

Abraham Jones

Interview with Abraham Jones

—*G.L. Clark*

THE PATRIARCH ABRAHAM SAW THE STARS FALL

A lot of water passes under the bridge in 112 years. I thought of that as I talked to Abraham Jones, 112-year-old ex-slave of Village Springs, Alabama.

"Uncle Abe" says he was born August 1, 1825, in Russell County, Alabama. Perhaps the day, the month and the year may not be exactly accurate. But they are near enough. He recalls the falling of the stars, the removal of the Indians from Russell County and the settlement of Auburn and other towns in that section. His great age is not apparent in his looks, actions or natural faculties. His hair is thin and white, but no more so than that of many men half his age, and his hearing is good. The mellow voice so characteristic of his race, is strong.

He stands as straight as a soldier. And he works regularly to earn a living for his family. When we found him he was laying a flagstone walk in hard clay soil, and there was power in the swing of his pick and his tamping ax. His regular daily chores include milking a cow and chopping wood.



Abraham Jones, Village Springs, Alabama

He describes the phenomenon of falling stars as an event that occurred when he was "a little shaver 'bout eight year' old." November 13, 1833 was the date.

"Yes, sir, I saw de stars fall. Some folks say dey didn't never fall but I seen 'em. Dey fell jest like pitch from a torch, 'Z-z-z-z-zip, z-z-z-z-zip!' and big cracks come in de ground. I was settin' on de end of de porch, and I watched 'em. Dere was so many grown people crowdin' into de house, 'twa'n't no use fer me to try to git in so I jest sot still. We had a big sill under our house, more dan a foot thick, and so many people crowded in de house till dere weight broke de sill. Dey was cryin' and hollerin' but de stars didn't hurt nobody; dey jest fell and went out, and I don't know where dey went den; maybe into dem cracks in de ground. De cracks stayed a long time and it was dangerous for de people to go about at night; dey might fall into de cracks. One of dem I remember was two feet across and so deep dey couldn't find no bottom wid a long pole. I reckon dem stars kept fallin' for about a hour. Folks thought de end of time was comin' and ever'body got right after dat.

"Back at dat time de country was not settled much and dere was lots of Indians. My grandpappy was a full-blooded Indian but I don't know what kind. De Indians was good people but if dey thought you had done 'em wrong dey'd kill you right now. I saw some of dem when dey left dat country. Dey women carried de babies in some sort of sacks, hung down in front of 'em, and de men carried some of de bigger chillun on dey shoulders. Dey didn't have no property—jest lived wild in de woods.



Abraham Jones' Back Yard, Village Springs, Alabama

"A few years after de stars fell, a passel of people from de other side of Columbus, Georgia, moved over and started de town of Auburn so dey could have a place for a school.

"Before de war my people took me up to Blount County, and when de war come dey left me to run de grist-mill. I was de fust man in Alabama to try to grind a bushel of oats. I ground 'em too. A lady brung de oats and ast me could I grind 'em, and I told her I would try. She say dey didn't had nothin' for de chillun to eat. I ground de oats, and told her, 'Ole Mistis, I knows jest how 'tis and I'll be glad to give you a peck of meal if you will use it.' She say, 'of course I will; jest put it in with the oat meal, and I sure will appreciate it.' Her husband was off to de war and she didn't had no way to feed de chillun.

"I was workin' on de road a long time after de war and was tellin' de men about dat when her son hear me. She had told him about it and so he went home and told her he had found me. She sent word back for me to go to her house and let her see if I shore 'nuff was de same man. So I went and when she seen me she say, 'Yes, he is the same man,' and she called her husband and de other chillun and told 'em about it. Her husband say, 'Well, dey is jest one thing we kin do. If he ever need a place to stay or vittles to eat, we must see dat he gits dem.'

"In slavery time I belong to Massa Frank Jones, and Timothy Jones was de overseer on de place. Frank Jones had two plantations, de one whar I was born and another one close to Columbus. People ax me sometimes what kind of house I was born in and I tell 'em I wa'n't born in no house; and I warn't, I was born in de middle of de big road.



Abraham Jones' House, Village Springs, Alabama

"It's gittin' to where it's mighty hard for me to go now and do de work to make sompen for us to eat. I can't git about so fast and my head bother me a lot. I been workin' a long time now, and you does git tired after a hundred years of workin'!"

On his wrists were circlets of heavy cord. I asked him why they were there and he explained:

"To keep de pain out. Dey keeps it out purty good but if you can git a little leather band wid a buckle on it, dat is better yet. I wears dese all de time