

Bill McNeil

Interview with Bill McNeil, 82 years old Ridgeway, S.C.

—*W.W. Dixon, Winnsboro, S.C.*

"In December 1855, de family Bible say, I was born on de McNeil Place in York County. De last person who have dat Bible was Captain Conductor True of de Southern Railroad trains. Had dis one name in dat Bible, just 'Bill' is set down on de page. I hear them say de Good Book am now in Tennessee, but I wouldn't swear to dat. I was born 'bout twelve miles from Chester Court House on a creek called Bullock or something lak dat.

"My pappy name Will; my mammy name Leah. I was put down in de Book as their child. When Miss Jane, daughter of old Marster McNeil, (I forgits his first name) marry, then my new marster was Marster Jim True. Miss Jane just up and marry Marster Jim and come wid him to Fairfield. Then old Marster McNeil give me, my mammy, and brother Eli, to Miss Jane.

"My pappy done passed out, ceased to live, befo' us come to Fairfield. Him b'long to de Rainey family of York. Had to git a pass to see his wife and chillun. Dat was one of de hard parts of slavery, I thinks. Does I 'members Conductor True's name? Sho, I does. It was Thurston True. When I git on de train him always slap me on de head and say: 'Well Bill, how your corporosity seem to sagasherate dis morning?' And I say: 'Very galopshous, I thanks you, Captain'. Then us both laugh, and he pass on down de coach and all de people on dat car 'steem me very highly. I feel a little bigger than all de other niggers, all dat day long, I sho does.

"Does you know de Warren Castles' Place? 'Bout two miles from dere is where us lived befo' freedom. Marster Jim True was killed in de war. Us carry on then and make corn for de 'federate army. Our house had a dirt floor and a stick and mud chimney. Us slept on a pallet on de floor. In de summer time I run 'round in my shirt tail.

"De overseer, Tom True, de daddy of Marster Jim was a rough and hard task marster. After freedom I went to de Rembert Place, Wateree Creek, then to de DesPortes' Place five miles from Winnsboro, then to de Jordan Place on de Gum Tree Road, then to de Buchanan Place, then I buy seventy acres from Mr. Jim Curlee and live there every since 1905. My wife was there wid me and my daughter and her four chillun, Willie, Anne, Andy and Henrietta Jackson.

"I got a heap of whippin's in slavery time from old Marster Tom True. I see lots of de Yankees and their doings in war time. They just ride high, burn and take off everything from us, lak they did everywhere else.

"I vote de 'publican ticket, as I try to show my 'preciation, and dat gits me in bad wid de Klu Klux. They scare me, but no touch me. De red shirts try to 'suade me to vote their way. Some of de best white folks was in dat movement, but this time I 'members old Tom True beating me often for little or nothing. I sticks out to de end wid de party dat freed me.

"I find out, and you'll find out, boss, dat only de Lord is pure in de beginning and to de end, in His plans. De works of man and parties lak democrat and 'publican have their day; if they reign long enough de people will mourn so de Bible say.

"My old overseer, Marster Tom was a school teacher. I feel sorry for de chillun he teached, 'cause him whip me just when him git out of sorts. Miss Jane couldn't stop him, she just cry.

"Yas sir, I have knowed good white men. Mr. Warren Castles was a good man, and Manigault here in town is fit to go to heaven, when he die. I sure dat he is, although he is a nigger.

"My house and land worth \$590.00, but I been going back'ards every year for last eight years. Can't get labor, can't work myself. Wonder if you white folks will help me get a pension. I's not going to beg. Dats my last word.