

Cornelia Robinson

Interview with Cornelia Robinson

—*Preston Klein, Opelika, Alabama*

DE YANKEES WUZ A HARRICANE

"One time I 'members a storm us had. I calls it a harricane; but it was really de Yankees comin' through."

Quaint, little Cornelia Robinson was anxious to give all the facts she could remember about slavery days; but she was only about four years old during the latter days of that period, and must depend a great deal on what has been told her.

"Chile, dem Yankees come through an' cleaned out de smokehouse; even lef' de lard bucket as clean as yo' hand. Ol' Marster tuk his bes' horses an' mules to de big swamp, an' de Yankees couldn't fin' 'em. But dey tore up everything dey couldn't take wid dem. Dey poured all de syrup out an' it run down de road lak water.

"One pore little nigger boy was so skeered dat when he went out to git up de cows an' when he couldn't fin' some of 'em, he laid down in a hollow stump an' nearly froze to death. Dey had to thaw him out in de branch, but he was powerful sick. He war'nt no 'count for nothin' atter dat.

"I 'members dat Ol' Mistus saved all her jewels an' sech frum de Yankees. She brung 'em out to de nigger cabins an' hid 'em amongst us."

Cornelia, forever smiling, wears her gray hair in two short braids down the back. She says her father and mother were George and Harriett Yancey, who belonged first to a Mrs. Baugh and who were later sold to a Dr. Trammell, of near Lafayette. Her brothers and sisters were Charlie, Willie, Albert and Ann.



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"I 'members de high, four-poster beds us useter sometimes sleep on," she said. "I was so little dat I had to crawl into 'em wid de help of a stool. I 'members dat de mud fireplaces of early times was far back, deep an' wide. All de little niggers was fed milk an' bread, wid de bread crumbled in. Us also had pot licker an' greens.

"Our clothes was muslin an' calico for de hot weather; an' den in winter us had linty cloth, part wool an' part cotton, homespun. Us raised de sheep, too, but us didn't wear no clothes hardly in hot weather.

"Us sho' did have a good marster an' mistis. Dey give us all de clothes an' food us needed an' gived us medicine. Us wore asafetida an' pennies aroun' our necks to help us not to git sick.

"Dey taught my mother to read an' write, too. Not many done dat. She'd read de Bible to us little niggers an' give prayers. Atter slavery, us had schools. I 'members dat George Hawkins an' his wife taught it."

Cornelia recalls some of the happenings of slavery times.

"If de slaves went off de plantation widout a pass, de patterollers would ketch 'em an' beat 'em powerful bad. If de niggers could outrun de patterollers an' git home fust dey couldn't be whapped. Dey had dogs called 'nigger hounds', same like dey had bird dogs, an' dey would track de slaves an' bring dem back home.

"I 'members my mother goin' to corn shuckin's. 'Course dey put us little niggers to bed 'fore dey went but dey sho' sounded lak dey was havin' a big time, hollerin' an' singin'. Us went to de white folks church in de afternoon, an' de Reverend Gardner was a mighty good preacher. When any of us niggers died, Marster was good to us an' let all de niggers quit an' attend de burial. Dey made de coffins at home an' would black dem wid soot.

"Us had a ol' quack herb doctor on de place. Some bad boys went up to his house one night an' poured a whole lot of de medicine down him. An honey, dat ol' man died de next day.

"Atter I got grown I married Robert Benson an' us had four chillun and several grandchillun."

Cornelia, beaming and apparently happy every minute of the day, lives with one of her grandchildren in Opelika.