

Amie Lumpkin

Interview with Amie Lumpkin, 88 years old

1411 Pine St. Columbia, S.C.

—*Stiles M. Scruggs, Columbia, S.C.*

"I was born on de plantation of Master John Mobley, in Fairfield County, South Carolina, in 1849. Both my parents was slaves on that plantation at that time. Master Mobley had a big farm and he had many slaves and chillun when I began to understand things there. My daddy worked in de field, but my mammy worked in de big house, helpin' to cook.

"There was pretty good order on de plantation, generally at de time in 1856, when I was 'bout seven years old. Most of de slaves go right along doin' their chores, as expected of them, but a few was restless, and they break de rules, by runnin' 'bout without askin', and always there was one or two who tried to escape slavery by goin' far away to the North.

"I 'member seein' one big black man, who tried to steal a boat ride from Charleston. He stole away one night from Master Mobley's place and got to Charleston, befo' he was caught up with. He tell the overseer who questioned him after he was brought back: 'Sho', I try to git away from this sort of thing. I was goin' to Massachusetts, and hire out 'til I git 'nough to carry me to my home in Africa.'

"It was de rule when a trial was bein' held lak this, for all de bosses and sometimes de missus to be there to listen and to ask the run'way slave some questions. After this one talked, it was Missus Mobley herself who said; 'Put yourself in this slave's shoes, and what would you do? Just such as he has. The best way to treat such a slave is to be so kind and patient with him, that he will forget his old home.'

"He was led away and I never did hear if he was whipped. He lak a Cherokee Indian, he never whimper if he should be whipped 'til de blood stream from him; but I do know he never got away again. He was de first one to pick up his hat and laugh loud, when President Lincoln set all slaves free in January, 1863. He say: 'Now I go, thank de Lord, and he strike right out, but he not git much beyond de barn, when he turn and come back. He walked in de yard of de big house, and he see Missus Mobley lookin' out at him. He take off his hat and bow low and say:

"Missus, I so happy to be free, that I forgits myself but I not go 'til you say so. I not leave you when you needs a hand, 'less de master and all de white folks gits home to look after you.

"De missus look down at her feet end she see de black man, so big and strong, sheddin' tears. She say to him: 'You is a good nigger and you has suffered much; make yourself at home, just as you have been doin' and when you want to go far away, come to me and I'll see that you git 'nough money to pay your way to Boston and maybe to Africa.' And that is what happen' a year or two later.

"My daddy go 'way to de war 'bout this time, and my mammy and me stay in our cabin alone. She cry and wonder where he be, if he is well, or he be killed, and one day we hear he is dead. My mammy, too, pass in a short time. I was sixteen when Sherman's army come through Fairfield County. I see them ridin' by for hours, some of them laughin' and many of them has big balls in their hands, which they throw against de house and it explode and burn de house.

"I have always 'spected that am just de way they set de houses when Columbia was burned in a single night. Some of de houses in Fairfield was burned, some in Winnsboro, and others in de country, but Columbia was de only place that was wiped out. As de army pass, we all stand by de side of de road and cry and ask them not to burn our white folks' house, and they didn't.

"I came to Columbia in 1868, and for a time I cooked in one or two of de hotels, then running in Columbia. About 1878, I was employed as cook in de home of de late W.A. Clark, and I stayed there, in de servant's quarters, on de place 'til I became too feeble to continue.

"It has been one of de big pleasures of my life that I has so many fine white friends, and so far as I knows, de good will of all de black folks as well. While workin' at Mr. Clark's home, which stood in a fine grove of magnolias at the corner of Elmwood Avenue and Park Street I never thought I should live to see it fade away. But you know it did, since de big stone mansion was torn away and de Junior High School now stands in that grove.

"While there, I think it was about thirty years service, I saw many of de leading white folks of de city and state, as guests there; they, at least many of them, still befriend me. De remnants of de Clark family treat me fine when they see me, and sometimes they drive by to see me. Of course, I had a pretty nice little roll of money when I got too old to work reg'larly but it has all been spent since. One day I's thinkin' 'bout it and I recalls de sayin' of my Missus Mobley. She say: 'Money has wings and it soon fly away.'

"For de last twelve years now, I has been de guest of Missus Ruth Neal, a fine Christian woman and a teacher in de public schools. She always treat me just as though I be her mother. My white friends have not forgot me to date and they enable me to live, without too much aid from my present benefactor. Her chillun, all in school now, call me 'Auntie.' Lookin' over my life it seems to me, I has done de best I could to live right and I have a hope that when de summons comes my Lord will say: 'Well done, Amie.'