

Janie Scott

Personal interview with Janie Scott

255 South Lawrence Street, Mobile, Alabama

—*Mary A. Poole, Mobile, Alabama*

SLAVE CA'LINE SOLD FER A SACK O' SALT

Janie Scott, living in a cottage at 255 South Lawrence Street, was interviewed by the writer on July 14th, 1937. She claimed she was born April 10, 1867, but she appeared older than seventy years of age. She, of course, was unable to give any experiences of her own as a slave but recalled what had been told her by her mother, who was a slave on the Myers plantation at Tensaw, Alabama.

When asked how large was the plantation, Janie answered:

"Lordy, chile, many an acre an 'bout sixty slaves."

Her mother worked in the house, and when the field hands were working helped carry water out to them in buckets, each one getting a swallow or two a piece. Her father was Andy White, and was raised on the plantation of John Jewett at Stockton, Alabama.

Janie had heard her father say he was a coachman and drove the folks around, also came over in a boat with his master to Mobile to get supplies and groceries, and that they killed many a deer in neighborhoods just north of Bienville Square.

Jane said her mother's Master and Mistress didn't want her mother to marry Andy, because he was too light in color and light niggers Janie said folks didn't think as strong as a good black one, so her mother, Sarah Porter, and Andy White her father just borrowed a mule without the Master's consent and rode off and were married, anyhow.

Janie laughed and said she guessed it was all right after all because they had eleven children, two are now living, Janie and a sister Daisy.

When the writer asked if slaves ever earned any money, she replied:

"They didn't even know what money was." Then she continued: "Once when my mother was a little girl she asked her mistress to give her fifteen cents, and her Mistress wanted to know why she wanted fifteen cents. Her Mother replied: "I wants to see what money looks like."

Her Mistress thought she was trying to act smart and in place of fifteen cents she received a whipping.

The slaves wore homespun clothes, but her mother remembered having as her best dress one made of marino.

The slaves quarters were log cabins with clay chimneys, and they cooked in the open fireplaces in the winter and in the summer on what they called scaffolds, built out in the yard. These were made of clay foundations with iron rods across on which the pots hung.

Janie said her mother "was strong and could roll and cut logs like a man, and was much of a woman." Then they had a log rolling on a plantation the Negroes from the neighboring plantations came and worked together until all the jobs were completed.

After each log rolling they gave them molasses to make candy and have a big frolic.

During the Civil War when supplies were scarce, especially salt, Marster John rode off taking her mother's sister Ca'line with him, and when he returned alone his wife, Mrs. Meyers, wanted to know where was Ca'line, and Marster John replied: "I sold her for a sack of salt." At first they did not believe him, but Ca'line never returned and Sarah never saw her sister anymore.

After the Surrender the Yankees came through and the slaves hid under the house, but the soldiers made them come out and told them they were free, and gave the slaves everything on the place to eat. They all went down to the creek and praised God for what he had done for them.

Janie does not believe in charms, hoodoo or fortune-tellers, saying:

"Those folks can't tell you nothing. When Christ was risen He carried all prophets with Him and didn't leave any wise folks able to tell things going to happen here on earth—everything Christ wanted folks to know had already happened."

Janie did say the best charm she knew of was a bag of asafetida worn around the neck to ward off sickness or to take nine or ten drops in a little water would sure keep the worms down.

The slaves got plenty of coons, rabbits and bear meat, and could go fishing on Sundays, as well as turtle hunting.

The overseer on the Myers plantation was not a mean man, they had a calaboose or sweat box to punish unruly slaves in place of whipping them.

After the Surrender her father and mother moved to Mobile, Alabama, and her father continued to work for Mr. Jewett at his mill located at the foot of Palmetto Street on the Mobile river front.