

## Jake Green

### Interview with Jake Green

—*Ruby Pickens Tartt, Livingston, Alabama*

#### *A CONJU' WHAT DIDN' WUK*

"Yessum, dem niggers sho' was scared when ole Buck showed up in de fiel'," Jake Green, former slave, laughed with a vigor that denied his eighty-five years as he described "a conju' what didn' wuk." Jake has a vivid memory of those days before the Civil War, though he was only a small boy when it started.

"Me an' my mother an' father b'longed to old man Lam Whitehead jes' a few miles from Coatopa, 'bout ten miles east of Livingston, Alabama," he began. "My mother was Molly Whitehead, my father was Dan Whitehead. I don't know nothin' 'bout my gran'mammy an' gran'pappy, but I had a heap of unkie's.

"Mr. Whitehead owned Dirtin Ferry down to Belmont, an' dey had a darkey dere named Dick what claim sick all de time. So de Massa man said, 'Dick, dam it, go to de house. I can't get no work outten you.' So Dick went on. He was a fiddler so dey jes' tuck his vittuls to him for seven years. Den one day, Old Massa say to de overseer man, 'Let's slip up dere an' see what Dick doin'. So dey did, an' dere sot Dick, fat as he could be a-playin' de fiddle an' a-singin',

'Fool my Massa seven years.

Gwiner fool him seven mo'.

Hey diddle, de diddle, de diddle, de do'.

"'Bout dat time Ole Massa poked his head in de do' said 'Dam iffen you will. Come outten dere, you black rascal, an' go to work, 'An' I ain't never hyard of Dick complainin' no mo'.

"But dey wan't so mean. Sometimes us got whupped but Massa had fo' men he didn't 'low nobody to hit, white er black. Dey was Unker Arch, he was de main carriage driver; my father, he was de house servant; Unker Julius, de fo'man of de plow han's an' Unker Ed'erds, de fo'man of de hoe han's. Whenever anybody wanted to hire anybody to work for 'em, de Massa send dem fo' out an' hire 'em by de day to chop cotton or pick. An' dem fo' niggers could chop much cotton in a day as de mule could plow. Whenever dey'd stop de plow at twelve o'clock, dem niggers was right dere to lay de hoe handles on de plow, an' dat's choppin'. All four could pick a bale of cotton a day. Whenever anybody say, 'Mr. Whitehead, I want a bale of cotton picked today,' he'd send dem fo' men an' dey could pick five hundred pounds apiece an' leave de sun still runnin'. Dey was pickers in dem days!

"Cose dey had to begin, an' all us got up 'fo' day. Twan't nothin' strange to be standin' in de fiel' by your plow waitin' for de sun to come up. Ev'body was early risers in dem days. Dey was pretty good to us, but ole Mr. Buck Brasefiel', what had a plantation 'jinin' us'n, was so mean to his'n dat twan't nothin' for 'em

to run away. One nigger, Rich Parker, runned off one time an' whilst he gone he seed a hoodoo man, so when he got back Mr. Brasefiel' tuck sick an' stayed sick two or three weeks. Some of de darkies tole him, 'Rich been to de hoodoo doctor.' So Mr. Brasefiel' got up outten dat bed an' come a-yellin' in de fiel', 'You thought you had ole Buck, but by God he rose agin'. Dem niggers was so skeered, dey squatted in de fiel' jes' lack partridges, an' some of 'em whispered, 'I wish to God he had a-died.'



*Jake Green, Livingston, Alabama*

"Twan't long atter dat come S'render, but dat nigger done lef' dere, an' didn't nobody know whar Parker was at. Some of de niggers done bought an' paid for dey mule an' me an' Pappy was rentin' an' wukkin' on sneers, when here come Parker, jes' hyared 'bout S'render. He say 'Why didn't somebody come tell me 'twas S'render?' Den he start a-singin'

Slav'y chain, slav'y chain,

Thank God a'mighty I'm free at las',

Free at las', free at las',

Thank God a'mighty I'm free at las'.

"But dat wan't none of Old Massa's niggers. He had one, do' call him John, an' hit come a traveler an' stayed all night. Ole Massa p'inted out John, an' said, 'He ain't never tole me a lie in his life.' De traveler bet Massa a hund'ed dollars 'ginst fo' bits he'd ketch John in a lie 'fo' he lef'. Next mawnin' at de table de mice was pretty bad, so de traveler caught one by de tail an' put him inside a kiver-lid dish what was settin' dere on de table, an' he tole Ole Massa tell John he could eat sumpin' out of ev'y dish atter dey got th'oo but dat kiver-lid one, an' not to take kiver offen hit. An' John said, 'Nossuh, I won't.' But John jes' nachully had to see what was in dat dish, so he raise de lid, an' out hopped de mouse. Den hyar come Old Massa an' axed John iffen he done what he tole him not to do, an' John 'nied hit. Den de traveler look in de dish an' de mouse wan't dere, an' he said, 'See dere, John been lyin' to you all de time, you jes' ain't knowed hit,' an' I reckon he right 'caze us had to lie.