

Easter Lockhart

Interview with Easter Lockhart (80)

322 Hill Street, Gaffney, S.C.

—*Caldwell Sims, Union, S.C.*

"Folks thinks that I was born round Easter, but that ain't so. March the 9th is what they always told me. The year I cannot recollect hearing, but by my count that I keep I am running close to eighty years. White folks give me my age to keep when I married, and I have kept it ever since, so I cannot be far wrong.

"It was the chief of police's grandpa that I knew and it was off his place that my old man come from. I was born Easter Norris and I married Nathan Lockhart when I was young, maybe fifteen, ain't sure about that. He was a little older than me. In slavery I was born and my mother was sold while I was a very young child, so they say. We then lived with Mr. Clayton Clark. Freedom broke when I was around thirteen, and we then went back to the Lockhart Plantation. There is where I nursed Henry, a little baby. He is now the chief of police. Miss Bessie, his mother, had me to clean up her yards for her.

"Miss Bessie fixed me up to be baptized at the Limestone Baptist church. It was then near Johnson Street and across from where Central school now stands. It was a Negro church. We had to go to the spring pond called Austin's Pond where all the baptizing took place in those days. Mr. Austin had a mill there run by a big water wheel. The white folks carried on their baptizing there, too. The first warm Sunday in May was when I was baptized.

"All Saturday I prayed and Miss Bessie told me what I was going to do, and read to me from the Bible about baptizing and about John the Baptist baptizing Christ. Yes sir, the Bible say Christ went down in the water, in the waters of Jordan. Miss Bessie was telling my ma how to fix my clothes while she was reading the Bible to me. All my clothes was white but my shoes. In those days they did not have white shoes. I wore white cotton stockings. I had a white dress to wear to the pond and I took two pairs of white stockings. A crowd was to be baptized at 2:30 o'clock that evening. The sun was good and hot. I went with my folks. Miss Bessie went and all the white folks went to see their Negroes go under.

"The dress I wore to the baptizing was starched so stiff it stood out. I wore a white handkerchief over my head that Miss Bessie give me. On top of that I had a white bonnet that had frills and tucks all over it. When we got there the banks of Austin's Pond was lined with Negroes shouting and singing glory and praises. They sang all the songs they could think of and the preacher lined out songs to them. The people to be baptized congregated before the preacher, and he told them what to do. Then we went in and put on the clothes we was to go under in.

"I had a long white gown gathered from my shoulders and it had a big kind of sleeves. On my head I wore a white cap and kept on my white stockings, but I pulled off my black shoes. Never had no white shoes that I know of way back then. I felt so good that I seemed to walk real light. While we were getting in our baptizing clothes we shouted praises as the people on the banks sang. Some of us jumped up. When my time come I started to the pond and just before the preacher turned to take my hand, I shouted 'Lord have Mercy' and clapped my hands over my head. Somebody said, 'Dat child sho is gitting a new soul'.

"Down in the water I went. First it hit my ankles and then I felt the hem of my skirts getting wet. I looked down and my gown was floating on top the water. I took my hand and pushed it down. The preacher pulled me to him and I went in water to my waist. I said 'Oh Lordy' when that water hit my stomach. The preacher said, 'Now sister, you just hold your breath and shut your mouth; trust in the Lord and don't act like a grunting pig, but have faith'. Then the singing seemed far off and the preacher's voice got deep. He put his big hand over my mouth and told me to limber up my back. His other hand was under my back. He pushed me over, and down in the water I went; then up I come. The preacher put a towel over my face, and while I was getting water out of my eyes and mouth, he was saying about the Lord done reached down from Heaven and created a new soul. I felt real funny when I turned to walk up out of the water. I could hardly walk for I had on so many clothes and they were so heavy. As soon as I could I got into the clothes that I wore to the baptizing and put on my black shoes and the pair of white stockings that I had fetched with me. While aunt Kizie Lockhart was tying the handkerchief around my head that Miss Bessie give me, I told her about how I felt. She said, 'Why, sure child, ain't you done washed your sins away and got converted?'

"Then she grabbed me by the hand and we went out among the people shouting praises to the Lord. I ain't never felt the same since. Aunt Kizie took me round to say 'howdy' to Miss Bessie. When the preacher had got them all baptized, we went into the church and had services. The white folks went on home after the baptizing was over. At the church we shouted till we could not shout no more. Folks don't like that now. They don't feel good when they join the church no more, either. I ain't had nothing to come against me since I was baptized. My head loses lots of things, but not my religion.

"Lots of folks was at Mr. Henry's Pa's house for his infair dinner. Mr. Hiram and Miss Bessie give the infair after the wedding. Miss Agnes, his sister come back for the wedding. Mr. Henry had sharp snapping eyes and he was good looking then. His eyes can still snap. When he looked at Miss Mary his face would light up. Her name was Miss Mary Gilmer, and she lived up near the lead mine. She sure looked good in white. I did not see the wedding, so I had to look careful at them when they come in Miss Bessie's front door so I could take it all in.

"The infair sure was fine. The table was most breaking down with turkey, chicken, ham, salads, pies and cakes. All the things to eat, already fixed on the plates, was fetched in from the kitchen by the Negroes. The chickens and turkeys just set on the table for ornaments and was not touched until the next day.

"The infair started at three o'clock in the afternoon. There were three or four tables for the people to sit at. The dining room and one other room were used to seat the guests at the tables while they ate. I can still see Miss Bessie's white linen table cloth that reached nearly to the floor. Such a time as I had the week before, washing and ironing the big linen napkins and shining the silver.

"They all looked mighty fine at the tables in their fine clothes. I could not help looking often at Mr. Henry's wife. Miss Bessie had done studied everything out so as it all went off fine."