

## Emma Crockett

### **Interview with Emma Crockett**

—*Ruby Pickens Tartt, Livingston, Alabama*

On the old east road from Livingston to Epes, about six miles north-east of Livingston, is the "double house" built of widely assorted materials, where Emma Crockett lives. The older part of the house is the "settin' room" where the stick-and-clay chimney of its earlier days has been replaced by a new brick chimney. A roof of corrugated sheet metal tops the warped, roughly hewn logs which form the walls. The "new room" is built in the later shanty style—pine boards, unplanned, and nailed upright to a frame of 2X4's, the cracks of the flat joints "stripped" with narrow siding. A roof of "bought" shingles covers this room. Connecting the two rooms is an open hall roofed with heavy boards "rived" from pine blocks. Despite its conglomerate architecture this is a better "colored folks'" house than many in the Black Belt. These "double houses" often have no roof for the hall and some also lack a floor, the hall being made entirely of earth, sky and imagination.

Emma settled herself on the top step at the front of the hall to talk to me, after first ironing a tiny wrinkle out of her "string apron" with her hand.



*Emma Crockett, Livingston, Alabama*

"Miss, I'm 'bout sebenty-nine or eighty year old," she told me, "and I belonged to Marse Bill Hawkins and Miss Betty. I lived on deir plantation right over yander. My mammy was called Cassie Hawkins and my pappy was Alfred Jolly. I was Emma Jolly 'fore I married Old Henry Crockett. Us had five chillun and dey's two of 'em livin' in Bummin'ham, Fannie and Mary.

"Sometimes I kain't git my min' together so as I kin tell nothin'. I fell out t'other day and had a misery in my head ever since. I wish I could read, but I wa'n't never l'arnt nothin' 'ceptin' atter Surrender Miss Sallie Cotes she showed us how to read printin'; but I kain't read no writin. I kain't tell you so much 'bout de wah' ca'se my recollection ain't no 'count dese days. All I knowed, 'twas bad times and folks got whupped, but I kain't say who was to blame; some was good and some was bad. I seed the patterollers, and atter Surrender de Ku Kluxes dey come den, but didn't never bother me. See, I wan't so old and I minded ev'ybody, and didn't vex 'em none. Us didn't go to church none, but I goes now to de New Prophet Church and my favorite song is:

Set down, set down, set down,

Set down, set down,

Set down, chile, set down.

Soul so happy till I kain't set down.

Move de member, move Dan-u-el,

Move de member, move Dan-u-el.

Dan-u-el, member, don' move so slow.

Dan-u-el, member, don' move so slow.

Got on my rockin' shoes, Dan-u-el.

Got on my rockin' shoes, Dan-u-el.

Shoes gwine to rock me home,

Shoes gwine to rock me home, Dan-u-el,

Shoes gwine to rock me home, Dan-u-el,

Shoes gwine to rock me home, Dan-u-el,

Dan-u-el.

Shoes gwine to rock by faith,

Shoes gwine to rock by faith, Dan-u-el,  
Shoes gwine to rock by faith, Dan-u-el.

Love de member, move Dan-u-el.

Love de member, move Dan-u-el.

Got on my starrycrown, Dan-u-el.

Got on my starrycrown, Dan-u-el.

"Dat's all I kin tell you today, honey. Come back when dis misery leave my head and I gwine to think up some tales and old songs.



*Emma Crockett's House, Livingston, Alabama*

"But I didn't never fool wid no hoodoo and no animal stories neither. I didn't have no time for no sich foolishness. And I ain't scared of nothin' neither.

"I lives here wid my grandchile now on Mr. Bob Davis' place. Us gits enough to eat, I reckon, but it's tight, I tell you dat!"