

Ella Kelly

Interview with Ella Kelly, 81 years old

—*W.W. Dixon, Winnsboro, S.C.*

"Yas sir, I was born a slave of Mr. Tom Rabb, they call him black Tom Rabb, 'cause dere was two other Tom Rabbs. Marster Tom's hair was jet black and even when he shave, whisker roots so black face 'pear black. Yas sir, I come to birth on his place two or three miles from Monticello in de country, so I did. They say de year was de year President Buchanan was president, though I dunno nuttin' 'bout dat.

"My pappy name Henry Woodward, and b'long to old preacher Beelie Woodward's son, John. But all dis was just what I heard them say 'bout it. My mammy name Ella. She was de cook. I too little to work in slavery time, just hang 'round kitchen wid mammy, tote water and pick up chips, is all de work I done I 'members.

"Money? Help me Jesus, No. How could I ever see it? In de kitchen I see none, and how I see money any where else, your honor? Nigger never had none! I ain't got any money now, long time since I see any money.

"What did us eat? Dat's somethin' I knows 'bout. My mammy de cook for de white folks, wasn't I right dere at her apron strings all de time? Eat what de white folks eat, all de time, sho' I did! Too little to 'member much what slavery was like; can't tell nothin' 'bout clothes, never had no shoes. Us went to church some Sundays. Funny, them dat had not been good or done somethin' bad was kept at home by de white overseer, and some of them played wid de white chillun. Sorry I can't answer every question.

"One story I 'member 'bout is de pa'tridges and de Savior. My pappy allowed de reason pa'tridges couldn't fly over trees was: One day de Savior was a-riding long on a colt to de Mount of Olive Trees, and de drove flew up, make sich a fuss they scared de colt and he run away wid him. De marster put a cuss on de pa'tridges for dat, and ever since, they can't fly over tree tops. You reckon dat so boss? They say they never does fly over trees!

"I had a good marster and mistress. When de slaves git sick, they 'tend to them same as one of their own chillun. Doctor come quick. They set up and fan you and keep de flies off. They wouldn't let de slaves do dis, 'cause certain times you got to take medicine 'cordin' to doctors orders, and a slave might

make a mistake. Oh, they was 'ticular 'bout sickness. They has a hard time wid some nigger chillun and dat cast' oil bottle, I tell you!

"One of my young marsters was name Charlie. After freedom he marry one of Colonel Province's daughters and me and my mammy moved and lived wid them a while. Then I got married to Wates Kelly, and went to live and work for a white man 'bove White Oak. His name was Long John Cameron, de best white man to work for, but when Sat'day come and all de hands paid off, he git dat red hoss and turn and gallop to Winnsboro and bring back a passel of low down white trash wid him to de disturbment of all de good colored person on de place.

"Yas sir, Klu Klux was a terror to certain colored persons. I 'members they come dressed up in white and false faces, passed on to de Richardson place and whipped somebody one night.

"My husban' been dead twelve years. I's got thirteen chillun and Minnie is de onliest one livin' wid me in dis house. Her name Minnie Martin. Got whole lot of gran' chillun; they cover de earth from Charlotte to Jacksonville, and from Frisco to Harlem, New York; but never see them, just three, Franklin, Masie and Marie Martin.

"I heard 'bout Lincoln and Booker T. Washington. De President now in de White House, Mr. Roosevelt, have done more good for de nigger in four years than all de other presidents since Lincoln, done in fifty years. You say its been seventy-two years? Well, than all de rest in seventy-two years. Don't you know dat is so? Yas sir, dats de gospel truth.

"I's a member of de Baptist Church. Been buried wid my Lord in baptism and hope for a resurrection wid him in Beulah Land.

"Yes, de overseer was de poor buckra, he was what you calls dis poor white trash. You know boss, dese days dere is three kind of people. Lowest down is a layer of white folks, then in de middle is a layer of colored folks and on top is de cream, a layer of good white folks. 'Spect it'll be dat way 'till Judgement day.

"I got one boy name Ben Tillman, livin' in dis town. White folks calls him Blossom, but he don't bloom 'round here wid any money, though he is on de relief roll by sayin' he got a poor old mammy nigh a hundred years old and he have to keep her up. 'Spect when I gits my old age pension my chillun will pay me some little 'tention, thank God. Don't you know they will, sure they will."