

## Sam Polite

### Interview with Sam Polite, age 93

—*Mrs. Chlotilde R. Martin, Beaufort County*

"W'en gun shoot on Bay Pint (Bay Point) for freedom, I been sebenteen year old wuking slabe. I born on B. Fripp Plantation on St. Helena Island. My fadder been Sam Polite and my mudder been Mol Polite. My fadder b'long to Mister Marion Fripp and my mudder b'long to Mister Old B. Fripp. I don't know how mucher land, neider how much slabe he hab, but he hab two big plantation, and many slabe—more'n a hundred slabe.

"Slabe lib on Street—two row ob house wid two room to de house. I hab t'ree sister name, Silvy Polite, Rose Polite and Minda Polite. Hab brudder, too, but he die.

"My fadder and mudder ain't marry. Slabe don't marry—dey jest lib togedder. All slabe hab for stay on plantation in day time but w'en wuk done, kin wisit wife on odder plantation. Hab pass, so Patrol won't git um.

"W'en I been leetle boy, I play en Street—shoot marble play aa'my and sech t'ing. W'en hawn blow and mawning star rise, slabe' hab for git up and cook. W'en day clean, dey gone to field. 'Ooman too old for wuk in field hab for stay on Street and mind baby. Old mens follow cow. Chillen don't wuk in field 'till twelve or t'irteen year old. You carry dinner to field in your can and leabe um at de heading (end of row). W'en you feel hongry, you eat. Ebery slabe hab tas' (task) to do. Sometime one task (quarter acre), sometime two tas', and sometime t'ree. You haf for wuk 'til tas' t'ru (through). W'en cotton done mek, you hab odder tas'. Haffa cut cord ob maash (marsh) grass maybe. Tas' ob maash been eight feet long and four feet high. Den sometime you haffa (have to) roll cord ob mud in cowpen. 'Ooman haffa rake leaf from wood into cowpen. (This was used for fertilizer.)

"W'en you knock off wuk, you kin wuk on your land. Maybe you might hab two or t'ree tas' ob land 'round your cabin what Maussa gib you for plant. You kin hab chicken, maybe hawg. You kin sell aig (egg) and chicken to store and Maussa will buy your hawg. In dat way slabe kin hab money for buy t'ing lak fish and w'atebber he want. We don't git much fish in slabery 'cause we nebber hab boat. But sometime you kin t'row out net en ketch shrimp. You kin also ketch 'possum and raccoon wid your dawg.

"On Sattidy night ebery slabe dat wuks gits peck ob corn and pea, and sometime meat and clabber. You nebber see any sugar neider coffee in slabery. You has straw in your mattress but dey gib you blanket. Ebery year in Christmas month you gits four or eider fibe yaa'd cloth 'cording to how you is. Out ob dat, you haffa mek your clote (clothes). You wears dat same clote till de next year. You wears hit winter en summer, Sunday en ebery day. You don't git no coat, but dey gib you shoe. In slabery, you don't know nutting 'bout sheets for your bed. Us nebber know nutting 'bout Santa Claus 'till Freedom, but on Christmas Maussa gib you meat and syrup and maybe t'ree day widout wuk. Slabe wuk 'till daa'k on

Sattidy jest lak any odder day—I still does wuk 'till daa'k on Sattidy. But on Sunday slabe don't wuk. On Fourth ob July, slabe wuk 'till twelbe o'clock and den knocks off. On Sunday slabe kin wisit back and fort' (forth) on de plantations.

"Slabe don't do mucher frolic. W'en 'ooman hab baby he hab mid-wife for nine day and sometime don't haffa wuk for month w'en baby born, Missis send clote (clothes) from Big House. W'en nigger sick, Maussa sen' doctor. If you been berry sick, doctor gib you calomus (calomel) or castor oil. Sometime he gib you Dead-Shot for worms, or Puke (powder) to mek you heave. If I jest hab a pain in muh stummick, my mudder gib me Juse-e-moke w'at he git outen de wood." (I was unable to get any definite idea of what 'Dead-Shot', 'Puke' or 'Juse-e-moke' were.)

"If slabe don't do tas', de git licking wid lash on naked back. Driver nigger gib licking, but Maussa 'most always been dere. Sometime maybe nigger steal hawg or run 'way to de wood, den he git licking too. Can't be no trouble 'tween white folks and nigger in slabery time for dey do as dey choose wid you. But Maussa good to slabe If dey done day's tas' and don't be up to no meanness. Missis don't hab nutting to do wid nigger.

"In slabery, nigger go to white folks chu'ch. Slabe don't know nutting 'bout baptizing. W'en nigger dead, you can't knock off wuk for berry um. You haffa wait 'till night time to put um in de graabe (grave). You berry um by de light ob torch. Old Man Tony Ford bin de man w'at 'tend to funerals. Dey wasn't no nigger preacher on de plantation but dey been people to hold praise (prayers).

"I nebber see nigger in chain, but I shum (see them) in stock. I see plenty nigger sell on banjo table. Dey put you up on flatform (platform) en dey buy you. I see my uncle sell he brung one hundred dollar. 'Ooman don't sell widout he chillen.

"Mister Johnnie Fripp been my n'oung Maussa. W'en he chillen git marry, Old Maussa diwide de nigger. He gib Maussa Johnnie t'irty slabe and I been one ob dem. Maussa buy plantation on de Main (mainland). He build big house. He hab four boy and two gal. He hab five hundred acre. He ain't hab no oberseer, jest driver. We don't know no poor white trash on de Main, neider on St. Helena Islant.

"I wuk in field on Maussa Johnnie Fripp plantation. Sometime we sing w'en us wuk. One song we sing been go lak dis:

Go way, Ole Man

Go way, Ole Man

W'ere you bin all day

If you treat me good

I'll stay 'till de Judgment day,

But if you treat me bad,

I'll sho' to run away.

"W'en war come, Missis tek me and two more niggers, put we and chillen in two wagon and go to Baarnwell (Barnwell). My mudder been one ob de nigger. We stay in Baarnwell all enduring (during) de war. My fadder he been wid de Rebel—been wid Mr. Marion Chaplin. W'en Freedom come, Missis didn't

say nutting, she jest cry. But she gib we uh wagon and we press (stole) a horse and us come back to St. Helena Islant. It tek t'ree day to git home. W'en we git home, we fine de rest ob de nigger yere been hab Freedom four year befo' we! I wuk for uh nigger name Peter White. Muh fadder come back, and buy 20 acre ob land and we all lib togedder. I gone to school one or two year, but I ain't larn (learn) much. Four year after war, I buy fifteen acre ob land. Dat was dis yere same place w'ere I libs now. After w'ile I goes to wuk in rock (phosphate mines). I hears 'bout Ku Klux. Dey been bad people. Dey will kill you. Been marry to four wife. Dis yere last one, he been born in slabery too, but he don't 'members much 'bout um. He been leetle gal so high jest big 'nuf for open gate for white folks. I hab t'ree chillen, two libbing. I hear tell my boy William been marry to a w'ite 'ooman in England and hab t'ree chillen. My gal Alice lib in New Yawk. Sometime she send me money. I hab two great-gran.

"Abraham Lincoln? He de one w'at gib we liberty for wuk for we se'f. He come to Beaufort 'fore de war. He come as uh rail-splitter and spy 'round. He gone back w'ere he come from and say: 'You eider got to gib dese nigger t'ree day for deyse'f or dere will be blood-shed.' And he been right. I would be glad for shum (see him) but I nebber shum.

"I don't know nutting 'bout dat genman Mister Davis, neider Mister Washington—you say he been a nigger, too?

"Wat I t'ink 'bout slabery? I t'ink it been good t'ing. It larn nigger to wuk. If it ain't mek nigger wuk, he wouldn't do nutting but tief (thief). You don't find nigger wuk for slabery running 'round looking for ready money—dat been all dese yere n'oung nigger want. Me—I slabing for self right now. I don't want nobody for mek me wuk, but slabery larn me for wuk. I hab wuk five hundred head ob man in rock and today ain't one can come to me and say: 'Sam Polite, you beat me out ob one penny.'

"Slabery done uh good t'ing for me, 'cause if he ain't larn me to wuk, today I wouldn't know how to wuk.