

Delia Garlic

Interview with Delia Garlic

—*Margaret Fowler, Fruithurst, Alabama*

DEM DAYS WAS HELL

Delia Garlic lives at 43 Stone Street, Montgomery, and insists she is 100 years old. Unlike many of the old Negroes of the South, she has no good words for slavery days or the old masters, declaring: "Dem days was hell."

She sat on her front porch and assailed the taking of young children from mothers and selling them in different parts of the country.

"I was growed up when de war come," she said, "an' I was a mother befo' it closed. Babies was snatched from dere mother's breas' an' sold to speculators. Chilluns was separated from sisters an' brothers an' never saw each other ag'in.

"Course dey cry; you think dey not cry when dey was sold lak cattle? I could tell you 'bout it all day, but even den you couldn't guess de awfulness of it.

"It's bad to belong to folks dat own you soul an' body; dat can tie you up a tree, wid yo' face to de tree an' yo' arms fastened tight aroun' it; who take a long curlin' whip an' cut de blood ever' lick.

"Folks a mile away could hear dem awful whippings. Dey was a turrible part of livin'."

Delia said she was born at Powhatan, Virginia, and was the youngest of thirteen children.

"I never seed none of my brothers an' sisters 'cept brother William," she said. "Him an' my mother an' me was brought in a speculator's drove to Richmon' an' put in a warehouse wid a drove of other niggers. Den we was all put on a block an' sol' to de highes' bidder.

"I never seed brother William ag'in. Mammy an' me was sold to a man by de name of Carter, who was de sheriff of de county.

"No'm, dey warn't no good times at his house. He was a widower an' his daughter kept house for him. I nursed for her, an' one day I was playin' wid de baby. It hurt its li'l han' an' commenced to cry, an' she whirl on me, pick up a hot iron an' run it all down my arm an' han'. It took off de flesh when she done it.

"Atter awhile, marster married ag'in; but things warn't no better. I seed his wife blackin' her eyebrows wid smut one day, so I thought I'd black mine jes' for fun. I rubbed some smut on my eyebrows an' forgot to rub it off, an' she kotched me. She was powerful mad an' yelled: 'You black devil, I'll show you how to mock your betters.'

"Den she pick up a stick of stovewood an' flails it ag'in' my head. I didn't know nothin' more 'till I come to, lyin' on de floor. I heard de mistus say to one of de girls: 'I thought her thick skull and cap of wool could take it better than that.'

"I kept on stayin' dere, an' one night de marster come in drunk an' set at de table wid his head lollin' aroun'. I was waitin' on de table, an' he look up an' see me. I was skeered, an' dat made him awful mad. He called an overseer an' tol' him: 'Take her out an' beat some sense in her.'

"I begin to cry an' run an' run in de night; but finally I run back by de quarters an' heard mammy callin' me. I went in, an' raght away dey come for me. A horse was standin' in front of de house, an' I was took dat very night to Richmon' an' sold to a speculator ag'in. I never seed my mammy any more.

"I has thought many times through all dese years how mammy looked dat night. She pressed my han' in bofe of hers an' said: 'Be good an' trus' in de Lawd.'

"Trustin' was de only hope of de pore black critters in dem days. Us jest prayed fer strength to endure it to de end. We didn't 'spect nothin' but to stay in bondage 'till we died.



Delia Garlic, Montgomery, Alabama

"I was sol' by de speculator to a man in McDonough, Ga. I don't ricollect his name, but he was openin' a big hotel at McDonough an' bought me to wait on tables. But when de time come aroun' to pay for me, his hotel done fail. Den de Atlanta man dat bought de hotel bought me, too. 'Fo' long, dough, I was sol' to a man by de name of Garlic, down in Louisiana, an' I stayed wid him 'till I was freed. I was a regular fiel' han', plowin' an' hoein' an' choppin' cotton.

"Us heard talk 'bout de war, but us didn't pay no 'tention. Us never dreamed dat freedom would ever come."

Delia was asked if the slaves ever had any parties or dances on her plantation.

"No'm," she replied, "us didn't have no parties; nothin' lak dat. Us didn't have no clothes for goin' 'roun. I never had a undershirt until jest befo' my first chil' was borned. I never had nothin' but a shimmy an' a slip for a dress, an' it was made out'en de cheapes' cloth dat could be bought; unbleached cloth, coarse, but made to las'.

"Us didn't know nothin' 'cept to work. Us was up by three or four in de mornin' an' everybody got dey somethin' to eat in de kitchen. Dey didn't give us no way to cook, nor nothin' to cook in our cabins. Soon as us dressed us went by de kitchen an' got our piece of cornbread. Dey wasn't even no salt in dem las' years. Dat piece of cornbread was all us had for breakfus', an' for supper, us had de same.

"For dinner us had boiled vittles; greens, peas an' sometimes beans. Coffee? No'm, us never knowed nothin' 'bout coffee.

"One mornin' I 'members I had started to de fiel', an' on de way I los' my piece of bread. I didn't know what to do. I started back to try to fin' it, an' it was too dark to see. But I walk back raght slow, an' had a dog dat walked wid me. He went on ahead, an' atter awhile I come on him lyin' dere guardin' dat piece of bread. He never touched it, so I gived him some of it.

"Jus' befo' de war I married a man named Chatfield from another plantation; but he was took off to war an' I never seed him ag'in. Atter awhile I married a boy on de plantation named Miles Garlic.

"Yas'm, Massa Garlic had two boys in de war. When dey went off de Massa an' missis cried, but it made us glad to see dem cry. Dey made us cry so much.

"When we knowed we was free, everybody wanted to git out. De rule was dat if you stayed in yo' cabin you could keep it, but if you lef', you los' it. Miles was workin' at Wetumpka, an' he slipped in an' out so us could keep on livin' in de cabin.

"My secon' baby soon come, an' raght den I made up my min' to go to Wetumpka where Miles was workin' for de railroad. I went on down dere an' us settled down.

"Atter Miles died, I lived dere long as I could an' den come to Montgomery to live wid my son. I'se eatin' white bread now an' havin' de best time of my life. But when de Lawd say, 'Delia, well done; come up higher,' I'll be glad to go."