

Charlie Aarons

Personal contact with Uncle Charlie Aarons

Oak Grove, Alabama

—*Written by Mary A. Poole*

HE LOVED YOUNG MARSTER JOHN

Some friends driving to Oak Grove, Ala., gave the writer the opportunity on August 4th to interview an old ex-slave, Charlie Aarons, who is quite venerable in appearance, and who, when asked his age, replied:

"Madam I don't know but I sure been 'round here long time", and when asked how old he was at the time of the Surrender he answered:

"I was a man able to do a man's work so I 'spects I was eighteen or twenty years old."

Uncle Charlie, as he is known among his own color and the white people who know him, told the writer he was born at Petersburg Va., and his parents, Aaron and Louisa, were owned by a Mr. J.H. White, who had a store in the city, but no plantation. His parents had three children, two boys and one girl, and when Uncle Charlie was about ten years of age, he was sold by Mr. White to a speculator named Jones who brought him to Mobile. He recalled being placed on the block, at the slave mart on Royal and State streets, and the anxiety of hearing the different people bidding for him, and being finally sold to a Mr. Jason Harris, who lived near Newton Station in Jasper County, Miss.

Uncle Charlie never saw or heard of his parents or brother and sister again and never knew what became of them.

Uncle Charlie said Mr. Harris was a pretty rough master, and somewhat close. All rations were weighed out and limited. He had a white overseer and a negro driver, who was the meanest of all.

Mr. Jason Harris had about sixty slaves, and a large plantation of a hundred acres, the men and women worked in the fields from six to six, except on Saturday, when they had half day holiday to clean up generally.

The home of the Harris family was a large two story house and the quarters were the regular log cabins with clay chimneys. They cooked in their cabins, but during the busy season in the fields their dinners were sent out to them each slave having his own tin pail marked with his name. Water would be sent out in a barrel mounted on an ox cart.

The old men and women looked after the children of the slaves while their parents worked in the fields.

When the writer asked Uncle Charlie, if his master or mistress ever taught him to read or write, he smiled and said:

"No, Madam, only to work".

When asked if they had any special festivities at Christmas or any other holiday, he replied:

"No, we had no special jolifications".

Saturday nights they would sing and dance in the quarters and have prayer meetings, then on some Sundays, they would hitch up the mules to a big wagon and all go to the white folks church: and again there would be camp meetings held and the slaves from all the surrounding plantations would attend, going to same in these large wagons, sometimes having four mules to a wagon. They then would have a jolly time along the way, singing and calling to one another, and making friends.

Uncle Charlie, said, he drove many a load of cotton in the large mule wagons from Newton Station to Enterprise, Mississippi.

When asked if that wasn't a chance to run away, he replied:

"Git away, why Madam, those nigger dogs would track you and all you got was a beating."

Uncle Charlie seemed to look off in the distance and said: "You know, Madam, I never saw a slave rebuked until I came to Mississippi," and I just couldn't

understand at first, but he grinned and said: "Lordy, Madam, some of those niggers were onery, too, and a nigger driver was a driver sure enough."

When the Master's son John Harris went to war, Charlie went with him as his body guard, and when asked what his duties were, he replied:

"I looked after Marster John, tended the horses and the tents. I recalls well, Madam, the siege of Vicksburg."

The writer then asked him if he wasn't afraid of the shot and shell all around him.

"No, Madam," he replied, "I kept way in the back where the camp was, for I didn't like to feel the earth trembling 'neath my feet, but you see, Madam, I loved young Marster John, and he loved me, and I just had to watch over that boy, and he came through all right."

Uncle Charlie said when they were told the Yankees were coming through from their headquarters in Meridian, Mississippi, and warned of their raids, they all made to the swamps and staid until they had passed on, but that the Yankees did not disturb the Jason Harris plantation.

After the Surrender Charlie came to Mobile and worked at the Yankee Camp, living in the quarters located in Holly's Garden. He drove their wagons and was paid \$14.00 a month and his keep. After his discharge he worked on steamboats and followed different lines of work, being employed for several years at Mr. M.L. Davis' saw mill, and is at present living on the Davis place at Oak Grove, Ala., an old Southern home, with quarters originally built for the employees of the mill and still known as the "quarters", and like other ante-bellum homes they have their private burying ground on the place.

Uncle Charlie was married four times, but now a widower. He had four children, two boys who are dead, and two girls, one Carrie Johnson, a widow, living in Kushla, Ala., and the other, Ella Aarons, a grass widow, living in Mobile, Ala.

Uncle Charlie says he saw Jeff. Davis as an old man, after the war at Mississippi City, Miss., and then his face lit up, and he said; "Wait a minute, Madam, I saw another president, let me think, —Yes, Madam I saw President Grant. He came through Mobile from New Orleans, and my! there was a big parade that day."

When asked about Abraham Lincoln, Uncle Charlie thought awhile, and answered:

"According to what was issued out in the Bible, there was a time for slavery, people had to be punished for their sin, and then there was a time for it not to be, and the Lord had opened a good view to Mr. Lincoln, and he promoted a good idea."

When he was asked about Booker T. Washington he replied:

"It was traversed out to him until the white folks took part with him and helped him carry on."

Uncle Charlie thinks the present day folks are bad and wicked, and dont realize anything like the old folks.

Charlie is a Baptist, became one when he sought the Lord and thinks all people should be religious