

Molly Ammond (Ammonds)

Interview with Molly Ammond (Ammonds)

—*Gertha Couric*

JESUS HAS MY CHILLUN COUNTED

I walked along a dusty road under the blazing sun. In the shade of a willow tree a Negro man was seated with his legs drawn up and his arms crossed upon his knees. His head rested face downward upon his arms, as he had the aspect of one in deep slumber. Beside him munching on a few straggly weeds, a cantankerous mule took little notice of his surroundings.

"Can you tell me where Aunt Molly Ammonds lives?" I asked in a loud voice. The Negro stirred slowly, finally raising his head, and displaying three rabbit teeth, he accompanied his answer with a slight gesture of his hand.

"Yassuh, dar her house raght across de road; de house wid de climbin' roses on hit."

"Thank you," I said.

"Yassuh," was the drawled response, and the Negro quickly resumed his former posture.

Aunt Molly Ammonds is as gentle as a little child. Her voice is soft and each phrase measured to the slow functionings of her aged mind.



Molly Ammond (Ammonds), Eufaula, Alabama

"Honey," she said, "you ain't gwinter believe dis, but I is de mammy of thirty chilluns. Jesus got 'em counted an' so is me. I was born in a log cabin dat had a loft, an' it was on Marse Lee Cato's plantation five miles wes' of Eufaula. My pappy's name was Tobe Cato an' my mammy's was Sophia. I had one sister, Marthy, an' two brothers, Bong and Toge. My pappy made all de furniture dat went in our house an' it were might' good furniture too. Us useta cook on de fiahplace. Us would cook ash cakes. Dey was made outen meal, water and a little pinch of lard; on Sundays dey was made outen flour, buttermilk an' lard. Mammy would rake all de ashes out de fiahplace, den kivver de cake wid de hot ashes an' let it cool till it was done.

"Yas Missy," she continued, "I recollects dat I was 'bout twelve or fo'teen when de s'render come, kaze a little atter dat I ma'ied Pastor Ammonds. We walked ober to Georgetown an' it was de fus' time I eber had shoes, and I got dem fum ole Massa. I remembers dat I ma'ied in a striped calico dress."

"Aunt Molly," I said, "you're getting a little ahead of your story, tell me something about your plantation life before the war."

"Well, honey, Massa Lee's place was 'bout three miles long an' two miles wide, and we raised cotton, cawn, 'taters and all sorts of vegetables. We had a mean oberseer dat always wanted to whup us, but massa wouldn't 'llo no whuppin'. Sometimes de massa whould ride over de place on a hoss, an' when he come up on de oberseer a-fussin' at a nigger, Massa say, 'Don't talk rough to dat nigger when he doin' de bes' he can.'

"My pappy had a little garden of his own back of his cabin, an' he raised some chickens for us to eat, an' we had aigs nearly ev'y mornin'.

"De only work I done on de plantation was to nuss some little niggers when dere mammy an' pappy was in de fiel's. Twarn't hard.

"Nawsuh! I ain't never seed no slave in chains. Massa Lee was a good man. He had a church built called de brush house, dat had a flo' and some seats, an' a top made outen pine boughs, an' massa's pa, Mr. Cato, would preach eve'y Sunday. We sung songs lak 'I Heered De Voice of Jesus Say,' an' 'I'se Gwine to Die no Mo.' We was all babtized in de creek, but none of us was taught to read or write.

"No-suh, I ain't never seed no slave run away. Us was treated fine. Our folks was quality. We had plenty som'n t'eat, but dem slaves hadda work powerful hard though. Atter dey come home fum de fiel's dey was so tired dat dey go raght to sleep, except when de massa had barbecues. Christmas was de big time; dere was several days to res' an' make merryin' an' lots of dem no count niggers got drunk.

"When us slaves was sick, Massa Lee would send to Eufaula to fetch Dr. Thornton to give us some medicine. We had de bes' treatment ever.

"Yassuh, white folks, dem days is long ago. All my chilluns done died or wandered away an' my ole man been dead goin' on twenty years. I been here a long time by myself."

"Aunt Molly," I interrupted. "There's one thing I've always been wanting to ask one of you ex-slaves, and that is: what you thought of people like Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis and Booker T. Washington."

A puzzled expression came of the face of the old Negro. "White folks," she said after a moments deliberation, "I don't believes I is had de pleasure of meetin' dem gent'mens.