

Interview with Ephriam (Mike) Lawrence, about 80, farmer and laborer Edisto Island, S.C.

—*C.S. Murray*

Mike Lawrence belonged to what he calls "de Murray state" in slavery times. He was one of Major William Meggett Murray's "fire boys", who was charged with the specific duty of bringing live coals to the master whenever he wanted to light his pipe. Mike was only a small lad when war was declared, but he remembers numerous stories relating to "Maussa's niggers", some of which are worth recording. He speaks from first hand knowledge, he says, for the things that he tells about happened during his childhood and still stand out clearly in his mind.

Here is one of Mike's stories:

"Old John Drayton was de smaa'test of all de nigger de Maussa place. He wuk so haa'd some time dat Maussa jest got to stop him, or he kill heself. I nebber see sech uh man fer wuk in all my life. Maussa t'ink uh lot ob um, 'cause he been uh good field hand, beside know lot 'bout cutting 'ood (wood) and building fence. What been more old John play fer all de dance on de plantation. He fair (really) mek fiddle talk. When Maussa gib uh dance he always call 'pon John.

"Yas, suh dat man sure could play. W'en he saw down on de fiddle and pull out dat june (tune) 'Oh, de Monkey Marry to de Babboon Sister,' he mek paa'son (parson) dance.

"One day more dan all, Maussa Murray send wud (word) to John dat de cow der break out ob de pasture, and he got to mend de fence quick. But John done promise some nigger on Fenwick Island to play fer uh dance, and he steal paa't (path) and go. (This expression means to go away by stealth). Dat been Friday night and Maussa say John got to finish de fence by sundown the next day.

"W'en Old John ain't show up Saturday morning, Maussa ax eberybody where he been and de nigger all band togedder (together) and tell Maussa dat dey see him leabe in uh boat to go fish and he ain't seen since. Maussa been worry sure 'nough den 'cause he t'ink John might be drown'. He 'gage (engage) four man to shoot gun all ober creek to mek John body rise. Atter dat day drag all 'bout in de gutter.

"Maussa gone bed wid heaby haa't (heart) 'cause he been very fond ob Old John.

"John come back from Fenwick Island early Monday morning and 'fore day clean he in de 'odd der cut fence rail. Now, one hundred rail been call uh good day wuk, but Old John decide he going to do better den dat. He find fibe (five) tree grow close togedder, and he cut piece out ob every one. Den he chop at the biggest tree till he fall, and dat tree knock all de rest ober wid um.

"W'en all dem tree fall togedder, it make sech uh noise, dat ole Maussa hear um in he bed, and hasten to dress so he kin see w'at der go on in de woods.

"Maussa saddle de horse and ride 'till he git to de center ob de noise and dere he see Old John cutting 'way like he crazy. Maussa been mad sure 'nough, but den he glad to see John ain't drown'. He staa't to say some t'ing but Old John interrupt, and sing out: 'Go 'way Maussa, I ain't got time to talk wid you now.'

"Old John den gather up five ax, and go to de five tree laying down on de ground. He dribe uh ax in ebery tree and den grab uh neaby maul. W'en Maussa look on, he tek de maul and run from one tree to torrer (one to the other) and quick as he hit de ax, de tree split wide open. Maussa staa't to say some t'ing 'gain but John ain't let him talk. He say: 'Go on home to Missus, Maussa, I too 'shame, great God I too 'shame! Go on home.'

"Maussa tun (turn) 'round in he track and go home widout uh wud, 'cause he see de old nigger ain't going to gib him any satisfaction 'bout Saturday. W'en he go back in de 'ood dat evening he check up and find dat Old John done cut five hundred rail. Oh, dem been man in dose day, I tell you."