

Caroline Holland

Interview with Caroline Holland

—*Mabel Farrior*

CAROLINE HOLLAND HAD MANY MASTERS

"Yassuh, I was a slave," spoke Aunt Carry from her vine-shaded porch at No. 3 Sharpe Street, Montgomery, Alabama. "I was borned in 1849 on Mr. Will Wright's plantation on the Mt. Meigs road. Massa Will had a big slave house an' us niggers sho' use to have a good time playin' 'roun' down at de slave quarters. We had a row of houses two stories high, an' dey was filled wid all sorts of niggers. When I was twelve year old, I was made nu'ss fer my mistis's little girl an' at de fus' I couldn't do nothin' but rock de cradle. I didn't know how to hol' de baby. Us niggers had gardeens (guardians) dat look 'atter us lak dey did atter de hosses and cows and pigs.

"One night atter we had all gone to bed I heered a noise at de window, an' when I look up dere was a man a climbin' in. He was a nigger. I could tell eben do I could scarce see him, I knowed he was a nigger. I could hear my mistis a breathin', an' de baby was soun' asleep too. I started to yell out but I thought dat de nigger would kill us so I jes' kep' quiet. He come in de window, an' he see us a sleepin' dere, an' all of a sudden I knowed who it was. 'Jade,' I whispers, 'What you a doin' here?' He come to my bed and put his rough han' ober my mouf.

"Listen you black pickaninny, you tell em dat you saw me here an' I'll kill you,' he say, 'I th'ow yo' hide to de snakes in de swamp. Now shet up.'

"Wid dat he went to de dresser an' taken mistis' money bag. Atter dat he went to de window an' climb down de ladder an' I didn't do nothin' but shake myself nearly to death fum fright. De nex' day de oberseer an' de pattyrollers went a searchin' th'ough de slave quarters an' dey foun' de money bag under Jade's cot. Dey tuk him an' whupped him for near fifteen minutes. We could hear him holla way up at de big house. Jade, he neber got ober dat whuppin'. He died three days later. He was a good nigger, 'peer to me lak, an' de bes' blacksmith in de whole county. I ke'pa-wonderin' whut made him want ter steal dat purse. Den I foun' out later dat he was a goin' to pay a white man ter carry him ober de line to de No'thern States. Jade jus' had too big ideas fo' a nigger. I us'ta see Jade's ghos' a walkin' out in de garden in de moonlight; sometime he sit on de fence an' look at his ole cabin, den sometimes he stroll off down de cotton fiel'. When de Lawd git th'ough a punishin' him fo' a stealin' dat money, I guess he won't make us no mo' visits. He jus' go right on in heaben. Dat's what ghos'tes is, you know; peoples dat can't quite git in heaben, an' dey hadda stroll 'roun' little longer on de outside repentin'.

"Soon atter dat my gardeen tuk me to Tallasse when de massa died. My gardeen was a good man. He was always a-makin' speeches fo' de slaves to stay under bondage till dey was twenty-one. One dey he was in front of a sto' talkin' 'bout de slaves an' a man come up to him an' said he don't like de way Capt. Clanton talk (dat was my gardeen's name). Capt. Clanton ask him whut he goin' ter do 'bout it an' de man tuk out a pistol an' kil't de Cap'n raght dere on de spot.

"Den I was sold to another man, a Mr. Williamson, 'bout de time de war broke loose, an' Massa Williamson tuk me ober ter lib wid some mo' peoples. He said he had mo' slaves dan he could take keer of. Dis was de Abernathy plantation. While de massa was a standin' in de slave quarters a takin' to Mr Abernathy, I noticed a boy wid a bad eye. I didn't lak him at all an' I tol' de massa I don't wanna stay, kaze I didn't lak de way dat boy Lum wid de bad eye looked at me. Den Mr. Abernathy brung a boy 'bout sebenteen year old; a big strong lookin' boy named Jeff. He say 'Jeff, look out after Carry here. Don't let her git into no trouble.' Fum dat time on till 'bout five year ago, Jeff he always look after me, kaze atter de war I ma'ied him. Now I ain't got nobody but myself."