

## George Taylor

### Personal interview with George Taylor

409 South Hamilton Street, Mobile, Alabama

—Ila B. Prine, Mobile, Alabama

### *CHILLUN WAS TAUGHT TO BE MANNERABLE*

George Taylor, an old and very black man, who lives at 409 South Hamilton street in Mobile, says he is an ex-slave. He knows that he was born in Mobile on the corner of Cedar and Texas streets, but left Mobile, and was carried to Gosport, Alabama, when he was twelve years old. His father's name was Gus Taylor and his mother's Sarah Taylor, and they were owned by Mr. W.G. Herrin. There were twenty-one children in George's family, and he said he was the oldest one, and helped "nuss de odders."

"Mah grandfather's name was Mac Wilson an' mah grandmother's name was Ellen Wilson, an' de ol' Miss's name was Miss Mamie Herrin. All de colored folks' chillun called Mr. Herrin 'Cl' Marster, an' he sho' was a good marster, too. I 'members dat atter I got to be a big boy dey put me in de fiel's choppin' cotton, but I neber could pick cotton. I knows dat mah paw said I was too crazy 'bout de girls, so he tuk me an' made me plow.

"Ol' marster had a big place, I don't jes' exactly knows how many acres dey was, but I knows us had plenty ob cotton, 'ca'se sometimes dey would pick four or five bales a day. An' den I knows durin' cotton time mah paw hauled cotton all day long to de gin whut was run by five or six mules.

"Durin' de busy season on de plantation ol' Marster had de older women cookin' an' sendin' de dinner to de fiel'. Dere was two big baskets, one to put de bread in, an' de odder basket to put de meat in. Every mornin' at three o'clock de women begun cookin' an' each han' brought his own meat an' bread to this cabin to be cooked. Every person's plate had their names on 'em. Ever'body had to be up by daylight an' ready to begin work. De men had to get up before daylight an' begin to harness de mules, an' soon as light dey was in de fiel's. Dere was two hundred and fifty head ob colored people, 'scusing chillun. Dey would raise four, five, and six hundred bales ob cotton, a year. Us worked den, dere warn't no walkin' 'bout den, not eben on Sat'day afternoons, but I believes I'd lack it betta dan I does now, 'cause de chillun was taught to be mannerable den, but now dey cuss if you say anything to dem.

"Us had a good place to stay, de ol' Marster's house was a big two-story house, an' our cabins was built ob boards an' was in a row. Us didn't hab no stoves, jes' cooked out in de yard ober a fire wid stakes on each side of hit, wid an' iron bar across 'em to hang de pots on. Ol' Marster rationed out de food, an' each man was 'lowed seven pounds ob meat, de women was 'lowed six pounds an' five pounds for each child. Den dey gib us a peck ob meal, five pounds of flour and some molasses.

"I neber did eat at home wid mah folks, 'ca'se I nussed in de big house, an' ebery time dat de white chillun eat, I had to eat, too. Dere was plenty ob pecan, walnut, an' ches'nut trees on de place, an' us could eat all de nuts we wanted; and den de slaves had dere own gardens if dey wanted to.

"Den I 'members how dere was four men who put de hogs in de pens to fatten, sometimes, dey would put as many as a hundred or a hundred an' fifty at a time. Den hit was dere duty to tote feed from de fiel's to feed 'em.

"My! when I think ob dat big smoke house, mah mouth jes' waters. At hog killin' time, dere was certain men to kill, an' certain ones to cut 'em up. Dere warn't neber no special time to hog killin', jes' when de ol' Marster said do hit, we did hit.

"You see us was allus under his direction, 'ca'se if us wanted to go anywhere, us had to git a pass, eben to church. De white folks had Methodist church, an' de colloed had de Baptist church.

"I also 'members de time I was put up on de block to be sold, an' when de man only offered five hundred dollars, fer me, an' Ol' Marster tole me to git down, dat I was de mos' valuable nigger he had, 'ca'se I was so strong, an' could do so muck work.

"Mah maw was de weaver, an' dere was a woman named Assella who did de dyeing. Mah paw gathered de bark, sich as red oak, elm, maple and juniper bark, an' dry hit an' den grin' hit up. Dey also used borax, alum and blue stone, to set de dye. De women made de clothes out ob dis cloth dat was woven on de place.

"You axed 'bout weddin's. Us didn't hab weddin's lack us do now. De way us married would be to go to de big house, an' ol' Marster had us to jump over a broom stick, an' den us was considered married. But dere was one thing dat us warn't 'lowed to do, an' dat was to abuse or cuss our wives, an' you betta not strike 'em, ca'se hit would be jes' too bad.

"You know, Miss, I'se been here a long time. I 'members when dere was only one house 'tween St. Louis Street an' Frascati, an' dat was de Guard House. I also 'members de ole time remedies dat dey used in de ole days. Dey used red oak bark for fever an' colds, an' den dere was hoarhound, an' black snake root dat de ol' Marster put whiskey on. Ol' Marster made his own whiskey. An' oh! yes, de calomus root growed in de woods whar dey lived. I neber seed dem send to no store for medicine. I neber hyeard ob no hoodoo stuff, 'till I was grown, an' anudder thing folks didn't die of lack dey do now. When any one did die, dey allus had a big funeral, an' de men would sometimes hitch up a ox team or mule teams, an' as many as could git in would go. De coffins was home made an' stained. Dere was plenty ob han's to dig de graves, too.

"I'se tell you, Miss, folks is pretty much de same, if de white folks treat de niggers right, you couldn't get dem to leave dem. I 'members when de Yankees come through, I was standin' on de Ol' Marster's porch, an' I seed dem comming, an' Marster got up on his crutch an' go to de steps an' invite dem in, an' believe me dey come in, too. Dey jes' natcherly tore up ol' Marster's place; then de furniture all 'roun' an' broke heaps ob hit. I knows b'fore dey got dere ol' Marster had mah paw, an' Jerry Lee, an' Mace Pouncey, an' anudder man take four barrels ob money an' carry down to de spring an' put hit in de spring, an' I'se tellin' you, Miss, you couldn't any more git near dat spring, dan nothin', ca'se de quicksan' made dem barrels boil up, one at a time, an' de way dey had to git dem barrels, was to buil' a scaffold from de river, an' let a line down an' ketch aroun' dem barrels.

"Atter we was freed, Ol' Marster come out in de yard an' got in de middle ob all ob us, an' tole us dat de ones dat wants to stay wid him, to stan' on one side, an' de odders to stan' on de odder side. So mah paw got on de side wid dose who wanted to leave, an' us lef' Ol' Marster an' paddled down de river, in a paddlin' boat to Belle's Landing.

"As I'se said before, I'se been here a long time, I eben 'members seeing Jeff Davis. I knows I ain't here for long, but I'se ready, 'ca'se I'se been fightin' for Jesus twenty-nine years, an' I ain't tired ob fightin' yet. I'se a Deacon in de Baptist Church."