

Jim Gillard

Interview with Jim Gillard

—*Preston Klein, Opelika, Alabama*

SOLD AT THREE MONTHS FOR \$350

Jim Gillard was eleven years old when the War between the States began. Thus, the memories of the conflict are fresh; with the retreat from Rome, Ga., to Salem, Ala., as a refugee, transcending the others.

Jim was born on a plantation at Pendleton, S.C., and was sold for \$350 when he was only three months old. He was one of eight children belonging to James and Hannah Gillard.

"Atter bein' sold, I fust lived 'bout three miles from Rome, Ga.," Jim recalled. "Den, when de Yankees come into Georgy us refugeed fust to Atlanta, den to Columbus an' later to Salem. Us was at Salem when de war ended."

Jim remembers catching partridges as a boy, taking them to the train and selling them to Charlie Crowder for ten cents each.

"Game was plentiful in dem days," he said, "an' I never had any trouble catchin' dem birds.

"No'm, our houses wasn't nothin' to brag about. Dey was built of hewn logs an' had slab floors, havin' two rooms an' a shed cook room. Us beds was lak tables, wid four legs nailed on to de sides an' den corded over de top wid ropes dat was tightened wid a big key. Us had shuck mattresses to sleep on.

"Us cooked on a great big fireplace. I 'members dat dere was plenty of meat in de winter, 'ca'se Ol' Marster used to kill as many as thirty hogs at a time. Us had meat an' bread an' home-made light bread an' de white folks was mighty kind. I 'members us was carried to Sunday School every Sunday at 3 o'clock in de evenin'. Ol' Mistus'd teach us de lesson. De white chilluns had dere Sunday School at 9 o'clock in de mornin'."

"I allus went to Sunday School, but on de week days us little niggers would slip off an' go huntin' when we could."

Jim recalls that "de little niggers" ate from tin plates on the plantation; but declared he didn't mind that because the food was always good.

"Yes'm, us had purty good clothes. Dey was dyed brown wid walnut leaves an' hazelnut bush, an' on Sunday us had striped gingham pants an' shoes. My father was de shoemaker an' had a gov'mint tan yard whar he would make ol' hard brogans fer \$8 a pair.

"My marster an' Mistus was Steven an' 'Lizabeth Wilson. Dey fust lived in a big log house, but den moved into a planked house. Dey had nine chillun; Ann, Steven, William, Liza, Humie, Eddie, Laura, Mary an' Lizzie.

"I 'members lots 'bout Mistus 'Lizabeth, 'ca'se she useter read de Bible to us niggers. She would talk to us 'bout de Good Book an' have prayer meetin' wid us.

"My dad useter look atter de fiel' hands. No'm, he war'nt no overseer, but Ol' Marster allus had confidence in him.

"I 'members dat when dey would be a funeral, us'd sing; marchin' befo' de body 'fore us'd get to de grave an' singin', 'Hark come de tune a doleful sound, my years a tender cry; a livin' man come view de ground whar you may shortly lie.'

"Us frolics on Sattidy night was fine an' us'd dance 'twel mos' day. Marster's brother would fiddle for us, an' at Christmas time us would have six days to frolic. Us also had a big time at de cornshuckin's, an' us'd whoop an' holler an' sing mos' all night. De big niggers had plenty of liquor de boss give 'um. High tables was filled up wid corn an' de niggers would shuck 'twel it was all done.

"My aunt married up at de big house an' dey give her a big dance. Dey had de fiddle and had a great big time. Dey jes' jumped over de broom to marry, so atter slavery dey had to git married agin.

"I acted as houseboy in slavery times. An' all de little niggers did have lots of fun.

"When de slaves got ailin', I 'members dat Marster had Dr. Word an' Dr. Dunwoody to come to see us.

"I 'members, too, how de Yankees come to Spring Villa, 'bout eight miles from Opelika, an' said to some mens, 'Halt'. De mens wouldn't stop so de Yankees throwed dey guns on dem. Two white ladies threw a white flag an' dey wouldn't shoot, but dey carried Mr. John Edwards to Spring Villa an' made a cross on his wrist; den turned him loose 'ca'se his wife was rale sick.

"When de Yankees come, us niggers buried a cigar box wid de jewelry in it under a certain pine tree 'twel dey went on.

"Atter de big war, I married Jane Davis fust time; den Carrie Cooper. Us had two chillun an' one gran' chile, Emanuel Trotter, ten year' old.

"Yassu'm, Mr. Abraham Lincoln died a warrior for dis country. I b'longs to de church, 'ca'se if a man dies outter de Ark he is not saved, an' I wants to be saved.