

TOM HAWKINS
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TOM HAWKINS
Ex-Slave—Age 75.

Tom was nowhere to be seen when the interviewer mounted the steps of his cabin. Daisy, his wife, was ironing on the back porch and when she learned the object of the proposed interview, she readily agreed to induce Tom to talk. She approached a basement door and called: "Tom, here's one of dem giver'ment ladies what's come to hear you talk 'bout slavery days." Tom replied: "All right, Miss Daisy, I'se a-comin'." The old man soon appeared feeling his way with his cane carefully before each hesitant step. Tom is blind. Established comfortably in his favorite chair, he talked freely.

"I was borned on Marse Johnny Poore's plantation 'bout four miles f'um Belton, South Callina. Marse Johnny owned my Ma, Mornin' Poore, and all three of her chillun. Dey was me and Johnny, and Mollie. My Pa was Tom Hawkins and he was named for his owner. De Hawkins plantation was 'bout a mile f'um de Poore place. Atter Ma married Pap, dey each one had to stay on wid deir own Marster. Dey couldn't stay on de same plantation together. I don't 'member much 'bout Gran'ma Jennie Poore 'cept dat she was de cook at de big house. Gran'pa Wade Poore was de blacksmith and Marse Johnny got a big price when he sold him to Dr. Chandler. Some of de slaves made demselves corded beds and others jus' had makeshifts. De beds and cabins was good 'nough for de Niggers

den, 'cause dey never had knowed no better. Gangs of slaves slept together lak hogs in dem dirt-floored log cabins.[Pg 128]

"Chilluns what was big 'nough to do anything had to wuk. I was a moughty little chap when dey started me in as houseboy. I slept on a trun'le (trundle) bed in Miss Annie's room. In de daytime my little trun'le bed was rolled back out of sight under Miss Annie's big old four poster teester bed. I kep' a fire burnin' in her room winter and summer. Night times she would call me. 'Tom! Tom!' Sometimes I was so soun' asleep I didn't answer. Den pop, she would hit me on de head wid her long stick. Den I knowed hit was time to fire up her pipe. She smoked dat pipe a pow'ful lot atter Marse Johnny died.

"Grown slaves made a little money, but I never got none 'til atter de war. I didn't have no cause to want no money. Miss Annie, she give me evvything I needed.

"Oh, but us had plenty of good things to eat on de Poore plantation—meat and bread wid lots of turnips and 'tatoes. 'Bout once a month dey give us lallyhoe. Dey calls dat 'lasses now. Us et our breakfast and dinner out of wooden bowls. Under a long shed built next to de kitchen was a long trough. At night dey crumbled cornbread in it, and poured it full of buttermilk. Grown folks and chilluns all gathered 'roun' dat old trough and et out of it wid deir wooden spoons. No Ma'am, dere warn't no fightin' 'roun' dat trough. Dey all knowed better'n dat.

"Us got 'possums and rabbits de best ways us could—cotch 'em in traps, hit 'em wid rocks, and trailed 'em wid dogs. Us lakked 'possums baked wid 'tatoes, but most of de rabbits was stewed wid dumplin's. All our cookin' was done on big open fireplaces. Dey didn't fry nothin' dem days; leastwise dey never give de slaves no fried victuals. Grown folks seined for fish in Big Crick and Saluda[Pg 129] River at night, 'cause dey couldn't git away f'um field wuk in de day. Chillun cotch a heap of fish wid hook and line. De river and crick bofe run thoo' Miss Annie's plantation so us didn't have to ax for a pass evvy time us went a fishin'. Us allus had to have a pass if us left de plantation for anything or de patterollers was apt to git you and look out den, for you was sho' to git a larrupin' if dey cotch you off f'um home widout no pass.

"Dere warn't but one gyarden on de Poore plantation, and it was big enough to feed all de white folks and slaves too. Two whole acres of dat gyarden was sowed down in turnips.

"Chilluns didn't wear but one piece of clothes in summer; dat was a shirt. In winter dey doubled up on us wid two shirts. I 'members how dem shirt tails used to pop in de wind when us runned fast. Us chillun used to tie up de 'bacco, what us stole f'um Miss Annie, in de under-arm part of de long loose sleeves of our shirts. Us didn't git no shoes for our foots, winter or summer, 'til us was ten years old.

"Marse Johnny Poore, he was kilt in de war and den Old Mist'ess, she was our Miss Annie, looked atter de plantation 'til her only child, young Miss Ann, married Marse Tom Dean. Den he helped Miss Ann 'tend to her business. Dey was moughty good to us. Miss Annie done her own overseein'. She rid over dat plantation onct or twict a day on her hoss.

"Our white folks lived in a big old two-story house what sot off f'um de road up on a high hill in a big oak grove. Miss Annie's own room was a shed room on dat house. De upstairs room was kept for comp'ny. Unkle Wade Norris Poore was Miss Annie's car'iage driver. De car'iage was called a surrey den.[Pg 130]

"Dar was 'bout four or five hunderd acres in our plantation. Miss Annie kept 'bout a hunderd slaves. She was all time sellin' 'em for big prices atter she done trained 'em for to be cooks, housegals, houseboys, carriage drivers, and good wash 'omans. She wukked 75 slaves in her fields. Her Niggers was waked by four o'clock and had to be in de field by sunup. Dey come in 'bout dark. Atter supper, de mens made up shoes, horse collars, and anything else lak dat what was needed; de 'omans spun thread and wove cloth.

"Miss Annie was her own whuppin' boss. She beat on 'em for most anything. She had a barrel wid a pole run thoo' it, and she would have a slave stretched out on dat barrel wid his clothes off and his hands and foots tied to de pole. Den Miss Annie would fire up her pipe and set down and whup a Nigger for a hour at a time. Miss Annie would pull my ears and hair when I didn't do to suit her, but she never whupped me. Miss Annie didn't need no jail for her slaves. She could manage 'em widout nothin' lak dat, and I never did hear of no jails in de country 'roun' whar us lived.

"Yes Ma'am, I seed Old Miss sell de slaves what she trained. She made 'em stand up on a block, she kept in de back yard, whilst she was a-auctionin' 'em off. I seed plenty of traders go by our place in wagons what dey had deir somepin' t'eat and beddin' in, and deir slaves was walkin' 'long behind de wagon, gwine on to be sold, but dere warn't none of 'em in chains.

"Dere warn't no schools whar slaves could git book larnin' in dem days. Dey warn't even 'lowed to larn to read and write. When[Pg 131] Dr. Cannon found out dat his carriage driver had larned to read and write whilst he was takin' de doctor's chillun to and f'um school, he had dat Niggers thumbs cut off and put another boy to doin' de drivin' in his place.

"Washin'ton Church was de name of de meetin' house whar us Niggers on de Poore plantation went to church wid our white folks. Couldn't none of us read no Bible and dere warn't none of de Niggers on our plantation ever converted and so us never had no baptizin's. De preacher preached to de white folks fust and den when he preached to de Niggers all he ever said was: 'It's a sin to steal; don't steal Marster's and Mist'ess'

chickens and hogs;' and sech lak. How could anybody be converted on dat kind of preachin'? And 'sides it never helped none to listen to dat sort of preachin' 'cause de stealin' kept goin' right on evvy night. I never did see no fun'ral in dem days.

"Niggers didn't run to no North. Dey run to de South, 'cause dem white folks up North was so mean to 'em. One Nigger, named Willis Earle, run off to de woods and made hisself a den in a cave. He lived hid out in dat cave 'bout 15 years.

"Old Miss give dem dat wanted one a cotton patch and she didn't make her slaves wuk in her fields atter de dinner bell rung on Saddays. De mens wukked in dem patches of deir own an Sadday evenin' whilst de 'omans washed de clothes and cleaned up de cabins for de next week. Sadday nights dey all got together and frolicked; picked de banjo, and drunk whiskey. Didn't none of 'em git drunk, 'cause dey[Pg 132] was used to it. Dar was barrels of it whar dey stilled it on de place. On Sundays us went f'um cabin to cabin holdin' prayer meetin's. Miss Annie 'pointed diff'unt ones to look atter da stock evvy Sunday.

"Big times was had by all at Chris'mas time. De eats warn't no diff'unt 'cept dey give us sweet bread and plenty of lallyhoe (molasses) what was made on de plantation. Us had two weeks vacation from field wuk and dey let us go rabbit and 'possum huntin'. Us had a gran' time clear up to New Year's Day.

"Oh, us did have one more big time at dem cornshuckin's. De corn was hauled to de crib and de folks was 'vited in de atternoon 'fore de cornshukin' started dat night. When de mans got to shuckin' dat corn, de 'omans started cookin' and dey got thoo' 'bout de same time. Den us et, and dat was de best part of de cornshuckin' fun. Cotton pickin's was held on moonshiny nights. Dey picked cotton 'til midnight, and den dey had a little shakin' of de footses 'til day.

"Mens had good times at de quilting's too. Deir white folkses allus give 'em a little somepin' extra t'eat at dem special times. But de 'omans what was cooks at de big house tied sacks 'roun' deir waisties under deir skirts, and all thoo' de day would drap a little of dis, and some of dat, in de sacks. When day poured it out at night, dare was plenty of good somepin' t'eat. De mens kept de fire goin' and if dey got hold of a tallow candle day lit dat to help de 'omans see how to quilt. Most of de quilting's was at night and nearly all of 'em was in winter time.

"De best game us had was marbles, and us played wid homemade clay marbles most of de time. No witches or ghosties never bothered us, 'cause us kept a horseshoe over our cabin door.[Pg 133]

"Miss Annie doctored us. In summer, she made us pull up certain roots and dry special leafs for to make her teas out of. Horehoun', boneset, and yellow root was de main things she used. She made a sort of sody out of de white ashes f'um de top of a hick'ry

fire and mixed it wid vinegar for headaches. De black ashes, left on de bottom of de hick'ry fire, was leached for lye, what was biled wid grease to make our soap.

"I never will forgit de day dey told us de war was over and us was free. One of de 'omans what was down by de spring a washin' clothes started shoutin': 'Thank God-a-Moughty I'se free at last!' Marse Tom heard her and he come and knocked her down. It was 'bout October or November 'fore he ever told us dat us was free sho' 'nough. Dat same 'oman fainted dead away den 'cause she wanted to holler so bad and was skeered to make a soun'. De yankees come thoo' soon atter dat and said us was free and 'vited all de Niggers dat wanted to, to go 'long wid dem. I never will forgit how bad dem yankees treated Old Miss. Dey stole all her good hosses, and her chickens and dey broke in de smokehouse and tuk her meat. Dey went in de big house and tuk her nice quilts and blankets. She stood all of dat wid a straight face but when dey foun' her gold, she just broke down and cried and cried. I stayed on and was Miss Annie's houseboy long as she lasted. I was 21 when she died.

"Dem night riders done plenty of whuppin' on our plantation. Hit was a long time 'fore Niggers could git 'nough money to buy lan' wid and it was a good 20 years 'fore no school was sot up for Niggers in our settlement.[Pg 134]

"I thinks Mr. Jefferson Davis and Mr. Lincoln was bofe of 'em doin' deir best to be all right. Booker Washin'ton, he was all right too, but he sho' was a 'maybe man.' He mought do right and den he moughtn't.

"Yes Ma'am, if Old Miss was livin' I'd ruther have slavery days back, 'cause den you knowed you was gwine to have plenty t'eat and wear, and a good place to sleep even if Mist'ess did make you wuk moughty hard. Now you can wuk your daylights plum out and never can be sho' 'bout gittin' nothin'.

"De fust time I married me and Ad'line Rogers stood up by da side of de big road whilst de preacher said his marryin' words over us, and den us went on down de road. Me and Ad'line had six chillun: Mary, Lucy, Annie, Bessie, John and Henry Thomas. Atter my Ad'line died, I married Daisy Carlton. I didn't have no weddin' needer time. Me and Daisy just got a hoss and buggy and driv' up to de house whar de Justice of de Peace lived, and he jined us in mattermony. Den us got back in de buggy and went back down de big road."

Tom began telling why he joined the church, when Daisy interrupted. "Now Tom," she said, "you just tell dis white lady what you told me 'bout how come you jined de church." "Now, Miss Daisy," pleaded Tom, "I don't want to do dat." Daisy snapped: "I don't keer what you don't want to, you is gwine to tell de trufe, Tom Hawkins." At that, Tom giggled and began: "Well, Miss, hit was lak dis: I went to church one night a feelin' moughty good. I went up and kneeled at de altar whar dey was prayin' for converts, and[Pg 135] a good lookin' yaller gal was kneelin' right in front of me. I accident'ly

tetched her on de laig. I sho' didn't mean to do it. In dat 'cited crowd most anything was apt to happen. Dat gal, she kicked me in de eye, and bruised up my face. My nose and eyes started drippin' and I hollered out real loud: 'Oh, Lord have mussy.' Den I staged a faint. De brother's of de church tuk me outside. Dey was sho' I had got 'ligion. By dat time I was so 'shamed of myself, I went back inside de meetin' house and jined de church, 'cause I didn't want nobody to know what had done happened. I 'cided den and dar to change my way of livin'. Next time I seed dat yaller gal I axed her why she kicked me in de face and she said: 'Next time you do what you done den, I'se gwine to kill you, Nigger.'

"Yes Ma'am, I thinks evvybody ought to be 'ligious."