

Anne Maddox

Interview with Anne Maddox

—*Preston Klein, Opelika*

I SHOUTED THREE DAYS

Bible records place Anne Maddox's age at 113. She lives in a tiny cabin with her youngest child, Zora, about eight miles from Opelika. She is very feeble now and had to be wheeled out on the front porch to have her picture made.

Anne lives exclusively in the past. To her, the present world is "full of de devil an' gettin' worsen every day." She likes to talk about the old days, but her voice is feeble and barely above a whisper.

"I'se heerd a heap o' talk 'bout Mr. Abraham Lincoln," she said, "an' I had a picture of him onc't; but I don't know nothin' 'bout him."

Anne takes her religion seriously and is devoutly confident that she will "inherit de promise."

"I jined de church in Gold Hill, Alabama," she recalled, "an' honey, I felt so good I don't know jest how I did feel. I shouted three days an' wouldn't eat a bite. I couldn't even drink water."

The old former slave was born in Virginia in 1824 and belonged to John Umford. She was later sold to Bill Maddox, of Alabama.

"When I come from Virginny," she said, "us travelled in wagons and slept in tents. Eve'y mornin' us was made to clean ourselves an' dress up; den us was put on de block an' bid on. White peoples was dere from everywhere; de face of de earth was covered by dem. I was thirteen den, an' I kin remember four wars.

"My mother and father was Charlie an' Rhody Heath, an' I had two brothers an' two sisters. Our houses was lak horse stables; made of logs wid mud an' sticks dobbed in de cracks. Dey had no floors. Dere warn't no furniture 'cept a box fer de dresser wid a piece of looking glass to look in. Us had to sleep on shuck mattresses an' us cooked on big fireplaces wid long hooks out over de fire to hang pots on to bile.



Anne Maddox, Opelika, Alabama

"Us fried on three-legged skillet over de fire an' cooked ash-cakes on de hearth wid hickory leaves on de bottom nex' to de hearth. 'Tain't no sech good cookin' now as den.

"'Bout four o'clock in de evenin' all de little niggers was called up in de big yard where de cook had put milk in a long wooden trough an' crumbled ash-cake in it. Us had pot licker in de trough, too. Us et de bread an' milk wid shells an' would use our hands, but it was good.

"Ol' Marster hunted a heap, but us never did git none of what he brought in. Us had plenty of clothes, sich as was, but dey was spun an' wove at home. Us had home-made shoes, hard brogans, called 'Jackson ties.' Dey had brass caps on de toe an' would rub blisters on de feet.

"De plantation had several hundred acres. I was up wid de fust light to draw water and help as house girl. When dat task was done I had to go to de fiel'. Dey blew a big hawn to 'rouse de slaves in de morning's, sometimes 'fore day.

"Marster was good to us niggers, dough. He never 'lowed us to be whupped; jist scolded us. If us went anywheres, us had to be back by sundown. I once seed some slaves workin' roads in chains wid a iron ball hangin' on behin'. It was punishment fur meanness."

Anne said the slaves on the Maddox plantation were never allowed to learn to read and write, declaring: "It was too bad if dey kotched a nigger wid a pencil an' paper in his han!"

"I was made to carry Marster's chilluns to school, den go back fur 'em," she said. "Ol' Mistus read us de Bible, an' us went to de white folks church an' sat in de back, wid de white peoples sittin' up front.

"Oh, dem patterollers was bad. I sho' would run from dem things, too."

Anne's mind leaps in fast succession from one subject to another, and at times it is difficult to keep up with her intermingled thoughts.

"Ol' Marster give us plenty of licker," she said, "an' us laked dat. One of de funniest things us had aroun' de plantation was a little goat dat could walk a fence jist lak us little niggers.

"When de Yankees come, gran'daddy was at prayer meetin' an' Ol' Marster come runnin' an' told de niggers to hitch up de mules an' waggins. Dey was tol' to hide all de food an' jewelry, but 'bout dat time us seed de Yankees comin'. Dey didn't do us no harm; sho' did some places, dough.

"T'want long 'fore Marster call all us niggers up to de house an' tol' us dat us was free. He said us could go away or stay wid him. I stayed 'twel I was grown an' married Doc Maddox. Us had five chillun, Walter, Failer, Siney, Zora an' Johnny. I don't know how many gran'chilluns I'se got.