

Charles Hayes

Interview with Charles Hayes

—*Mary A. Poole, Mobile*

SHO' I BELIEVES IN SPIRITS, SAYS CHARLES

"Mistis," said Charles Hayes from his porch in Maysville, near Mobile, Alabama, "I was a little bitty nigger when de war broke out, an' I belonged to Massa Ben Duncan who lived at Day's Landin' on de Alabama Ribber.

"Marse Ben's house was de regulation plantation wid slave quarters. Most of de things us used was made raght dere on de plantation, sich as: beds, buckets, tools, soap, brogans, breeches, an' chairs. Our mattresses was either made outen cornshucks or cotton bolls. Us cooked on an open fireplace, an' eve'y Saddy night us would go to de big house for supplies. Marse Ben was good to his slaves an' he 'lowed dem to have a little plot of groun' nex' to de cabins whar dey could raise dere own little crop.

"My mammy was a fiel' han' an' my pappy was a mechanic an' he use to be de handy man aroun' de big house, makin' eve'thing f'um churns an' buckets to wagon wheels. My pappy also useta play de fiddle for de white folks dances in de big house, an' he played it for de colored frolics too. He sho could make dat thing sing.

"Us useta have all sorts of cures for de sick people, f'rinstance, us used de Jerusalem weed cooked wid molasses into a candy for to give to de chilluns to git rid of worms. Den us'd bile de root an' make a kinda tea for de stomach worms. You know de kinds dat little puppies an' little chilluns has dat eats all de food dat goes in to de stomach, an' makes de chile or dog eat plenty but don't git no benefits f'um all dey're eatin'. Horehound, dat growed wild in Clarke County, was used for colds. Mullen tea was used for colds an' swollen j'int. Den dere was de life everlastin' tea dat was also good for colds and horse mint tea dat was good for de chills an' fevers. Co'se, Mistis, us niggers had a regular fambly doctah dat 'tended to us when we was sho 'nough down raght sick, but dese remedies I's tellin' you 'bout us used when warn't nothin' much ailin' us. It was always to de owner's interest, Mistis, to have de niggers in a good, healthy condition.

"Does I believe in spirits, you says? Sho I does. When Christ walked on de water, de Apostles was skeered he was a spirit, but Jesus told dem dat he warn't no spirit, dat he was as 'live as dey was. He tol' 'em dat spirits couldn't be teched, dat dey jus' melted when you tried to. So, Mistis, Jesus musta meant dat dere was sich a thing as spirits.

"Atter de war my pappy an' mammy stayed on de Duncan plantation en' worked on share crops. Dere was a school on de groun's for us slave chilluns, an' my gran'mammy, Salina Duncan, taught de bible, 'ca'se she was f'um Virginy an' had been learnt to read an' write by her Mistis up dere.

"My fus' wife was named Alice Bush, an' us had ten chilluns; my second one was named Caroline Turner an' us didn't have but eight. Both my ole womens is daid now, white folks, an' I stays here wid one of my daughters. You see, my eyesight is almos' gone due to one day when I was a workin' in de forge, a hot piece of iron flew up an' landed in my eye. 'Twarn't long befo' it started to hurtin' in my udder eye. Now both is 'bout to give out."