

Junius Quattlebaum

Interview with Junius Quattlebaum, 84 years old

—*Henry Grant, Columbia, S.C.*

Junius Quattlebaum lives with his grandson, a short distance south of the Guignard Brick Factory, in the town of New Brookland, S.C. He is partially capable of self-support from what work and produce he is able to pick up around the City Market in Columbia.

"Well, sir, you want to talk to me 'bout them good old days back yonder in slavery time, does you? I call them good old days, 'cause I has never had as much since. I has worked harder since de war betwixt de North and de South than I ever worked under my marster and missus. I was just a small boy while de war was gwine on, but I was big 'nough to see and know what went on dere on de plantation all right.

"I was born on Marster Jim Quattlebaum's plantation over dere in Saluda County. He had 'bout sixty-five slaves in all, countin' de chillun. My marster wouldn't have no overseer, 'cause he say overseers would whip his niggers and he didn't 'low nobody, white or black, to do dat. If his niggers had to be whipped, he was gwine to do dat hisself and then they wouldn't be hurt much. Marster lak to see his slaves happy and singin' 'bout de place. If he ever heard any of them quarrelin' wid each other, he would holler at them and say: 'Sing! Us ain't got no time to fuss on dis place.'

"Marster lak he dram, 'specially in de fall of de year when it fust git cool. Us used to have big corn shuckin's on de plantation at night, 'long 'bout de fust of November of every year. All de corn was hauled from de fields and put in two or three big piles in de barnyard and de slaves would git 'round them, sing and shuck de corn. De slave women would hang buckets of raw tar afire on staves drove in de ground 'round de crowd, to give light. Them was sho' happy times.

"Marster would give all de grown slaves a dram or two of pure apple brandy, on them corn shuckin' nights, and take several smiles (drinks) hisself. I 'members so well, one of them nights, dat marster come to de barnyard, where us was all lit up, a singin' fit to kill hisself. Us was s'prised to see marster settin' down wid us niggers and shuckin' corn as fas' as us was. After a spell, him stood up and took 'nother smile, then say: 'Pass de jug 'round and let's all take a drink.' Wid dat, one of de niggers grab de jug of liquor and passed it 'round to all de shuckers. Then marster say: 'Everybody sing.' Some of de niggers 'quire: 'What you gwine to sing?' He say:—'Sing dis song: Pass 'round de bottle and we'll all take a drink.' Some of them in de crowd 'jected to dat song, 'cause they had 'nough liquor in them to 'ject to anything. Marster kinda scratch he head and say: 'Well, let me git a pole and you all is gwine to sing.' And singin' dere was, as sho' as you's born. Them niggers 'round de corn piles dat night h'isted dat song right now; dere was no waitin' for de pole or nothin' else. They wanted to sing, bad.

"De next mornin', after dis night I's talkin' 'bout, Miss Martha, our good missus come 'round to de slave houses and 'quire how they all felt. She say: 'You all can rest today and do what you want to do, 'cause Marster Jim ain't feelin' so well dis mornin'.' She knowed what was gwine on at de corn shuckin' de night befo' but she ain't said nothin' 'bout it. Mammy said many times dat de missus didn't lak dat whiskey drinkin' business in nobody. She was a pure and 'ligious woman if dere ever was one in dis world. Dere ain't no wonder dat de marster was foolish 'bout her. Mammy say de onliest way for both white and black to keep from lovin' Miss Martha, was to git away from her and not be so you could see her.

"Dis is de way our marsters treated deir slaves. I don't care what de world does write and say 'bout slave owners; I knows dis. Us slaves dat b'long on marster's plantation had de best folks to live and work wid I has ever seen or knowed. Dere is no sich kindness dese days betwixt de boss and them dat does de work. All de slaves worked pretty hard sometimes but never too hard. They worked wid light and happy hearts, 'cause they knowed dat marster would take good care of them; give them a plenty of good vittles, warm clothes, and warm houses to sleep in, when de cold weather come. They sho' had nothin' to worry 'bout and no overseer to drive them to work, lak some slaves on other plantations had. Easy livin' is 'bout half of life to white folks but it is all of life to most niggers. It sho' is.

"No, sir, de patarollers (patrollers) didn't bother none of marster's slaves. I has done told you he wouldn't let nobody, white or black, whip his niggers, 'cause he thought too much of them and de work they could do on de plantation when they was well and healthy. Yes, sir, I 'members, lak yistiddy, when Columbia was burned by de Yankees in 1865. All dat happened in de month of February, I thinks. Some of de niggers on de plantation said they seen de smoke from dat big fire, but I has my doubts 'bout de truth of dat.

"When Christmas come, all de slaves on de plantation had three days give to them, to rest and enjoy themselves. Missus and de two little misses fixed up a big Christmas tree. It was a big holly bush wid red berries all over it. It sho' was a picture of beautifulness. I can see missus so plain now, on Christmas mornin', a flirtin' 'round de Christmas trees, commandin' de little misses to put de names of each slave on a package and hang it on de tree for them. She was always pleased, smilin' and happy, 'cause she knowed dat she was doin' somethin' dat would make somebody else happy. She tried as hard to make de slaves happy as she did to make her own white friends happy, it seem lak to me. Close to de tree was a basket and in dat basket was put in a bag of candy, apples, raisins and nuts for all de chillun. Nobody was left out.

"Christmas mornin', marster would call all de slaves to come to de Christmas tree. He made all de chillun set down close to de tree and de grown slaves jined hands and make a circle 'round all. Then marster and missus would give de chillun deir gifts, fust, then they would take presents from de tree and call one slave at a time to step out and git deirs. After all de presents was give out, missus would stand in de middle of de ring and raise her hand and bow her head in silent thanks to God. All de slaves done lak her done. After all dis, everybbody was happy, singin', and laughin' all over de place. Go 'way from here, white man! Don't tell me dat wasn't de next step to heaven to de slaves on our plantation. I sees and dreams 'bout them good old times, back yonder, to dis day.