

Adeline Hodges

Personal interview with 'Aunt' Adeline Hodges

3 Frye Street, Mobile, Alabama

—*Ila B. Prine, [HW: Mobile?]*

HONGRY FOR PUN'KIN PIE

'Aunt' Adeline, a tall, gaunt, bright-skinned Negro woman, lives on Frye St., Mobile, Ala. The day I called she was nodding in a cane bottom rocking chair on a wide porch that extended across the front of a cottage almost hidden in a grove of giant oaks. She opened her eyes, which were covered by a pair of steel-rimmed glasses with one lens badly cracked. The news that a search was being made for old people who had lived during slavery days acted like an electric shock on the old woman, who immediately sat up straight and said:

"Lor, yes'm, I libed in dose days, and I tells you I 'members all 'bout dem. Do come in and set down. De fust white people I b'longed to was a man named Jones, who was a colonel in de war, but I can't tell you much 'bout dem, 'caze I was jes' a li'l gal den. I was jes' big 'nuff to tote water to de fiel' to de folks wukking and to min' de gaps in de fence to keep de cattle out when dey was gatherin' de crops. I don't 'spec' you knows anything 'bout dose kind of fences. Dey was built of rails and when dey was gatherin' de crops dey jes' tuk down one section of de fence, so de wagons could git through.

"A'ter de war broke out ole Mister Jones went off to hit, and I 'members de day he lef'. He come to de fiel' to tell all de han's goodbye, wid a big white plume on his hat. Dat was in Bolivar County, Mississippi. A'ter ol' Mister Jones lef' for de war, den de nigger drivers an' oberseer begun to drive us 'round lack droves of cattle. Everytime dey would hyar de Yankees was coming dey would take us out in de woods and hide us. Finally dey sold us a'ter carrying us away from Bolivar County. Some of us was sold to people in Demopolis, Alabama, an' Atlanta, Georgia, an' some to folks in Meridian and Shubuta, Mississippi. I don't any more know whar my own folks went to dan you does.

"I 'members afore leaving ole Mister Jones' place how dey grabbed up all de chillun dat was too li'l to walk and puttin' us in wagons. Den de older folks had to walk, and dey marched all day long. Den at night dey would strike camp. I has seen de young niggers what was liable to run away wid dere legs chained to a tree or de wagon wheels. Dey would rake up straw and throw a quilt ober hit and lie dat way all night, while us chillun slep' in de wagons.

"When us come to de big river at Demopolis, Alabama, I 'members seein' de big steamboats dere, and dey said dat de sojers was goin' away on dem. Hit was in Demopolis us was sold, and a man name Ned Collins of Shubuta, Mississippi, bought me."

'Aunt' Adeline said that the houses the slaves lived in on the Jones plantation were board houses, and that Mr. Jones owned a big plantation and lots of slaves. She said that they had home-made beds, nailed to the walls, with mattresses made out of shucks.

After having been sold to Mr. Collins, of Shubuta, Mississippi, 'Aunt' Adeline said that life was very hard, not so much for herself, but she saw how hard the other slaves worked. She was the house girl and

helped clean house, wash dishes, and take care of the children. After finishing that work, she had to spin thread. Each day she would have to spin so many cuts, and if she did not finish the required number, she was punished.

She said that her mistress kept the finished work on top of a large wardrobe, and 'Aunt' Adeline said that many times she would steal a cut of thread off that wardrobe to complete the day's task to keep from being punished.

As she grew older she did have to go to the field and pick cotton. 'Aunt' Adeline does not remember it pleasantly. She said:

"I jes' hates to hab to weigh anything today, 'caze I 'members so well dat each day dat de slaves was given a certain number of pounds of cotton to pick. When weighing up time come and you didn't hab de number of pounds set aside, you may be sho' dat you was goin' to be whapped. But hit wasn't all bad times 'caze us did hab plenty to eat, 'specially at hog killin' time. Dey would hab days ob hog killin' and de slaves would bake dere bread and come wid pots, pepper, and salt. A'ter cleanin' de hogs, dey would gib us de livers and lights, and us would cook dem ober a fire out in de open and hit sho' was good eatin'. De usual 'lowance a week of pickled pork was six or seven pounds, and iffen you had a big family of chillun dey gib you more. Den dey gib you a peck of meal, sweet 'taters, sorghum syrup, and plenty of buttermilk. At Christmas times, dey gib you extra syrup to make cakes wid and sweet 'taters to make 'tater pone. And, Lor', dey would hab big cribs of pun'kins. Hit makes me hongry to think 'bout dem good ol' pun'kin pies.

"And did dey raise chickens? You knows in Mississippi dat de minks was bad 'bout killin' dem. I 'members one time de minks got in de chicken house and killed nearly every chicken on de place. Ole Mister Jones had de cook to clean and cook dem, and he come out in de fiel' an' eat wid dem to let de slaves know dat hit was all right. Den us had dem good ol' cushaws and lye hominy, too.

"De clothes was made out ob homespun in one piece. I 'members I allus had mine split up de side so I could git 'bout in a hurry. De women had pantalettes made and tied to dere knees to wear in de fields to keep de dew off dere legs. De shoes was made of cow hide and was called red russets. De way dey got dem darker was to take a hog 'gristle' and hang up in de chimbley. When hit git full of soot, we rub de shoes wid dat. Den dey used de darker shoes for dere Sunday best.

"You asked me about huntin'? Lor', yes dey hunted in dem times. Up in dem swamps in Mississippi dere was bears as big as cows, and deers aplenty. Dey bofe was bad about comin' in de corn fiel's and tearin' down de corn. You could hyar dem at nights out in de fiel's. Dey also caught plenty of possums and coons.

"Of course, us got sick, but dey had de doctor. In dose days de doctor would cup you and bleed you. I seen a many a person cupped. De doctor had a li'l square lookin' block of wood wid tiny li'l knives attached to hit. On top was a trigger lack is on a gun, and de doctor would put de block of wood at de nape of dere neck an' pull dat trigger. Den he hab a piece of cotton wid somepin' on hit to stop de blood when he had cupped you long 'nough. Dey would allus gib us calamus (calomel) to clean us out, and den de nex' mawnin' dey gib us a big bowl of gruel made out ob meal and milk. Den us'd be all right.

"De slaves warn't 'lowed to go to church, but dey would whisper 'roun' and all meet in de woods and pray. De only time I 'members my pa was one time when I was a li'l chile, he set me on a log by him an'

prayed, an' I knows dat was whar de seeds ob religion was planted in my min'. Today I's happy to tell folks 'bout Jesus and thank Him for His goodness to me. Hit won't be long twell I meet Him face to face and thank Him."