

## Daniel Taylor

### Interview with Daniel Taylor

#### Montgomery, Alabama

—*John Proctor Mills, Montgomery, Alabama*

Foreword:—In Uncle Daniel Taylor we find the unusual, fast disappearing type of negro ex-slave (it makes the sentimental white man feel a deep sadness in the passing of these gentle old souls, whose lives have been well spent in serving to the best of their ability.) Uncle Dan is a light complected mulatto (octoroon) with a high and broad forehead (a noble brow) devoid of all negroid features, a heavy suit of silk-like hair almost free of any kinks, a heavy suit of gray beard (it is in the short kinky hair next to his throat that the negro stands out most prominently) a fine moustache which matches the snowy silkiness of his hair up on his head. Deep set, dark blue-grey eyes which beam with kindness, wide apart and far-searching. A voice well modulated and refined in timbre, of tenor quality. Uncle Dan has been so closely associated with the educated white man of the South until he uses no negro dialect, but his speech is that of one who has tried at all times to speak correctly and deliberately. He has served as janitor at nearly all of the Public Schools of the Montgomery City Schools system, and for fifteen years or more has been at the Baldwin High School; is janitor at this school at present (May 1937) where he is highly respected, and greatly beloved by the student body and members of the large faculty.

"Strange to say, I do not remember the name of my first master, nor of the second master to whom my Mother and myself were sold to in Alabama. I was born at Charleston, South Carolina, and at the age of two and a half years we landed at Luverne, Ala., where with my Mother I was sold for four-hundred dollars.

"I was fourteen years old at the time of the 'Surrender,' and was living at old 'Rocky Mount' in Crenshaw County, at the time of the 'Civil War.' Professor Mack Barnes of Highland Home, Alabama, was the first man I ever worked for, and he, as you know, was at the head of the large school located in Highland Home.

"The hottest moments of my life were the ones in which my Mother got tight in behind me with a hickory (switch) and I always took to the woods. I'll just bet that I knew and could tell more about the woods and the cane-brake than anyone in that section. Yes sir! I knew every varmint that crawled on its belly, and all the rest which went on four feet, that lived there. Believe me, I knew every one of them by name and right where they stayed.

"The hot moments just mentioned usually found me 'cooling off' in the creek in the old swimmin' hole.



*Daniel Taylor, Montgomery, Alabama*

"Among the thrilling moments of my life well do I remember the visits of President Jefferson Davis, (the first and only President of the Confederate States of America) to the home of my Master. Mr. Davis always gave me a quarter of a dollar for holding his horse, and up 'til lately I had one of those quarters as a highly valued keep-sake, but it suddenly disappeared, I know not where.

"The most exciting moments of my whole life was when the Herron Street School (at present the Cottage Hill School) caught fire and burned to the ground. We had marched all of the children out of the building to safety (you see we had all had disciplined fire drills) but Professor Charles L. Floyd (Superintendent of the Montgomery Public Schools) was mindful lest there should still be one person left in the building, so hastened back into the rapidly burning building. He just wouldn't listen to the pleadings of Miss Jinny (Miss Virginia Hereford, who was the Principal of this school) nor to Miss Sophy (Miss Sophia Holmes) a teacher at the primary department, nor would he listen to my humble plea. The roof was already tumbling in, and the blazing rafters were falling in every direction. I could stand it no longer, so rushed right through the smoke and flames, finally I found Mr. Floyd and dragged him out to safety. My God! I loved that white man, he was one of the finest men I ever knew!

"No! Mister John, I have never sought a 'heroe's medal for bravery and for risking my life', my one great reward was in the saving of the life of my true friend Professor Charles L. Floyd."