

## Walter Long

### Interview with Walter Long, 83 years old

2440 Sumter Street, Columbia, S.C.

—*Henry Grant, Columbia, S.C.*

"I's a little bit stiff, when I tries to git up, and sometimes when I's walkin' I weaves and wobbles like a drunk person, but know all dat comes from old age. I has been healthy and strong all my life. De onliest trouble I has ever had in my life has been wid my teeth; they sho' has been bad a long time, and now I has only one or two old snags left. I don't want no store bought teeth nohow, 'cause they 'minds me of a hoss or mule wid a bit in their mouth floppin' up and down. No sir, I don't want them triflin' things botherin' me, I think I can take care of de little I gits to eat wid dese few snags I has left.

"Me and all my folks was slaves and b'longs to Master John Long, and his wife, Betsy Long. Their plantation was six miles north of Chapin, Lexington County, South Carolina. De plantation was a big one and lay 'long Saluda River. You know it had to be a big place 'cause master had over three hundred slaves in all. Everything de slaves needed was made right dere on de plantation; all de food 'cept sugar and coffee, and what us need to wear, 'cept buttons for de clothes.

"Master and mistress raised four fine boys, no girls I 'members 'bout. De boys names was: West, Mid, Gradon and Hill. Master West and Mid served as overseers on de plantation. Dese boys being de overseers, was de whole reason us slaves was treated good and kind. They knowed us slave would b'long to them some day, when old Master John died. De slaves never worked hard, and they was give every Saturday and Sunday to rest.

"Our food in slavery time was good and a lot of it. De food was cooked good and prepared for us by servants dat didn't do nothin' else but 'tend to de food dat de rest of de slaves had to eat. When us had beef us went to de pasture for it; when us had pork, us went to de hog lot. De cabbage and turnips come from de garden and field dere at home, and when us was eatin' them us knowed they didn't come from out yonder, like de stuff us has to eat dese days.

"De houses us slaves lived in was built of logs and then de logs was covered over inside and out wid plank, dat made them tight and warm. Every family was furnished plenty of covering, so they wouldn't suffer in cold weather but in summer de most of us slept on pallets on de floor.

"Master John was a business man, but he never got too busy to be polite and gentle to mistress. Both of them has good schoolin'. They knowed just how to treat both their slaves and their white friends. They was good to all, and they never turnt anybody down dat come to them for help. Many was de poor white folks dat 'most lived on Master John. They was what I calls, real white folks; no sich people is easy found dese days by de poor niggers.

"Mistress was mighty 'ticular 'bout our 'ligion, 'cause she knowed dere was no nigger any too good nohow. Us slaves 'sorbed all de good us had in us from our mistress, I really believes. She was so kind

and gentle, she moved 'mong us a livin' benediction. Many was de blessings dat fell from her hands for de sick and 'flicted. She got tired, but I has never seen her too weary to go to a cryin' child or a moanin' grown person on de place and 'quire what was de matter. Us was 'bliged to love her, 'cause she knowed us more better than us knowed ourselves. More than dat, she and her sons' wives taught us how to read, write and figure, 'nough to help us in small business.

"When did I git married? I wish you hadn't ask dat question. I sho' had a bad mixup wid my first gal. You see it was dis way: I was good grown befo' I left my daddy and mammy who was then farmin' for Master Mid Long, on the other side of Saluda River. My mammy had a heap of sense dat she got from de white folks. So, one day while me and she was pickin' cotton out in de field she all at once stopped pickin' cotton, straightened up, pointed her finger at me and said: 'Look here nigger, you knows I don't like for you to be gwine to see dat brown skin gal what lives over yonder on Cling Creek. After I has raised you up de best I knowed how and then for you to do like you is, foolin' your time 'way wid such sorry women makes your old mammy sick and mad all over. One other thing I wants to say to you is dat some of dese nights when you go to see dat gal, you is gwine to see something dat is sho' goin' to call to your mind what I's sayin' to you.' Well boss, you know how 'tis wid men. I knowed mammy could give good 'vice, and I knowed she sho' wouldn't do me no harm. But what 'bout dat I's gwine to see some nights when I go to see dat gal? So I thinks and thinks 'bout dat two or three days and never did satisfy my mind what dat something gwine look like.

"Late one evenin', close to sunset, several days after mammy said what she did to me, I kinda loafed off down to de cross-road store, 'tending I was gwine after some 'bacco. I fool 'round de store a good long while like I didn't have nothin' on my mind 'cept my 'bacco. I had a plenty on my mind, 'cause as dark come I headed up de Cling Creek road towards dat gal's house. When I got close to her house I seen her down at de fence in front of de house. Soon as she glimpsed me, she 'tended like she was lookin' for something dat wasn't dere. I knowed what she was lookin' for, 'cause women has got their own 'culiar way of foolin' men; keepin' them from knowin' what they are thinkin' 'bout. Dat gal knowed all de time in dat little kinky head of hers dat I was goin' to see her dat night. When I spoke to her she didn't 'pear to be de least bit frightened or surprised.

"Quick as a cat she climbed up and set down on top of de fence, while from de other side I leaned against it, close by. Dere she was smilin' just as shy and skittish as a squirrel. Us stayed right dere and talked and talked 'bout everything we knowed 'bout and a heap we didn't know 'bout, 'til de big yellow moon stood straight up, befo' I said farewell to her and begun makin' my way down de big road towards home.

"I went on down de road whistling wid nothin' on my mind 'cept dat gal. When I got 'bout a mile from home I seen a woman wid a basket on her arm, a little piece ahead, comin' towards me. Just as I turnt to let her pass I kinda raised my hand to my hat to speak. But bless your soul, I ain't seen dat woman no more. I stopped and looked everywhere and dere was nobody in dat road 'cept me. Well, dere you is. What does all dis mean nohow? So de more I thought de more a 'culiar feelin' crept over my body. Then I say: 'Here I is been lookin' for hants and spirits all my life and I ain't never seen one befo' dis one.' By dis time dat 'culiar feelin' had reached my foots and they got to movin' 'bout uneasy like. Dis ain't gwine to do I said and wid dat I tore off down de road faster than a wild hoss. White man, I believes I run de first hundred yards in nearly no time and after dat I kinda picked up a bit. I begun to feel dat I wasn't makin' as good time in de road as I ought to be makin' so I cut 'cross de field towards a narrow strip of

woods close to home. When my foots hit de rough grass and corn stalks of de field they took holt then and got to bird-working<sup>2</sup>, smooth and nice like machinery. I thought I heard something back of me, I glanced back to see what it was and befo' I could git my head straight again I smacked head on into a pine tree as big as I is. Well, my runnin' ceasted right dere, de big yellow moon went dark, a breeze fanned my face, and then everything got still.

"De next mornin' when my mind come back to me, de sun was shinin' straight in my face. I lay dere on de ground blinkin' my eyes, wonderin' if I was still livin'. After a while I tried to move and sho' 'nough I was dere all right.

"After de war de most of us slaves stayed on de plantation and worked right on just like nothin' had happened. I lived with my mammy and daddy a long time after I was grown. Old master and mistress died soon after de war and then my family went to live wid young Master Mid on his plantation on de other side of Saluda River.

"When I got some over thirty years old I got married and then I left de farm, moved lower down in Lexington County and went to work at a sawmill. I worked in de sawmill business 'bout twenty-five years. Rollin' big logs to de saw wid a kanthook ain't no easy job, but it was better to do dat than nothin'. I made a pretty good livin' but didn't save no money, 'cause money was scarce in them days, nobody was paid much for their labor in them times.

"Soon after I quit working in de sawmill business I moved to Columbia and has been here every since. De white folks has been pretty good to me here, 'cause I has had work most all de time. I has always been able to pay my bills and support my family right good. I believes de reason of dat is, I has never bothered nobody, and attended to my own little business as best as I knowed. Even now, as old as I is, I can git work from my white friends 'most all de time, dat's right.

"Did I marry dat first gal what mammy fussed wid me 'bout? Listen at dat. No sir, I ain't seen dat gal in 'bout fifty years and I don't know if she is dead or not."