

Isiah Jeffries

Interview with Isiah Jefferies, (age 86)

Gaffney, S.C. Rt. 6.

—*Caldwell Sims, Union, S.C.*

"I is what is known as a outside child. My Ma went to Hamlet. I lived on de Jefferies plantation, below Wilkinsville in Cherokee County. My father was Henry Jefferies. My mother was Jane Jefferies. My mother's husband was named Ned. Before her marriage she was a Davis. She was sold in slavery to Henry Jefferies. I allus lived with my mother, and Ned was as good to me as he was to his own chillun. My mother had three outside chilluns, and we each had a different father. Atter she married Ned; den he jest come to be our Pa, dat is he let her give us his name. She and Ned had four chillun.

"My first wife is dead and my second wife is named Alice Jefferies. I got one child by my first wife, and I ain't got no outside chilluns. Dat works out bad, at best. None of my folks is living. All of dem is done dead now; jest me, my wife and my sister's daughter, Emma, who is grown now. Her Pa and her Ma took and went crazy befo' dey died. Both of dem died in de asylum. We took Emma, and she ain't jest 'zactly right; but she ain't no bother to us.

"First thing I had to do as a child was to mind my Ma's other chilluns as I was de first outside one dat she had. Dis I did until I was about twelve years old. My Ma and Ned was working one day and I was minding her chilluns as usual when I looked up and seed de top of our house on fire. I hollered and dey come running from de field. De other hands come with dem kaise I made such a noise hollering. Soon de big folks got de fire out. Atter dat, Marse Henry had me to leave de house and go to work fer him.

"It was spring and I started in chopping cotton. 'Peers dat I got on pretty well, and dat de overseer liked me from de start. From dar on I was broke into field work of all kinds and den I did work around de lot as well. It was not long befo' everybody started calling me 'uncle Zery', why—I did not know; but anyway dat name still sticks to me by dem dat knows me well. My grandpa never called me dat, kaise I was named atter him, and he too proud of dat fact to call me any nickname. I stayed wid him at his house lots atter I started working fer de marster, kaise he showed me how to do things. I worked fer him to git my first money and he would give me a quarter fer a whole day's work. Dat made me feel good and I thought I was a man kaise I made a quarter. In dem days a quarter was a lot of money. I spent it fer chawing tobacco, and dat made me sick at first. Dats all men had to spend money fer in dem days. Everything was give you on de plantation and you did not need much money. Sometimes we cooked out in de field and I have cooked bread in de field in a lid.

"Ma teached me how to cook befo' I was twelve years old. We had good things to eat den; more dan my chilluns has dese times. All de slaves had dere gardens on my marster's plantation. He made dem do it,

and dey liked it. Niggers do not seem to take no pains wid gardens now. Land ain't soft and mellow like it used to be. In cold weather we had to bank out 'taters, rutabegas, beets, carrots and pumpkins. De pumpkins and carrots was fer de hogs and cows.

"In warm weather we had cotton clothes and in cold weather we had woolen clothes dat our marster had made fer us by de old ladies on de plantation. But we did go barefooted all winter until we was grown and married. We had all de wood we wanted fer fire. We kept fire all day and all night. We sot by de fire in winter and popped corn, parched pinders [HW: peanuts] and roasted corn ears.

"Marster and Mistress had six chilluns. Her name was Ellen and her house was three stories high. Dere overseers allus lived wid dem. Dere was a lot of slaves and dey all loved de white folks. De whole plantation was allus up at sunup. But we did not work very late. I remember de Patter-rollers, de Ku Klux and de Yankees. Niggers dreaded all three. Dere was no jail fer us; de Patter-rollers kept us straight.

"When I got to be a big boy, my Ma got religion at de Camp meeting at El-Bethel. She shouted and sung fer three days, going all over de plantation and de neighboring ones, inviting her friends to come to see her baptized and shouting and praying fer dem. She went around to all de people dat she had done wrong and begged dere forgiveness. She sent fer dem dat had wronged her, and told dem dat she was born again and a new woman, and dat she would forgive dem. She wanted everybody dat was not saved to go up wid her.

"De white folks was baptized in de pool first, and den dere darkies. When de darkies time come, dey sung and shouted so loud dat de Patter-rollers come from somewhar, but Marster and Missus made dem go away and let us shout and rejoice to de fullest. Missus had all her darkies to wear white calico in de pool dat was a-gwine in fer baptizing. In de sewing-room she had calico robes made fer everybody. My Ma took me wid her to see her baptized, and I was so happy dat I sung and shouted wid her. All de niggers jined in singing. De white folks stayed and saw us baptize our folks, and dey liked our singing