

Callie Williams

Interview with Callie Williams

—*Mary A. Poole, Mobile*

PATTEROLLERS USED SHACKLES, SAYS CALLIE

Callie Williams was only four years old at the time of the surrender, but stories told to her by her mother are vividly remembered, and the fact that she has had the same environment continuously throughout the years imprinted these happenings permanently on her mind. She lives at 504 Eslava Street, Mobile.

"My mammy and pappy was brought to Alabama by speculators who sold 'em to Mr. Hiram McLemore at Newport Landing, on de Alabama ribber," Callie said. "Mammy's name was Vicey and she was born in Virginia, but my pappy was born in Kentucky. His name was Harry. Mr. McLemore had about three hundred head of slaves, some of 'em on one plantation of about two thousand acres an' de res' on another place of about five hundred acres. He sho' did have a pretty house. It was all white and ramblin-like and had big trees aroun' it. Dere was a cool well and a big dairy right close by it and den de cabins was all in a row in de back, some of 'em made out of planks, but mos' of 'em was made wid logs. Dey was all named after whoever lived in 'em."

Aunt Callie needed little urging to tell of the old days, and she claims to vividly remember her master's family.

"His wife was named Axie Bethea and he had seven children," she said.

"One of 'em I never will forget, Miss Julia, 'case she gimme de first calico dress I ever had and I was proud as a peacock wid it. Miss Julia was de oldest little girl and dey give me to her.

"My mammy say dat dey waked up in de mornin' when dey heard de sweep. Dat was a piece of iron hangin' by a string and it made a loud noise when it was banged wid another piece of iron. Dey had to get up at four o'clock and be at work by sunup. To do dis, dey mos' all de time cook breakfast de night befo'.

"Pappy was a driver under de overseer, but mammy say dat she stay at de little nursery cabin and look after all de little babies. Dey had a cabin fixed up with homemade cradles and things where dey put all de babies. Der mammies would come in from de field about ten o'clock to nurse 'em and den later in de day, my mammy would feed de youngest on pot-licker and de older ones on greens and pot-licker. Dey had skimmed milk and mush, too, and all of 'em stayed as fat as a butter balls, me among 'em. Mammy saw dat I always got my share.

"De slaves got rations every Monday night. Dere would be three pounds of meat and a peck of meal. Dere was a big garden dat all of 'em worked and dey had all de vegetables dey needed and dere was

always plenty of skimmed milk. Dey cooked de meals on open fireplaces in de big iron 'spiders.' Dem was big pots hangin' over the fire from a hook. Dey do de cookin' at night and den warm it over the nex' day if dey wanted it dat way.

"While mammy was tendin' de babies she had to spin cotton and she was supposed to spin two 'cuts' a day. Four 'cuts' was a hard day's work. What was a cut? You oughta' know dat! Dey had a reel and when it had spun three hundred yards it popped. Dat was a "cut." When it had been spun, den another woman took it to de loom to make cloth for de slaves. Dey always took Saturday afternoon to clean up de clothes and cabins, 'case dey always had to start work on Monday mornin' clean as a pin. If dey didn't, dey got whupped for bein' dirty.

"Some of de niggers, after dey'd been beat, would try to run away and some of 'em got loose, but de patterollers caught a lot of 'em and den dey'd get it harder dan ever befo' and have shackles out on dere feet wid jes' enough slack for 'em to walk so dey could work.

"If dey wanted to go 'possum huntin' or fishin', dey could get passes from de overseer. Two things dey really loved to eat was 'possum and fish. Dey'd eat and eat 'till dey'd get sick and den dey'd have to boil up a dose of Boneset tea to work 'em out. If dat didn't make 'em feel better, dey'd go to Marster. He always kept calomel, bluemias and quinine on hand. If dey got too bad off sick, den marster would call de doctor. De children wasn't bothered with nothin' much but worms and dey'd take Jerusalem oak. It was de seed of a weed dat cook' and mix' 'lasses to make it taste like candy. Boneset was a bush and dey'd boil de leaves to get boneset tea.

"Mos' of de time de slaves would be too tired to do anything but go to bed at night, but sometimes dey would set around and sing after supper and dey would sing and pray on Sunday. One of de songs dat was used mos' was 'Yon Comes Old Marster Jesus.' If I remembers rightly, it went somp'n' like dis:

I really believe Christ is comin' again

He's comin' in de mornin'

He's comin' in de mornin'

He's comin' wid a rainbow on his shoulder

He's comin' again bye and bye.

"Dey tried to make 'em stop singin' and prayin' durin' de war, 'case all dey'd ask for was to be sot free, but de slaves would get in de cabins and turn a big wash pot upside down and sing into dat, and de noise couldn't get out. I don't remember nothin' about dis ceptin' what mammy say.

"When de Surrender come, she say dat a whole regiment of soldiers rode up to de house yellin' to de niggers dat dey was free. Den de soldiers took de meat out of de smokehouse and got all de 'lasses and meal and give it all to de niggers. Dey robbed de bees and den dey eat dinner and go on to de nex' place, takin' de menfolks wid 'em, all 'ceptin' de ones too old, my pappy among 'em.

"After it was all over my pappy rented land on Mr. McLemore's place and he and mammy stayed dere till dey died. Dey was buried in de same graveyard dat Mr. McLemore had set aside for his slaves. I married Frank Williams in Montgomery, Alabama, but our marriage was nothin' like mammy say her and pappy's was. She say dey 'jumped de broom stick.' When any of de slaves wanted to get married dey

would go to de big house and tell marster and he'd get his broomstick and say, 'Harry, does you want Vacey?' And Harry would say 'yes.' Den Marster would say, 'Vacey, does you want Harry?', and she say 'yes.' Den marster say, 'Jine hands and jump de broomstick and you is married. De ceremony wasn't much but dey stuck lots closer den, and you didn't hear about so many divorces and such as dat.

"All my children is dead but two. I had five. One is livin' in Atlantic City, N.J., and I live here wid de other one. I 'spects I'll jes' go on livin' here 'till I die, serving Ole Marster as bes' I can. If all de peoples on dis here earth would do dat, we wouldn't be pestered wid all dese here troubles like we is nowadays.