

## Bert Frederick

### Interview with Bert Frederick

—*Preston Klein*

#### *WANTS MY FRIENDS TO GO WID ME*

"Wants my friends to go wid me, New Jerusalem;

Wonder ef I'll ever git to heaven, New Jerusalem!"

Nappy-headed, humble little Bert Frederick sang the old song in a voice that trembled and broke on the high notes. His black face beamed when he had finished, and "de old times" came flooding back into his mind.

"Honey, Ol' Master us'ta sing dat good song to us niggers; an' he allus could sing it so purty."

Uncle Frederick, like all the other gray-bearded Negroes of the Old South, is occupied mostly these days with getting ready to meet "de Sweet Jesus." As well as he can remember, he was around 12 years old when "de hawn of freedom sounded."

He shook his white head when the interviewer asked his age, a slow smile spreading over his face.

"Honey chile, you's axed me a riddle. I disremember 'bout dat. De bes' I kin tell you is dat I is eighty-odd—but as to 'zackness, I can't tell."

Some years ago, Uncle Frederick suffered a broken back in an accident. Since then he has been unable to stand erect, but can straighten his back when seated. Therefore, he politely asked to sit down when he was asked to pose for a picture.

His first master, he says, was Dr. Rich Vernon, who lived in Chambers County. Afterward, he was sold to William Frederick.

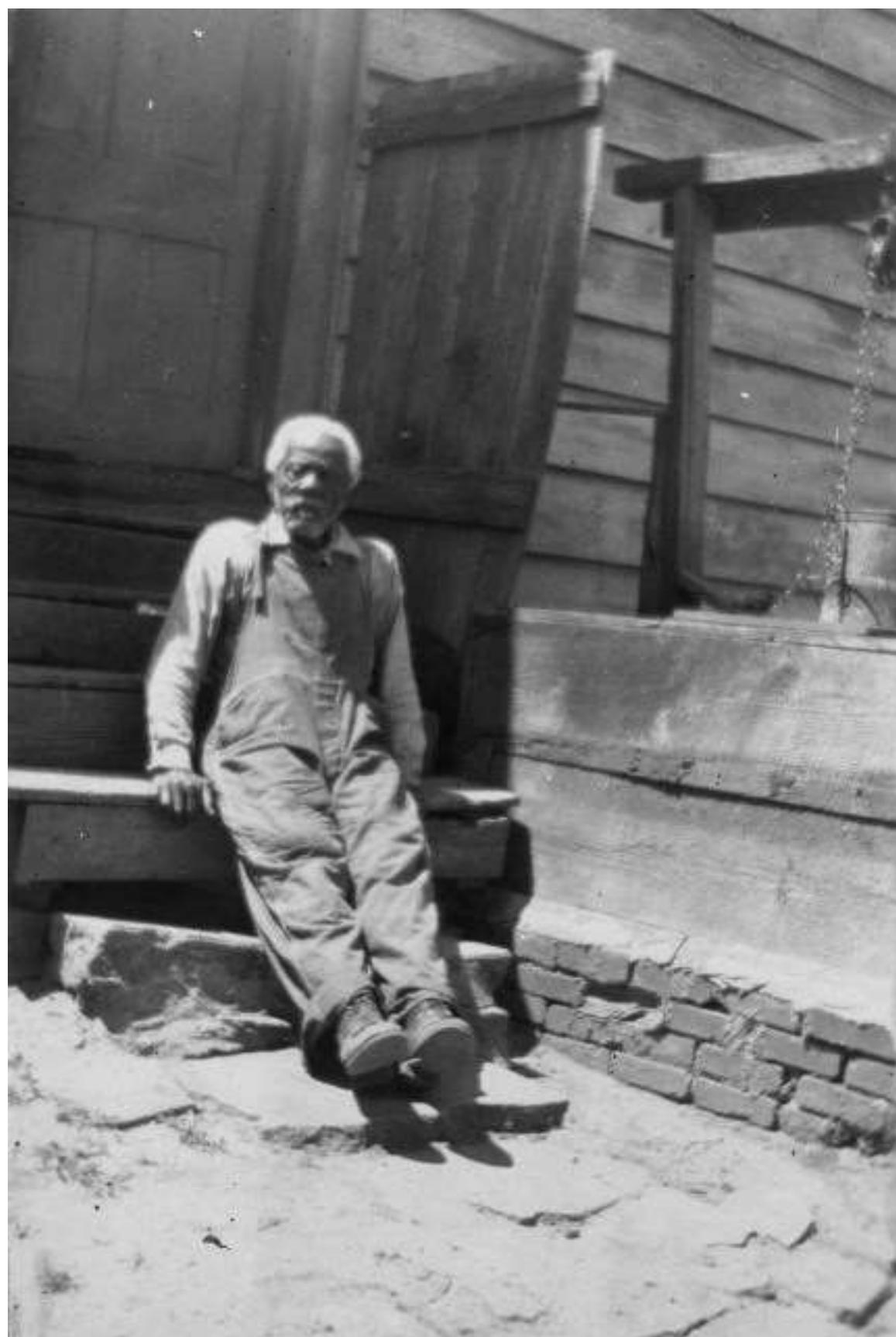
He chuckled as he recalled the old days.

"I was a shirt-tail nigger," he laughed. "Dat is, I wore jes' a long shirt 'twel I was a big scamp more dan twelve year old. Honey, I was a sight to look at!"

"Whut did I do about de plantation? Well, I driv de cows an' sheep to pasture an' seed dat no eagles kotched de lambs. Us had big eagles 'roun' den, an' us had to be keerful wid de small stock. Ef us warn't, ol' eagle ud swoop down an' tote off a whole lamb.

"Us had a time in dem days. I 'members dat us had a pen to ketch wild turkeys in. An' us kotched a few of dem, too."

Uncle Frederick's mother was Harriett Lumpkin, who lived below Opelika. He had three sisters, Mary Dowdell, Anne Carlisle and Emma Boyd; but all are dead.



*Bert Frederick, Opelika, Alabama*

"When de Yankees come to Alabama," he recalled, "Ol' Master tol' de niggers to hitch up all de wagons an' load all de food an' sech on 'em. Us had 'bout forty acres of swampland, so us hid de stuff dere.

"'Fore long I seed a long string of black an' white horses, wid mules behin' dem. Dey had packs on dey back. In de packs was grub de Yankees had tuk off'en de white peoples."

"Did you enjoy the old slavery days, Uncle?"

"Yes, chile, dey was good days. Some of de white peoples was bad to de niggers, but my Ol' Master warn't dat kind. Dat de reason he would let all de niggers sit aroun' whilst he was a singin'; an' he could sing."

Uncle Frederick putters about his tiny home in Opelika, managing to grow a profusion of flowers and vegetables despite his bent back. He was hoeing in his garden when the interviewer came upon him, but he eagerly laid down the hoe when told what he sought.

"Uncle, I want to talk with you about the old times."

"Lordy me, chile," he beamed, his eyes twinkling, "you done foun' de raght nigger!"