

## John Petty

### Interview with John Petty (87)

Hill Street, Gaffney, S.C.

—*Caldwell Sims, Union, S.C.*

"I was born on the Jim Petty place in what was then Spartanburg County.

"Marse raised all his darkies to ride young. I no more 'members when I learned to ride than I 'members when I come into the world. Marse had his stables built three logs high from the outside of the lot. When the horse step down into the lot, then I jump on his back from the third log. So little that I never could have got on no other way without help.

"The horse what I rid had a broad fat back and he trot so fast that sometimes I fall off, but I hang on to the mane and swing back on his back and he never break his gait. Then again if I didn't swing right back up he take and stop till I git landed on his back once more.

"One horse called Butler, farm horse named Tom, mule called Jack, slave horse called Stoneman, then one called Cheny, one Jane, one Thicketty and the stud-horse named Max. I allus play with him, but my folks was ig'nant to that fact. I lay down and he jump straight up over me. I git corn and he eat it from my hand. There was apples and salt that he loved [HW: to eat] from my palm. He throw his fore legs plumb over my head, and never touch me at all. All this gwine on in Max's stable. It big enough for a dozen or more horses, 'cause it hardly ever beed that Max git out and his stable had to be big so as he could exercise in it. So I slip in there and we play unbeknownst to the old folks, white or black. The door slided open. When I git tired and ready to go out then I slide the door open. Maxie knowed that I was gwine and he had the most sense. He watch till I git the door slid open and if he could he run by me and jump out. I never could git him back in and he race 'round that lot till the hands come in from the field at dark. He have a good time and git all sweaty.

"When he jump over me out'n the sliding door, then I hide under the feed house till Mammy holler, 'Lawdy, fore the living, yonder is Max a-ripping hisself plumb to he death in that lot.' Then they send for some the mens to git him back. Atter they done that then I crawl out, climb the lot fence and run through the field home. When I sets down Maw 'lows, 'Does you know it's real curious thing how that old stud-horse git his door open and come out'n that stable. It must be haints creeping 'bout right here in the broad open daylight!' At that I draw up real near the fire and say, 'Maw, does you reckon that the haints is gwine to come and open our door some time?'

"On t'other hand, if I be real quick a-getting out of the stable door before Max turn and see me, when then he couldn't git out. None of them never knowed 'bout the good times that me and Max used to did

have. And it 'pears real strange to me now that he never did hit me with his foots nor nothing. That horse sure 'nough did love me and that's jest all what it is to that. I also used to slip in the extra feed house and fetch him oats and the like 'twixt and 'tween times. He stay that fat and slick. But it wouldn't nary lil' darky would go near that stud-horse but me. They's all skeered to death when he git in the lot and when they seed him in there they would run and git in the house and slam the door plumb shut.

"When I done come up nigh 18 or something like that, the big freedom come 'round. Marse Jim say us could all go and see the world as we'uns was free niggers. Us jump up and shout Glory and sing, but us never sassed our white folks like it 'pears to be the knowledge up North. I'd done been there and they thinks us turned our backs on our white folks, but I never seed nothing but scalawag niggers and poor white trash a-doing that, that I ain't. One nigger went from the plantation to the north as they called it.

"When he had done stayed there fer five years then he come back and hired out to Marse Jim. He looked real lanky, but I never paid that no mind then. He was older than I was and he always 'lowing, 'John, up in Winston all the niggers makes five dollar a day; how come you don't go up there and git rich like I is'. Some of the older ones laugh when he talk to me like that and he lean to my ear and say real low, 'They's ig'nant.'

"One day when the crops done laid by I told Marse Jim, as I allus call him that, I 'lows, 'Marse, dis fall I gwine north to git rich, but I sure is gwine to bring you folks something when I comes south again'.

"So Marse give me my money and I set out for the north. I got to Winston-Salem and got me a job. But it was that hard a-cleaning and a-washing all the time. 'Cause I never knowed nothing 'bout no 'baccy and there wasn't nothing that I could turn off real quick that would bring me no big money. It got cold and I never had no big oak logs to burn in my fireplace and I set and shivered till I lay down. Then it wasn't no kivver like I had at Marse Jim's. Up there they never had 'nough wood to keep no fire all night.

"Next thing I knowed I was down with the grip and it took all the money dat I had and then I borrowed some to pay the doctor. So I up and come back home. It took me a long time to reach Spartanburg and from there I struck up with the first home niggers I seed since I left in the fall. That make me more better than I feel since the first day what I 'rive at Winston. Long afore I 'rive at home, I knowed that I done been a fool to ever leave the plantation.

"When I git home all the darkies that glad to offer me the 'glad hand'. I ax where that nigger what 'ticed me off to the north and they all 'low that he done took the consumption and died soon after I done gone from home. I never had no consumption, but it took me long time to git over the grippe. I goes to old Marse and hires myself out and I never left him no more till the Lawd took him away.

"God knows that the slaves fared better than these free niggers is. Us had wool clothes in the winter and us had fire and plenty wood and plenty to eat and good houses to keep out the rain and cold. In the summer us had cool clabber milk and bread and meat and spring water and now us don't have all them things and us can't keep up no houses like our log houses was kept.

"Why, Charlie Petty, Marse's son, wore home made clothes at home jest as us did. He was dat proud that he 'come editor or something of a Spartanburg paper."