

Charlie Meadow

Interview with Charlie Meadow (83)

Rt. 2, Union, S.C.

—*Caldwell Sims, Union, S.C.*

"It bees so hot today dat I jes' setting here on de bank steps a-waiting fer Aaron to come. Aaron work out on de road yonder in front of Dr. S'ratt's house. De heat, it still come up out'n dis granite rock like dar was a fire under it somewhars. It feel good to me kaise my blood thin and I has on de thinnest clothes dat I's got, today. Sho' did git dis hot in slavery, but us never had to tramp 'round on no pavement and rock steps like dese. Us tromped on de ground and it take up a lot of heat.

"In dem days, Union had trees along dis Main street like dem dat grows on de forest now, (Forest Creek). Mister, dey never called dis street Main when I was little, dey called it Virgin. It was real narrow and de trees recht plumb over de street in de middle 'till de limbs touched over your head. Here whar we's setting was de opera house. Right dar whar I's a pinting my finger was a stone hitching post, and along dis side de street was whar de surreys driv up fer de folks to git out and go in de do' to de Opera.

"I don't want to see no picture shows; ain't never seed none of dem things afo' dey got to talking. It's de devil hisself and dat's all it is. Now dey says dat dey talks in de pictures. Well, dem dat wants to can go and pay dere hard earned money to see sech as dat, but Charlie ain't gwine narry a step. No, if you is got any money to give me, I take it; but I ain't gwine to no picture whar de devil hisself bees in de dark. Dat's how come dey has it dark, and dat's what I 'lows to my grandchilluns but dey is ig'nant and laughs at me. It ain't no good to all sech as dat anyway. I likes to go to picnics and barbecues fer my enjoyment. Befo' my legs give out, I cotch fish and killed birds and went to log rollings and corn-shuckings. Dem things give you something to recall. Dese chilluns comes from de picture show and den dey does not have nothing to recall, kaise dey has to go agin de very next Sad'day. Tain't no merits to no sech as dey does.

"Slavery, us wore thin home-made clothes and dey sho' was better dan what I has now, kaise us made dem on de home looms and spinning wheel, and dey was good. Cloth ain't no count, kaise it ain't made good in no mills like dat what us made at home in de time of slavery. 'Course I was too little to make dem, myself, but it was done at home 'till atter I got big enough to card and spin. Ain't never seed no garments as strong as dem we wore back dar. Every thing was made out of plaited cotton and it lasted fer years and years. Winter time, we wore all wool clothes, and when you furs' changed in de fall, how dey did scratch! Make a feller feel like he had de itch. Marster had enough sheep to give his folks wool, and den some fer all de darkies. I's 'bout ten years old when I could card and spin good, and dat was atter de war.

"I live down dar on de Forest (creek) in 'Patterac'. My house ain't fer from McBeth School. De mail box in Mr. Charlie Ray's yard, 'bout fo' miles from Patterac. I walks fer dat mail, dat ain't fer. Not long ago I walked to Union and dat twelve miles. At dat you see I doesn't consider fo' miles fer.

"And Marse Johnny Meadow was my Marse when I was five years old. From den on, I 'members fer myself and I does not have to take what old folks say, but as you knows, from dar back it is as I is heard it.

"Yankee Carpetbagger or something come 'round and 'lowed to our overseers dat us have to come to Union Courthouse on a certain day. Us went in all de wagons. From de winding stairs, a man say, 'you is free; you is free; you is free as your marsters is.' Grandma Julie grab me and say, 'Boy, you is free; you is free; clap your hands.' Dat never meant much to me and atter us got in de wagon to go home, grandma 'low dat she sorry she so free and footloose. Next day us went to work as usual. Some strange folks and trashy niggers and po' white folks dat ain't never had nothing, would come to see us and tell us to stop work, but dat never meant nothing to us. Us all stayed on and gathered de crops.

"Next year maw and her maw went to de Mabry Thomas plantation in Santuc to work fer a fourth. My pa stayed at de Meadow plantation. I went wid my maw, but I also stayed wid my pa and his ma some. Atter dat, when ma's maw died she went back to pa and dey worked fer a fourth; and de older boys hired to de big house fer wages. I come up to manhood and I been down dar on de Patterac ever since. I live near Charlie Giles, and dey done tuck his picture kaise he so old and wise.

"Paw name in full, Griffin George Meadow, and ma's is Alice Brice Meadow. She brought from de state of Delaware, and pa was brought from de state of Virginny. I's heard both say dat dere parents was brung all de way from Africa. Mr. Bonny Tripling fetched both my ma and pa to South Carolina atter dey was married. I 'member my grand-daddy, my ma's daddy. He was furs' George Brice; then Marse Meadow bought him and he was George Meadow.

"My grandpa went to Mississippi on his own expenses atter de Confederate War and took his wife wid him. Her name was Mahala; and her two girls, Sara and Jane, and two sons, Henry and George, went along. Dey went on a little train. It was new here den, and dey say dat it was de first train dat ever went through de state of Mississippi. De first train dat I ever saw, was de one on de Southern Railroad, from Spartanburg to Union. It run to Columbia den, and my first ride was from Santuc to Union. I set betwist my daddy's legs on de train and dat de best ride dat I ever had and I'll never forget it. It was de fastes' thing dat had ever gone through dis country. When it started off, I hollored as I was so scared. Atter it got its speed, I thought de woods was leaving me and I held tight to my daddy's knees, couldn't hardly get my breath. It didn't take any time to get to Union, fact, befo' I got used to it we was at de station and my daddy told me dat we had to get off. When we got off I could get my breath again, but I felt funny all de rest of de day.

"I has a brother, Luke, dat lives near Lockhart, S.C., and another brother, Jimmie, lives in New York. Dat is all dat I has living.

"All de darkies on de plantation lived a good life. De ladies had me to pick up trash for de stove and fireplaces in de winter time. Marse Bee was Miss Lizzie and Marse John's son. All de time I stayed 'round de kitchen and got water and eat from de kitchen and had a good time until Marse and Missus died. Dey

give me plenty of food, clothes, a good house and good clean bed. We made our bed clothes on de home looms wid wool from our marster's sheep. De barns was always full and so was de smokehouse.

"For our summer clothes we plaited de hanks to make a mixtry of colors. De winter clothes was heavy, drab and plain. Our dyes was made from bark skinned from de maple trees. Dis was mixed with copperas for a pretty yellow. Green dye was bought from a store in Union, and de filling for de garments was also store-bought. I carded and spun and wove a many a day.

"We slept on straw ticks in summer, made from de wheat, and on feather beds in winter. De quilts was warm and made from many pretty home-made patterns. Lightwood knots give de only light at night. 'Puff' from flint rock give de first sparks. A piece of old iron or hard rock was used to strike de sparks wid, don't know why it was called 'puff'. Fire was kept in de kitchen hearth all de year as a usual thing.

"De overseer would 'hoop us up every morning, but we didn't work late at night. We went to de white folks' church at Harden's Ferry near de old Jeter graveyard. Church and ferry gone now. We also went to Sunday school. Every two or three afternoons in summer, Marster and Missus call us all on de kitchen porch and read de Bible and pray and tell us 'bout our Sunday school lesson. In winter we went in de kitchen where I built a big fire, to hear de Bible read. We was Methodist. My favorite preacher was a big black African named Williams who come to preach in de darky church for us every now and den. Dat was Jeter Chapel.

"First time dat I went to a baptizing was to see it at de white folks' church, Kelly Chapel. I went wid my ma and pa to see Mr. Cain and some Jones baptized. A box-pool had been built in de branch about half a mile from de church. De people draped in white was taken to dis pool and dipped, although it was a Methodist church. Sheets was hung up for a dressing-room. When dey come out of de pool dey dressed in regular clothes. It was warm weather and lots of folks had to be baptized and a lot of people was dere to see it done.

"Some years later, I went to see some darkies baptized for the first time. I had to walk a long ways. I don't go to church much now because my legs don't 'low me to walk to church.