

Gus Rogers

Interview with Gus Rogers

—*Mary A. Poole, Mobile, Alabama*

JABBO EXPLAINS HIS BLACK SKIN

Living on the Moffat road at Orchard, in western Mobile County, Alabama, on Mr. McIntyre's place is Gus Rogers, who is known better by the name of Jabbo. He claims to be over ninety years of age, but could give no proof. He claims the 26th of June as his birthday.

When asked how old he was, he replied with a smile:

"Miss, I don't know but I found everything here when I came along."

He was born at Salisbury, N.C. on the Rogers' plantation, and Mr. John and Mrs. Mary Rogers were his master and mistress. His parents were William and Lucy Rogers, who had five children, three girls and two boys.

Jabbo said the Rogers's home was built of boards of virgin timber and the slave quarters were some distance from the big house. Some of the cabins were built of logs and some of boards, all having clay chimneys and big open fireplaces equipped for cooking, as the slaves usually cooked their own meals, except during busy seasons, when meals were prepared in the house kitchen by the slave women too old to work in the fields.

Jabbo said one old man went around and rapped on the doors to wake up slaves to go to work. When asked how long they worked he laughed, and said:

"Just from sun to sun and then you went to bed, 'cause you knew that old man would sure be rapping before you were ready next morning."

When asked about earning any money, Jabbo said:

"Law, Miss we didn't even know what money was, and we didn't have no use for it. We had all we needed, plenty to eat and all the clothes necessary those days."

The Rogers raised lots of tobacco and wheat, and all the necessary farm products needed on the plantation. They had a large orchard and made all the cider they could drink.

Jabbo recalled driving many a refugee wagon during the War, and when they heard of the Yankees' coming, the Rogers family took all the horses and mules and hid them in the swamps and buried all the silver and other valuables.

After the devastation wrought by War, Mr. Rogers moved his family to Massey Station, Montgomery County, Alabama, intending to raise cotton. He brought Jabbo's father and mother and family with him, but meeting with little success he returned to Salisbury, N.C. Jabbo remained in Alabama.

Jabbo married and raised a family of five children. There were two girls and three boys but he has no knowledge of their present whereabouts.

When asked if he was married more than once, Jabbo laughed and said:

"No, Miss I always had the price of a marriage license in my pocket, but somehow I never married."

In answer to inquiry as to religion, Jabbo replied:

"Miss, I am a Methodist, but there's only one religion. You have to be pure in heart to see Him, because He said so, and to do unto others as you desire others to do unto you."

Continuing about religion Jabbo said:

"God gave it to Adam and took it away from Adam and gave it to Noah, and you know, Miss, Noah had three sons, and when Noah got drunk on wine, one of his sons laughed at him, and the other two took a sheet and walked backwards and threw it over Noah. Noah told the one who laughed, 'you children will be hewers of wood and drawers of water for the other's two children, and they will be known by their hair and their skin being dark,' so, Miss, there we are, and that is the way God meant us to be. We have always had to follow the white folks and do what we saw them do, and that's all there is to it. You just can't get away from what the Lord said."

Jabbo said he would like "to go back to the good old days, 'though there was good folks and there was mean folks, then too, just like there is today."

Bibliography: Personal interview by the writer with Gus Rogers, ex-slave, better known as "Jabbo."