

Jake McLeod

Interview with Jake McLeod, 83 years old

Timmonsville, S.C.

—*Mrs. Lucile Young and H. Grady Davis, Florence,
S.C.*

"You see what color I am. I born in Lynchburg, South Carolina de 13th day of November, 1854. Born on de McLeod place. Grandparents born on de McLeod place too. My white folks, dey didn' sell en buy slaves en dat how-come my grandfather Riley McLeod fell to Frank McLeod en grandmother fell to de McRaes. My boss give my grandfather to his sister, Carolina, dat had married de McRae, so dey wouldn' be separated. Dey take dem en go to Florida en when de Yankees went to Florida, dey hitched up de teams en offered to bring dem back to South Carolina. Some of my uncles en aunts come back, but my grandfather en grandmother stayed in Florida till dey died.

"De McLeods, dey was good people. Believe in plenty work, eat en wear all de time, but work us very reasonable. De overseer, he blow horn for us to go to work at sunrise. Give us task to do en if you didn' do it, dey put de little thing to you. Dat was a leather lash or some kind of a whip. Didn' have no whippin post in our neighborhood. I recollect my boss unmercifully whipped man I thought, but I found out dat it was reasonable. He (the slave) beat up my uncle (a slave) en my old boss put it on him. Striped him down en tied him wid buckskin string. Whipped him till he get tired en come back en whip him more. I looked right on at it. When he turn him loose, told him to go. See him whip my mother one time 'cause she whip me. Caught her by de hand en whip her right in de same field dat she whip me. It was so hot I dig holes en put my foot in de hole en dat de reason she whip me. Den if he find anyone steal a thing, he whip dem for dat.

"Dey didn' have no jails in dem days, but I recollects one woman hanged on de galleries (gallows). Hang dem up by harness en broke neck for wrongdoing like killin somebody or tryin to kill. Old woman cookin for de Scotts, named Peggy, tried to poison de Scotts. Mean to her, she say, en she put poison in de coffee. My mother walked 'bout 10 miles to see dat hangin' 'cause dey turn de slaves loose to go to a hangin'. Took her from de quarter in de wagon en I heard her tell dat de old lady, Peggy, was sittin on her coffin. My mother say she used to use so much witchcraft en some one whispered, 'Why don' you do somethin 'bout it?' She say, 'It too late now.' I hear tell 'bout dem hangin', but I ain' see none of it.

"My boss had four slave houses dat was three or four hundred yards from his house en I reckon he had 'bout 25 slaves. One was pole house wid brick chimney en two rooms petitioned off en de other three was clay house. Us had frame bed en slept on shucks en hay mattress. Dey didn' give us no money but had plenty to eat every day. Give us buttermilk en sweeten potatoes en meat en corn bread to eat mostly. Catch nigger wid wheat, dey give him 'wheat'. Den dey let us have a garden en extra patches of

we own dat we work on Saturday evenings. En we catch much rabbits en fish as us want. Catch pikes en eels en cats. Catch fish wid hook en line in Lynches river wid Senator E.D. Smith's father. Rev. Bill Smith de father of E.D. Smith.

"De white folks, dey had a woman to each place to weave de cloth en make all us clothes. De women had to weave five cuts a week, one cut a night. Have reel in de shape of wheel en spokes turn en hold thread en turn en when it click, it a cut. Any over, keep it to de next week. Dey wore cotton clothes in de summer en wool clothes in de winter en had more den one garment too. Had different clothes to wear on Sunday 'cause de slaves go to de white folks church in dat day en time. Den dey had shoemaker to come dere en make all de colored peoples shoes. De Durant shoemaker come to de McLeod plantation en make dey shoes.

"I tellin you my boss was a good man en he had a big plantation wid six or seven hundred acres of land, but he didn' have to mind to see 'bout none of de work. De overseer name Dennis en he was de one to look out for all de plantation work. He lived on de McLeod place en he was good man to us. I had to thin cotton en drop peas en corn en I was a half [HW: hand] two years durin de war. If a whole hand hoes one acre, den a half hand hoes half a acre. Dat what a half hand is. Waited on de wounded de last year of de war.

"Wheat, peas, corn en cotton was de things dat peoples plant mostly in dem days. Dis how I see dem frail de wheat out. Put pole in hard land en drive horse in circle en let dem stamp it out. You could ride or walk. Two horses tramp en shake it out en den take straws en have somethin to catch it in en wind it out. Had to pick en thrash a bushel of peas a day.

"When corn haulin time come, every plantation haul corn en put in circle in front of de barn. Have two piles en point two captains. Dey take sides en give corn shuckin like dat. Shuck corn en throw in front of door en sometimes shuck corn all night. After dey get through wid all de shuckin, give big supper en march all round old Massa's kitchen en house. Have tin pans, buckets en canes for music en dance in front of de house in de road. Go to another place en help dem shuck corn de next time en so on dat way.

"My old Miss en Massa, dey always look after dey slaves when dey get sick. Use herbs for dey medicine. I used to know different herbs my mother would get. Boneset en life-everlastin make teas for fever en colds. When I was a boy, dey used to carry dem what have smallpox by de swamp en built a dirt house for dem. Kept dem dere en somebody carried feed to dem. People used to have holes in dey skin wid dat thing en most of dem died.

"I hear tell 'bout one man runnin away from Black Creek en gwine to Free State. Catch ride wid people dat used to travel to Charleston haulin cotton en things. He come back 'bout 15 years after de war en lived in dat place join to me. Come back wid barrels en boxes of old second hand clothes en accumulated right smart here. Talk good deal 'bout how he associated wid de whites. Don' know how-come he run away, but dey didn' catch up wid him till it was too late. De community have man den call pataroller en dey business was to catch dem dat run away. Say like you be authorized to look after my place, you catch dem dat slipped off to another man place. Couldn' leave off plantation to go to another place widout you ask for a pass en have it on you. White folks used to kill beef what dey call club beef. If you kill beef this week, you send this one en that one a piece till de beef all gone. White folks give me pass en tell me carry beef en deliver it. Next time, another man send us beef.

"I run away one time en somehow another de overseer know whe' I was. I recollects old Miss had me tied to de tester bedstead en she whip me till de whip broke. I see her gettin another arm 'bout full en I tear loose en run away. I slip home on steps at my mother's house lookin down playin wid de cat en look up in her face. She say, 'You good for nothin, you get out of here en get to dat barn en help dem shuck corn.' I go but I didn' go in 'cause I keep a watch on her. Another time boss had a horse apple tree dat just had one apple on it en he wanted to save dat apple till it get ripe enough for seed en fall. White man, I couldn' stand it. I eat dat apple. He put it on me dat time 'cause he saw my tracks en dat how he knew it was me. He know it was me en I couldn' get out of it.

"I get married in '76. My old boss, we all went gether. Red Shirt canvassed the country. People tried to get me to quit my wife 'cause dey say de Democrats would bring back slavery. Some voted 8 or 10 tickets. I was on de stand when Hampton spoke in Sumter. Chamberlain was elected on de Republican ticket. Sam Lee one of de men. He was white. I believe he was colored. Wade Hampton have him brought on de stand en ask questions. Ask what kind of Government it gwine be. Dey had tissue tickets en blindfolded man en he didn' take out tissue tickets. Name en number on de ticket.

"All I know 'bout de war dat bring freedom was dat de war was gwine on. I remember when dey couldn' get coffee, sugar or nothin like dat. You know dat was a tough time to think 'bout we couldn' get no salt. Cut up potatoes en parch to make coffee. Sweetened wid syrup en fore de war closed, made sugar from sugar cane. Boil dirt out de smoke house en put liquor in food. Eat poke berry for greens. Den one day we hear gun fire in Charleston en Miss made miration. I don' remember freedom, but I know when we signed de contract, de Yankees give us to understand dat we was free as our Massa was. Couldn' write, just had to touch de pin. Ask us what name we wanted to go in. We work on den for one third de crop de first year wid de boss furnishing everything. Soon as got little ahead went to share-cropping.

"I tell you it been a pretty hard time to be up against. I own dis here place en my nephew live here wid me. Dey give him government job wid de understandin he help me. Get \$24.00 a month en live off dat. Daughters in New York pay tax. If dey carry out de President's plan, it be a good one. It been pretty tough in some instance. God sent thing. I tell you it a good thing. If carried out like de President want it carried out, it be better den slavery time. You know some slaves got along mighty bad 'cause most of de white people won' like our white folks.

"I belongs to de Methodist church en I believe it de right thing. Man ought to do as God arranged it 'cause he plan it. We know right from wrong