

Allen Sims

Interview with Allen Sims

—*Preston Klein, Opelika*

PLENTY OF FOOD AND NO TRASH NEITHER

While interviewing former slaves in the rural sections of Lee County, I ran across Allen Sims, a sturdy old Negro, who proved to have an unusually clear recollection of slavery as the institution appeared to the small boy of that era. He was not old enough to make a work-hand at its close. He spoke slowly, but with evident positiveness as to the facts:

"I 'members lots 'bout slavery times; 'cause I was right dar. I don't 'member much 'bout de war, 'cause I was too little to know what war was, and de most I seed was when de Yankees come through and burnt up de Big House, de barns, de ginhouse and took all Old Marster's hosses and mules, and kilt de milk-cows for beef. They didn't leave us nothing to eat, and us lak to starve to death.

"Our folks, de Simses, dey come fum Virginny. My pappy and mammy was borned dere. Dey names was Allen Sims and Kitty Sims. My Old Marster was Marse Jimmie Sims, and my Old Mistis was Miss Creasie. Some of Pappy and Mammy's chillun was borned in Virginny, and some of 'em in Alabama. I was de baby chile, and I was borned right on dis very place whar us is now. Dey had a whole passel of chillun. Dere was Chaney, Becky, Judy, Sam, Phoebe, King, Alex, Jordan and Allen—dat's me.

"Us lived in a log house in de quarter, wid a board roof and a ol' rock fireplace wid a stick and dirt chimley. We had plenty wood, and could build jes' as big fire as we need, if de weather was cold. Mammy, she cook ash-cake in de fireplace, and it was de bes' bread I ever eat, better'n any dis store-bought bread. You ain't never eat no ash-cake? Umph, Missy, you don't know what good bread is lak!

"Old Marster was good to his niggers and all of 'em, big and little had plenty to eat, and it wa'n't trash neither. Us had ash-cake, hoe-cake, pone-bread, meat and gravy, peas, greens, roast-neers, pot-liquor, and sweet 'taters, l'ish taters, and goobers—I spec Old Marster's niggers live better dan lots of white folks lives now.

"Aunt Mandy, what was too old to work, looked atter all de little nigger chilluns, whilst dey mammys was working, and she whip us wid a brush, if we didn't mind her; but she fuss more dan she whip, and it didn't hurt much, but us cry lak she killing us.

"When us got sick, Old Mistis looked atter us herself, and she gin us oil and turpentine and lobelia and if dat didn't cure us, she sont for de doctor—de same doctor dat come to see her own fambly. Sometime a old nigger die, and Old Marster and Old Mistis dey cry jes' lak us did. Dey put 'em in a coffin and bury 'em in de graveyard, wid de white preacher dar and nobody didn't work none dat day, atter us come back fum de graveyard.

"Our beds was bunks in de corner of de room, nailed to de wall and jes' one post out in de flo'. De little chilluns slep' crosswise de big bed and it was plum' full in cold weather.



Allen Sims, Lee County, Alabama

"Our clothes was osnaburg, spun and weave' right at home, and it sho' did last a long time. De little niggers jes' wore a long shirt, 'twell dey got big 'nough to work in de field, and us had red shoes made at de tan-yard to wear in winter time; but us foots was tough and us went barefooted most all de winter too. Us played games too, ginerly, jumping de rope and base.

"De grown niggers had good times Saddy nights, wid dances, suppers and wras'lin. De corn-shuckings was de biggest time dey had, 'cause de neighbors come and dey laughed and hollered nearly all night.

"Old Marster and Old Mistis lived in a big two-story white house. Dey had ten chillun, five boys and five gals, and dey all growed up and married off. De old carriage-driver was name Clark, and he sho' was proud. De overseer was Tetter Roberson, and he was mean. He beat niggers a lot, and bimeby Old Marster turned him off. He used to blow de horn way befo' day to git de niggers up, and he work 'em 'till smack dark.

"Atter de Yankees burned up everyt'ing 'cept de cabins, us jes' stayed right dar wid Old Marster when us freed. Old Marster built a new house for him and Old Mistis, but it wa'n't much better dan our cabin and dey lived dere 'till dey died.

"When I growed up, I married Laura Frazier, and us had a big wedding and a preacher, and didn't jump over no broom lack some niggers did. Us had jes' two chillun dat lived to be grown. Dey is Filmore and Mary Lou, and us ain't got no gran'chillun.

"When I got grown, I j'ined de Baptist Church at Rough Neck, 'cause I felt I had done enough wrong, and I been a deacon forty year."