

ANNIE HUFF, EX-SLAVE, of near Macon, Georgia July 28 1937

A large windmill beside the highway, on the Houston Road near Seven Bridges, draws the attention of a traveler to a two-story house, recently remodeled, which was the colonial home of Mr. Travis Huff, now occupied by Mrs. Rosa Melton, his granddaughter. During the days of slavery the master and an indulgent mistress with their twelve slaves lived on this property. Mr. Huff's family was a large one, all of whom were well educated and very religious. Several of his daughters became teachers after the close of the Civil War.

Among the "quarter" families were Annie Huff and her daughters, Mary being the elder. The mother cooked and the small children learned to sweep the yard and to do minor jobs in the field at a very early age. At the age of twelve, the girls were taught to card and spin as well as to knit and were required to do a certain task each day until they were large enough to assist with the heavier work. The adult females did this type of work after sunset, when their labor in the field was over. On rainy days they shucked and shelled corn or did some other kind of indoor labor.

Generally, this group was humanely treated, but occasionally one was unmercifully beaten. In spite of the fact that there was only one male among his slaves, Mr. Huff's outbursts of temper caused him to be so cruel that his daughters would frequently beg him to end his punishment.[Pg 234]

Frolics were mostly given at corn shuckings, cane grindings, hog killings, or quiltings. At hog killing time, huge containers of water were heated in the yard. When it reached the desired temperature, the hogs were driven to a certain spot where they were struck a hard blow on the head. When they fell, they were stuck with a very sharp knife, then scalded in the boiling water. The hair and dirt were then scrubbed off and they were a pretty light color as they hung from a rack to be dressed. When the work was completed, the guests cooked chitterlings and made barbecue to be served with the usual gingercake and persimmon beer. They then dressed in their colorful "Sunday" garments, dyed with

maple and dogwood bark, to engage in promenades, cotillions, etc., to the time of a quill instrument.

On Sunday, church services were held at Old Liberty Church where seats in the rear were provided for all adult slaves. The small children were not allowed to attend these services, but they frequently sneaked away from home and attended in spite of the restriction. It was expedient that they also leave before the close of the service, but often lingered on the roadside and waited for Mr. Huff to pass. He'd stop and ask them where they's been, and as they danced up and down they replied in chorus: "We've been to church, Master; we've been to church."

The presence of slave visitors was not encouraged, for Mr. Huff usually purchased women with children and there were no married couples living on his place. However, young Negro men would often sneak in the cabins at night—usually coming through the windows—and visit with their sweethearts.

Gifts of handkerchiefs and earrings were smuggled in strictly against[Pg 235] the rules of the Master.

Children tattlers kept Mr. Huff informed regarding the happenings in the quarters, but their silence could be bought with a few shin plasters. This "hush" money and that made from running errands were enough to keep the children supplied with spending change. Often, when their childish prattle had caused some adult to be punished, Mrs. Huff would keep them in the house for a night to escape the wrath of the offender.

All food was raised on the plantation and cooked in the family kitchen. Every one had the same kind of food and the game caught or killed by the elder sons was a delicacy relished by all. When the family meal was served, a mischievous collection of black children would sometimes crawl under the table and meddle with each person seated there. Instead of being scolded, they would receive luscious morsels from the hands of the diners. Mrs. Huff often laughingly stated that she knew not which was more annoying—"the children or the chickens, as neither were disciplined."

Probably because of the absence of male slaves, no shoe-maker was maintained. Footwear for the entire group was purchased at Strong's Shoe Store in Macon.

Superstition was usually a part of the life of a slave. Those seeking to escape from a cruel Master used to rub turpentine on the soles of their feet to prevent capture. Others collected quantities of soil from a graveyard and sprinkled it in their tracks for a certain distance. Both of these precautions were used to throw the dogs off scent. Refugee slaves often found[Pg 236] shelter on Mr. Huff' estate, where they were assisted in further flight by the Huff Negroes. Those who remained in the woods were fed regularly.

Mr. Huff was not in favor of emancipating the slaves. One of his sons, Ramsey Huff, fought in the Confederate Army.

The slaves rejoiced at every bit of news which they heard regarding the probability of their being freed by the Yankees. During the latter part of the war, people from Macon journeyed to the outlying swampy sections to hide their valuables, many of which were never recovered.

Mr. Huff owned a place in Houston County where he hid most of his provisions, but these were stolen before the close of the war. A few Yankees who visited his home did little damage beyond the destruction of a turnip patch.

When the war ended, Mr. Huff would not tell his slaves they were free, for, it was said, that he hated the thought of a Negro being able to wear a starched shirt. Slaves from neighboring plantations spread the news. A few days later Mrs. Huff returned from a trip to Macon and called all the children together to tell them that, even though they were free, they would have to remain with her until they were twenty-one. Little Mary exclaimed loudly—"I'm free! I won't stay here at all!"

When the Emancipation Proclamation was made public, the Yankee soldiers gave a dinner in Macon for all Negroes and poor Whites who cared to come. A line was formed on the outside of the building in which the dinner was served and no one was allowed to enter unless he was in poor circumstances. Food of every description [Pg 237] was served in abundance and all admitted were allowed to eat as much as they desired.

Annie Huff moved to Macon when she was freed and her daughter, Mary, now eighty-seven years old, was reared here. She attributed her long life to the excellent care she has always taken of herself.

Huff, Mary, 561 Cotton Avenue, Macon, Georgia