

Jennie Bowen

Interview with Jennie Bowen

—Mary A. Poole, Mobile

NO BELL BRUNGHIM

Jennie Bowen was surrounded by numerous little colored children as I came upon her sitting on her front porch. She answered my questions through a mouth void of teeth and with a constant blinking of her brown eyes with their muddy whites. Her little grand-child had to act to some extent as an interpreter, as her speech was at times most indistinct.

"Yassum, I remembers lots of things dat happened back in de days of de Cibil War," she said. "I remembers de place whar I lived. It were de prettiest house you ever seed. It were on a high hill overlooking a small creek and de flowers 'roun' in de yard was somp'n to see, sho' 'nuff.

"I was bawn in 1847 on Massa Fisher's and Mistis Fisher's plantation near Camden, Alabama. Us

slaves lived in a row of whitewashed cabins in de rear of de big house. We useta have a mean oberseer, white folks, an' all de time dere was slaves on our place a runnin' away.

"I acted as nuss for massa's three chilluns, an' dey learnt me to read an' write. My pappy was named Burl Fisher an' he come f'um Virginny when Cap'n Fisher brung him. My mammy was named Grace Fisher, an' she was 'roun' de big house mos' of de time a weavin' an' a cardin' wool for de slaves, who wo' calico spun in de summer an' wool in de winter.

"An ole nigger man rung a bell for us to get up by, an' to call de fiel' han's in de evenin's. Atter Surrender, dis ole nigger stayed right on de plantation an' was a workin' in de fiel's one day when de Fisher boy rung de bell for de niggers to come in. All of 'em came 'cep'n dis ole man an' later on dey ax him why he don't come when dey ring de bell. He answer: 'Tain't no mo' bell ringin' for dis nigger, 'caze I is free.'



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"De Fishers was Pres'terians an' dey had dere own church on de place. Eve'ybody had to go on Sunday; de white folks sittin' in de front, de colored folks in de back. De onl'es' holidays us niggers had was Chris'mas an' New Years. On dese days us all exchanged gif's.

"My pappy an' mammy atter de war farmed on shares wid Cap'n Fisher. I was ma'ied 'bout dis time, white folks, to Sam Bowen, who long been daid. Us had a big weddin' an' de two Mistis Fishers (Massa's daughters) baked us a cake an' I sont a piece to all my white frien's for dem to dream on. Atter I come to Mobile, I changed my 'ligion to bein' a Babtist.

"I had ten chilluns, but seven of dem is daid. I is even got fo' great gran' chilluns.

"Yassum, us had po' white trash back in dem days of de war. Dey lived near our place, an' some of 'em didn't have no niggers at all. Dey worked deyse'f in de fiel's. Us didn't fool 'long wid dem kinds of people dough, white folks. Us kep' mostly to ourselves.

"Yassum, us house niggers et in de kitchens, dat was separated f'um de main buildin' by a walkway, kivered at de top but not at de sides. All de slave chilluns had a grown nigger woman and a young gal 'bout sixteen to look atter dem. We-alls had a good time an' us was happy an' secure.