

Fred James

Interview with Fred James (81)

Newberry, S.C. RFD

—*G.L. Summer, Newberry, S.c.*

"Yes, I 'member slavery time and de war. I was about 7 or 8 years old. I belonged to Marse Tom Price. My father, John James, belonged to Madison Brooks and my mammy belonged to Tom Price. When dey married dey lived wid Madison Brooks awhile, but dey was wid Tom Price when I was a boy.

"Of cose I 'member de war. Us chaps, both niggers and white, was made to go up-stairs in de big house and look out de window to see de soldiers when dey come. We heard de Yankees marching befo' dey got dar, but dey come from de other side of de house, facing south towards Caldwells, and we didn't see dem marching in. Dey stopped at our house and looked around and asked if marster was at home. We told him dat he wasn't dar. We was eating apples, and dey asked us whar we got 'em. We told dem dat we got de apples on de place, and dey asked us for some. We give dem some apples; den dey left. Marse had carried his fine stock about a mile off in de woods so de soldiers couldn't find dem; but we didn't tell de soldiers.

"We lived in a little log cabin made wid mud between de logs, dat was de kind of houses Marse had for his slaves. We slept on wood beds wid ropes stretched tight across in place of slats. Dis held our straw mattress.

"My father's daddy come from Africa. His name was Emmanuel James. Atter freedom come he give me a little yearling. We wasn't allowed to have anything befo' freedom come; and we wasn't allowed to learn to read and write. Dey whipped us if dey caught us wid a book trying to read or write. Ma said dey cut off a hand if dey caught you.

"We raised hogs, sheep, goats, cows and plenty chickens; raised everything at home, and had a good garden with plenty vegetables. Dem cows and hogs and other cattle were branded and allowed to graze around in bottoms of de lowlands whar dar was no fence.

"My clothes was made from yarn spun by my mammy, and she made my clothes, too. Marse had my mammy to spin and weave for all de slaves on de place. But marse and mistress was good to us. He had a nigger overseer who sometimes brought a nigger to marse when he misbehaved; den marse would have de nigger overseer to whip him. He had 8 to 10 slaves all de time.

"Some slaves dat lived on places close to us would run off sometimes and hide in de woods, and live dar in a den which dey dug. At night they would go out and hunt food, like hogs; den kill 'em at night and dress 'em. Most of de day dey would stay in de den.

"I 'member when freedom come, old marse said, 'You is all free, but you can work on and make dis crop of corn and cotton; den I will divide up wid you when Christmas comes.' Dey all worked, and when Christmas come, marse told us we could get on and shuffle for ourselves, and he didn't give us anything. We had to steal corn out of de crib. We prized de ears out between de cracks and took dem home and parched dem. We would have to eat on dese for several days.

"We had to work, all day, sun up to dark, and never had Saturday afternoons off anytime. My mammy had to wash clothes on Saturday nights for us to wear on Sundays.

"We chaps played marbles most all de time. Marse used to try to scare us by telling us dar was spooks. Some of de old folks did believe in spooks, but I don't know much about dem. We never used much medicine den but quinine. Folks had lots of chills den, but dey never had any kind of strokes or things like dat as dey do dese days.

"We had to get a pass from marse if we went out. If de patrollers caught us widout a pass dey would whip us.

"Right atter de war de Ku Klux started. I 'member dem when dey would march up and down de road. Dey marched most at night, and we could hear de horses for a long distance as deir feet struck de ground.

"I married Nellie Wilson, and had 12 children. I got now 6 children; my wife is dead. I got five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

"I think Abraham Lincoln and Jeff Davis was good men in deir way, as dey thought. Booker T. Washington is a great man, and he is done lots of good for de niggers. I think slavery was good in some ways and bad in others. I was better off den dan I am now.

"I jined de church when I was 20 years old, because it was de law—to trust in de Lawd, you got to belong to de church.

"I member something 'bout 40 acres of land and a mule dat de slaves would get, but never come anything about it. When freedom come most of de slaves hired out as wage hands, cutting wood and working on farms or any odd jobs dey could get. Dar was lots of new ground, and many of de niggers got work clearing it up.

"We didn't get any money in slavery time, but got plenty to eat; and atter de war, we got a little money and a little to eat. I 'member dat old Mr. Brown hired me out once about 45 years ago at 30¢ a day and my meals. I think de younger generation ain't so good. Dey have deir own way and don't respect old folks. Dat's de way it is wid both whites and blacks.