

George Patterson

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Interview with George Patterson

653 Peachtree St., Spartanburg, S.C.

—*F.S. DuPre, Spartanburg, S.C.*

While seeking an interview with an ex-slave today, the writer was directed to a certain house where an old man lived. Entering the premises by the rear, he observed an old man helping a woman who was washing some clothes. He was stepping around quite lively, carrying water and emptying one pot after another of the dirty water already used by the woman. After he had sufficient water for his wife's needs, he asked the writer to go with him to the front porch where he could be quiet and talk.

He stated that he was large enough during the Civil War to wait on the soldiers when they would come to his master's home for something to eat, which was at Kilgore's Bridge on Enoree River, said that his job during the slavery days was to wait on the white folks and watch the plantation.

He also stated that his father was a full-blooded Indian who was sold to his master by Joe Crews, the biggest slave trader in the country. His father was stolen somewhere in Mississippi, along with other Indians, and sold into slavery with the "niggers." He said his father told him he was stolen by Joe Crews when he was a young buck. At that time, his father went by the name of "Pink Crews," but after he was purchased by Mr. Joe Patterson, his name became "Pink Patterson." He stated that his mother was a white woman who came from Ireland and was working on the Patterson farm. She was not a slave, but was married to his father by his "Marster."

They lived in a one-story, one-room log cabin which had a dirt floor. The whole family of 18 children and parents lived in this small house. They were comfortable, however, and all had good health. He stated that he had not been sick for fifty years, and that the only trouble with him now was a broken foot, the result of a railroad wreck about forty years ago. He said his foot still gave him trouble in bad weather.

He said that he had not been conjured at all, but had just gotten his foot broken. "Conjuring and ghosts are all foolishness anyhow." The nearest he ever come to seeing a ghost was one night when he observed a "white thing moving back and forth across the branch." He had with him his brother's cap and ball pistol, and he shot at the object two or three times, knowing that his dogs would come to him if they heard the shots. Two or three dogs came up and recognized him. He told one bull dog to go to the white thing and see what it was. After the dog had been all around the place where the thing was moving, he knew there was nothing there to frighten him. Next morning, he went out to see the object and found it to be a small tree with white leaves waving in the breeze.

Going back to slavery times, he said that on most plantations were kept squirrel dogs, 'possum dogs, snake dogs, rabbit dogs and "nigger" dogs. Each dog was trained for a certain kind of tracking. He used to train the "nigger" dogs which were used to track slaves who had run away from the plantation. He

said he had two dogs that were sure never to lose the scent when they had taken it up. "If I put them on your track here and you went to Greenville, they would track you right to Greenville."

He said his master did not allow his slaves to be whipped but he had seen slaves on other plantations wearing chains to keep them from running away.

"People don't work like they used to, and this thing of higher education is ruining niggers. All their learning teaches them is how to beat a man out of a dollar and how to get out of work. It teaches them to cus, and it teaches these young girls how to make easy money. As old as I am, I've been approached by girls I didn't know and asked for a dollar. Now that thing won't do. I believe in teaching children how to read and write; but don't go any further than that. I've never seen a moving picture. Once a man offered to give me a ticket to a movie, but I told him to give me a plug of tobacco instead." When asked if he thought colored preachers should be educated, he replied that when they are educated they learn how to steal everything a man has, if they can.

"You remember reading about Joe Crews and Jim Young—what they did in this state? Well, they tried to lead all the niggers after the war was over. I was the one who got Jim Young away from the whites. I carried him to Greenville, but he got back somehow, and was killed. Joe Crews was killed, too. The Ku Klux was after them hot, but I carried Jim Young away from them. You know, the Yankees was after getting all the gold and money in the South. After the war, some Yankee soldiers would come along and sell anybody, niggers or whites, a gun. They were trying to get on to where the white people kept their money. If they caught on, they would go there and steal it. You know, there wasn't any banks, so people had to keep their money and gold in somebody's safe on some big man's place. These men in selling guns was trying to find out where the money was hid."

When asked about hunting, he said that hunting in slavery days was not like it is now, for a man could hunt on his own place then and get plenty of game. There were plenty of wild hogs in those days, as well as wild turkeys, rabbits and squirrels. Some of the hogs were so wild that no one dared to go into a pack of them, for they had tusks six inches long, and could tear a man to pieces. A man could shoot a wild hog and have no trouble over it. Cattle, he said, ran wild and were dangerous at all times.

"When you buy something now, you haven't got much. I bought a cake of soap for my wife but it was a small thing. When we used to make our own soap on the plantation, we had plenty of good soap."

He said his father followed his master and others to the war, and he drove artillery wagons at times. At Appomattox, his father told him that he drove wagons over dead soldiers piled in ditches. His father lived to be 111 years old. After he and his father were set free, they remained with Mr. Joe Patterson to help him make that year's crops; then they moved to another place.

He heard that work was plentiful in Spartanburg, and he moved here and did various kinds of work. He said that he was not as strong as he used to be, but that he could still do a full day's work except when his foot troubled him.

Uncle George was quite polite and seemed glad to talk of old times. He observed, though, that in old times people would speak to him. "You go up to a crowd now, and they won't speak. They won't notice you."

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George Patterson, ex-slave, says that during the Civil War and afterwards, when the owners of plantations in the Enoree River section had a surplus of peaches and apples, they made apple and peach brandy; and after they had filled kegs with it, rolled the kegs into a pond to keep them from leaking until they were either sold or taken out for personal use. Corn and rye whiskey were also stored in the water to keep the kegs from leaking. In those days, he stated, good whiskey sold for 40 cents a gallon. Butter sold for five cents a pound; eggs six cents a dozen, and hens that now cost 75 cents a piece, sold for ten cents. But stated George, salt was very dear and hard to get; a barrel costing as much as \$50.

George also stated there were plenty of wild turkeys, ducks and wild geese on the Enoree River. The turkeys would ravage a garden or scratch up the planted seed on the plantation. He has often been sent out to frighten the wild turkeys away from the crops. He said plenty of meat could be secured by shooting the wild hogs that roamed the woods, that anybody was at liberty to kill a hog. Of course, some once tame hogs mingled with the droves of wild hogs but the tame hogs had the owner's name on them; so one had to be very careful that he did not shoot a marked hog. He said that when his father, an Indian, was stolen by Joe Crews, from the woods of Mississippi, he marched them with niggers he had also stolen, or traded for, into different sections of the country, selling them as slaves and speculating on them. He drove them just like cattle and would stop at various plantations and sell the Indians and niggers into slavery