

Ephriam (Mike) Lawrence

Interview with Ephriam Lawrence

Edisto Island, S.C.

—*C.S. Murray*

"I don't 'member much 'bout slavery time 'cause I been lee (little) boy when war declare. I raise up under de Murray—all my generation belong to de Murray. Dey know how to treat slave. Ain't lick um much, hardly any. Chillun hab easy time. All I been require to do was tote coal to Mosser when he ready fer light. Adam Mack and me, we been de fire boy. Mosser gib Adam to Mister Ebersson. I ain't gib to nobody—'specially.

"All white people ain't treat slave good. Some make um wuk haa'd all day, and 'cuss um plenty. De slave who been live near Steamboat Landing had rough time when dere old Miss git in tantrum. She been 'nuse to trabbel all over de world, and when she come back, she call all de slave together, and say: 'When I come, de debbil come.'

"We family ain't had all dat to worry 'bout. Behave yourself and you all right. Plenty to eat, plenty to drink. Run 'round and enjoy yourself if you got uh mind to. Wuk when you wuk, play when you play. Ole Miss 'nuse to 'tend all de sick nigger. Go from house to house, wid lee pair of scale and bottle ram jam pack of calomel. Give lee nigger big dose of castor oil, and dey git well quick, mighty quick.

"Old Mosser 'nuse to keep all de likker in de world on hand. Had to keep plenty, 'cause he friend drink lot and nigger drink lot too. He ain't drink so much heself. Old nigger been live on de place call John Fraser, same one I tell you 'bout, dat cut all dem tree down. John sure been slick. When Mosser call fer he fine likker to hand 'round, John come back and tell him all gone. Mosser want to know why. John make reply: 'Why, Mosser you know you hab Mister Binyard to supper last night and he finish all dat good stuff. You know how Mr. Binyard drink. Sometime he drink when your back t'un (turned). How you 'speck um to last?' Mosser scratch he haid, and say, yes he know how Mr. Binyard drink, and mebbe dats why de last bottle empty. He ain't satisfy, but he can't prove dat John drink um.

"Mosser 'nuse to keep de whiskey down in de cellar by de barrel, and he draw um off in bottle when he need um and take um upstairs to de wine room. De nigger dat wuk 'round de house and de yaa'd, help dem self out de barrel when dey feel tired. Mosser 'spect dem to do dat—dey 'title (entitle) to um. Whiskey been kinder ration in dem day.

"Nigger jest know haa'd time now. Ain't been dat way when I been lee boy. You ain't lacking fer nutting den dat you really need. No tussling 'bout fer yourself and knock 'round from pillar to post. If we need

anything slavery time we ax (ask) fer um—make we want known. Any feeling ably white man who hab slave, gib we what we need. No puzzling 'tall (at all).

"Ain't I tell you 'bout dat time when John Fraser take overcoat from Mosser right on Meeting Street? No. Well, it been uh cold day, and Mosser tell John Fraser to meet him on de corner Meeting and Broad wid de overcoat, 'cause he going out dat night and he want 'um. John been wid Abel Wright, and de two of dem walk down de street to meet de Major. John say to Abel: 'I cold as de debbil, and I going to ax Mosser fer he coat.' Abel say: 'You crazy. He send for um and he sure ain't going, to gib you he good new coat anyhow.' John say: 'You wait and see.'

"Soon Mosser come in sight. When he see John he git mad right off 'cause John hab on he overcoat. Before he kin say uh wud (word) John speak up fast. He say: 'Yes, Mosser I got on your coat 'cause it mighty cold. Got to excuse old nigger. You hab 'nother coat. I ain't got nutting but dis here jumper. Go on home Mosser and git torrer (the other) coat. I going to keep dis. He jest fit me. Go on home.'

"Mosser study fer uh while, den he laugh. He see how keen de coat fit John, and he know it been cold sure 'nough. John look sekker (just like) dress up monkey in dat long tail overcoat, and dat make de Major laugh all de more. So he tu'n round and go home, and John hab dat coat till he die.

"Old Mosser scarcely going to deny you nutting, if he like you."