hanna Menefee. Dey jes' had two chillun Willis an' Willie. Willie weighed two hundred pounds when he was very young too. De 'Big House' stood in a oak grove wid one big oak tree raght by it.

"Mr. Sadler, de overseer, was good, too, but you sho' had to wuk. He's got a great-great-grandson, Sam Sadler, living now in Waverly, Alabama. De poor white peoples 'roun' dere used to ho'p us wuk. I disremembers our carriage driver's name but us had one dat drove Mistiss about, an' de carriage house was close to de Big House.

"Marsa had seven or eight hundred acres in de plantation an' I jes' don't know de number of slaves he did have. Dey got us up by daylight an' 'fo'. Blowed a cockle shell to get us niggers up. Iffen you didn't wuk, dey 'tended to you. Dey slashed one nigger an' he died nex' week. Us plowed 'twell dark an' lots an'

lots of times all night long wid a lantern tied to front an' back of de plows. We was picking cotton all night long too, be ready to take dat wagon to de gin by three or four o'clock in de morning. Sometimes dey would put de slaves in chains. When dey wuk clearing up new groun' dey had chains put 'roun' dey ankles.



*Frank Menefee, Opelika, Alabama*

"On Sunday mornin' Mistiss would try to teach us niggers de Bible. Den us would go to church at white church an' sit in de back wid white folks in front. De preacher was Rev'ren Frank Hugely. Dat Sunday mornin' breakfast sho' was good to us niggers. Us had meat, sugar, lard an' butter. I used to love to hear dem sing. When My Soul Be Resting in de Presence of My Lord, I'll Be Satisfied. I was baptized at eleven o'clock by Dave Hill an' I sho' got happy. I shouted an' sung: 'I'se never drunk no whiskey in my life.' When any of de niggers would pass on, old Mistiss would stand over de casket and weep. Us would pull off our hats an' marsa was nice as he could be, too. Hit was a home-made box dyed black. Mistiss she would see to de fixin' of de shroud.

"De patrollers sho' would get you an' dat's one thing made you stick to your wuk.

"On Sadday nights us would frolic an' dance all night long iffen you wanted to, buck-dance, sixteen-hand reel and cake walk. Dey would blow reed quills an' have all the licker dey wanted. Mistiss, dey ain't jes' now drinkin' licker. Oh, dem cornshuckings! Shuk corn, drink an' holler all night long. Sometimes dey'd sing:

Dark cloud arising like gwine to rain,

Nothing but a black gal coming down the lane,

Nigger stole a pumkin an' started outer town;

Nigger heered it thunder, Lord, an' throwed dat pumkin down.

"Mistiss, I don't wanter tell you no mo' of dat.

"When us niggers ma'ied, dey didn't have no preacher. We jes' jumped over de broom, an' went on an' lived together. Iffen a gal went wrong, dey beat her nearly to death. Iffen you moved de place when you ma'ied, de other marsa had to buy you.

"De li'l niggers had big times. Us used to play, 'Green grow the willow tree, you swing my gal an' I swing yourn. Green grow de willow tree.' Dey used to sceer up us niggers 'bout "Raw Head an' Bloody Bones," gwine to ketch us dat was so sceer bad iffen us didn't mind 'em, but I ain't never seed nor believed in ghostes. Us didn't get sick much 'caze us didn't have no trash to eat an' Mistiss giv' us ebony of yarbs an' us wore sacks of yarbs 'roun' our necks too.

"The Yankees did plenty of harm. Marsa shot at some of dem; an' dey took off our cabin wagons. When us was freed dey singed, 'I'se gwine back to Dixie, no more my heart to wander, never see my master no mo'.'

"Marsa called us all up an' told us we was jes' free as him. He give us all a suit of clo'es, some money, a mule, a cow, wagon, hog and a li'l corn to start off on. Us moved to Dr. Lawrence Smiths near La-Fayette, Alabama.

"Later years I ma'ied Jane Drake at the cafe in Opelika, Alabama, and by de jedge at twelve o'clock. She died, den I ma'ied Phoebe Ethen Drake. Some says de church can't save you, but I sho' feels safer in hit, an' I jined 'caze I wants to be better dan I was an' try to be saved."