

## Martha Jackson

### Interview with Martha Jackson

*Ruby Pickens Tartt, Livingston, Alabama*

#### *HEAPS OF DEM YALLER GALS GOT SONT NORF*

"When de War fus' started," said Martha Jackson, who was born in 1850, "dey wouldn't let none of de cullud people go to chu'ch 'thout dey had a pass, and mighty few white folkses would give 'em a pass. Dere was a heap of men (hit mou't have been six or twelve, my recollection is short, but anyhow 'twas jus' a big crowd) whut went back'erds en ferwerds jes' lack sher'fs and de calls de'se'fs de 'Patterrollers.' Ef de white folks give de niggers a pass, den dey could go, and ef dey was to go'thout one, dem Patterrollers would have 'em a-runnin' thoo de woods jes' lack dey was a lot of deer, an ef dey ever cotch 'em, dey'd take 'em to dey Marster and he'd jes' natchelly wear 'em out!

"Den dey didn't 'low 'em for to go nowhurs much, eben when de plantation j'ined one ernudder did, dey'd ketch 'em over dere and fetch 'em back and dey'd git whooped ag'in, and dat's 'zackly how come a heap uv 'em run'd away. I knowed a nigger onc't whut was gone nigh 'bout a year, and he wa'n't gone nowhur but right up de big road a piece, livin' in a cave whut he dug outer de side uv a clay bank. And Miss Betty say, 'Marthy, whur you reckon Dan at?' And I never said nothin'. De Patterrollers couldn't fine him or nobody, and he ain't never showed hisse'f in daylight 'tel he peered up atter de S'render.

"And I knowed a woman name Tishie, Miss Mollie's house sarvant. She run away 'case dey so mean to her, I reckon, and de cullud folks harbored her and hid her up in de grain house wid de peas and sech lac', steddin' down in de corn crib. And who ever 'twas 'trayed her I ain't sayin' but a crowd uv dem Patterrollers come and got 'er one night, and tuck her away, and I ain't nebber seed Tishie no mo'.

"And one uv Ole Marsa's niggers—'little boy' he go by—he tuck on might'ly, 'case dey say he wanted to marry Tishie. I know he fotch her up in de quarter fer ter git her sumpin' to eat atter de white folks done sleep. But couldn't nobody marry, 'twa'n't 'lowed, 'outer one or t'other uv de Ole Marsa 'greed to buy bofe uv 'em and ef dey didn't 'gree you sho' better keep 'way fum dey place. And Ole Marsa and Miss Mollie didn't nebber 'gree.

"I hear some uv 'em say one dem Patterrollers had 'bout three sets er cullud chillun over dere, and some uv 'em favor'd Tishie, and ev'y time hit come time fer 'em yaller gals ter work in de fiel', dey got sarnt Norf. I reckon 'case he never wanted see his own blood git beat up, and dat Jim Barton was er cru'l overseer, sho's yer bawn.

"'Twas a heap of dem yaller gals got sarnt Norffrum 'roun' here sho' was."

Martha says most of the meanness of pre-war days on the plantations may be charged up to cruel overseers.

"Ole Marsa's wife's sister had a husband whut kep' de meanest overseer durin' de war dat I ever is seed," she declares. "Dat man would make 'em niggers on de plantation plow up a gre't big fiel' big as all over yonder and den check hit fer corn. And checkin' corn in runnin' a straight row clean 'cross de fiel' bofe ways, and hit make a check 'bout two feet square. Den he'd make de niggers drap a grain uv corn right in de middle uv ev'y check, and ef hit didn't come up straight as deese here fingers on my han', he'd snatch hit up and make 'em eat hit right den and dere, stalk and all 'thout ever bilin' hit a anything. And that'll mighty ne'r th'ow you in de middle uv a spell uv sickness sho's yo' bawn.

"But dat didn't make no diffe'ns to dat man. And stidder dat, he'd nigh 'bout beat 'em ter deaf ef dey 'sputed his word 'bout hit, but den dey didn't 'spute, 'case dey was so skeered when dey drappin' hit dat hit ain't gwinter come up straight lack he say, dat dey couldn't drap hit good as dey could uv drapped hit. 'Case dey so skeered dey couldn't.

"Dem niggers jes' natchelly shuck lack dey havin' de black ague chill soon as dey heered him a-comin'. And when de Patterroles tole him de niggers was a-risin', 'case dey foun' papers 'bout in de cabins, he nigh 'bout kilt 'em. Some of dem niggers run 'way down in de woods lack deers and clam' up in de trees, 'case he sot dogs on 'em and some uv 'em stayed in a cave in de clay bank and tuck to comin' up to us house nights after vittles. And dat overseer man would send 'em Patterrollers jes' lack dey was de sher'f down to fotch 'em back, and he'd say, 'Dead or alive, doan' make no diffe'nce.' And sometimes dem dogs be done nigh 'bout chewed dem niggers up. Den he'd whoop 'em sho' 'nuff.

"'Twas a long and a wide stiff leather strop w'at he had whut hung back uv his do', and hit had big roun' holes in hit, and he'd git him a pot of warm salty water and set hit down by his side. Den he had 'em cotch de nigger and put his feet in de long block, and somebody helt dey han's, and he strip 'em stark naked, and he stretch 'em 'cross a log, and he dip de long stiff leather strop wid de roun' holes in hit in de briny salt water, and den look out 'case he comin' down on dat po' nigger's nekkid bottom. De holes in de strop dey sucks flesh up in th'oo 'em, and de nigger's a hollerin' and ev'ybody so skeered dey right ashy, and dey can't nobody say a mumblin' word 'case dey so skeered.



*Martha Jackson, [TR: Livingston?], Alabama*

"Lawdy, Lawdy, dem was tribbolashuns! Wunner dese here 'omans was my Antie and she say dat she skacely call to min' he e'r whoopin' her, 'case she was a breeder woman, and brought in chillun ev'y twelve mont's jes' lack a cow bringin' in a calf. And she say, dat whut make her mo' val'ble to her Ole Marster. He orders she can't be put to no strain 'casen uv dat. And she say she give him praise on his gretty grave fer dat. But dem others he worked 'em day en night, Sad'dy en Sunday too you'se sho' ter hear dem women uv er night battin' de clo'es on er log in creek wid de stick.

"But fo' long dat man tuck rale sick, en he b'lieved in conjurashun but spite everything he done he got worser en worser and fo' long he died.

"So dey sarnt down in de woods and all over de plantation er lookin' fer de niggers to come to de Big House 'case dey overseer was dead. And here dey comes a-shoutin' and a-clappin' dey han's and a-holl'rin' sumpin' awful.

Ole John Bell is de'd en gone

I hopes he's gone to hell!

"En dat was de onles' time I's ever seen dem niggers happy on dat plantation 'tel atter s'render.