

Abe Whittess

Interview with Abe Whittess

—*David Holt*

"MAYOR OF DOUGLASVILLE"

When the sunshine is warm, Abe Whittess, "Mayor of Douglasville," sits outside his cabin door near Bay Minette, Alabama, and watches the stream of traffic on US 31 just beyond his bare feet, "a' restin'" in the soothing sand. More than 90 years ago he was born not many miles from this same cabin over in Mississippi as a slave of Col. Rupert, who owned plantations in Alabama and Mississippi.

"I come over to Alabama after the surrender," Abe Whittess told his interviewer after he had retired with dignity to put on shoes before he permitted his photograph to be taken. "I went to a plantation in Butler County fust and then came on down here to Bay Minette.

"Slavery wasn't so bad. Col. Rupert was a good marster, but he lived way over in Mobile and us was at his Scooby (Scooba) plantation. That was in Kemper County and his overseer there sho was handy with a whup. I was a cotton hand and spent most of my time totin' water for the other hands. When Mr. Lincoln 'mancipated us we was free and I didn't carry any more water. It wasn't 'twell after the surrender I went to Butler County, where Colonel Rupert had him another plantation.

"I come down here to Bay Minette a long time ago. I us'ta be chairman of the Republican party in Baldwin County here, but when the Republicans got in they made the white gem'mun what took my job postmaster. Then the bank I had my money in went busted in another Republican time and I loses \$658.05. I votes for Mr. Roosevelt now."

Abe Whittess stopped to take a chew of his favorite tobacco and admitted that he lived alone in his one-room cabin by preference. He doesn't want women "botherin' 'round his place and ain't had no truckin' with 'em for years." He cooks on the hearth just as his mammy did before him decades ago in the slave quarters of Colonel Rupert's plantation.



Abe Whittess, Bay Minette, Alabama

Despite his years, he is well able to take care of himself. He carries his nine decades lightly, and his kindly face is topped by a wealth of snow white hair. Though he lost money in the bank failure that made him a Democrat in politics, Abe owns 14 acres of land, part of which he farms. He has cleared a portion of it for a baseball diamond which is rented to Negro teams, who play there frequently. The fee is always collected before a ball is thrown.

Several years ago he donated a part of the acreage to be used for a public road which opened up a portion of Douglasville, the suburb in which he lives, where a number of Negroes had developed a residential section. His people named him then and since "Mayor of Douglasville," without office or emolument, but Abe wears the title with a dignified content for his remaining years.