

## Theodore Fontaine Stewart

### Interview with Theodore Fontaine Stewart

—Gertha Couric, [HW: Eufaula]

#### *US GWINE 'ER WALK DEM GOLD STREETS*

"De years are mighty long widout Lottie, Massa. She done gone on to de promise; but I knows she wid Jesus. And us gwine 'er walk dem golden streets together holdin' hands."

Uncle Theodore Fontaine Stewart lives alone in a weather-beaten, one-room Eufaula shanty. It is clean and surrounded by flowers. In the rear is a small garden; and there you will find Uncle Stewart when the dawn is fresh or the dusk is coolly approaching.

"Lottie been gone away nigh onto twenty-two year now, Massa. Her was a good woman; one of de best de Lord ever sont to de earth."

He paused to think when the interviewer asked his age.

"It hard fer me to tell 'bout dat," he said, "but I knows I'se well past de ninety mark. I guess I'se gwine on a hundred, caze I was borned 'fore de war an' was a right peart boy at de surrender."

"What about slavery times, Uncle Stewart?"

He mused a moment, his black fingers gently caressing the buttons on his rust-colored old vest.

"I 'members all 'bout dem times," he said, "an' de Lord know dey was better times den we got now, for white or black. Nobody was hongry den, Massa, and peoples didn't git in de devilment dey gits in now. Folks went to de church an' 'haved demselves in dose days.

"Who was my Ol' Marster?" He looked at the interviewer a moment, answered proudly, "Why, he was de riches' man in Georgy. I knows you has heard of Marse Theodore Fontaine. He had three big plantations and mo' niggers dan he could count. He moved clost to Florence, an' his three places was so big you couldn't see 'crost de littlest field.

"Ol' Marster he lib in a big house, bigger dan any meetin'-house in Eufaula. He had a gang of fine horses, an' when company was dar he had horse races on his own track. His horses could beat all de horses brought dar, an' dat's de direc' trufe."

Uncle Stewart filled a blackened old corncob pipe with tobacco, continued:

"Ol' Marster, he didn't go to de war. He too ol' to go, so he stay home an' make corn an' fodder an' oats an' sen' dem to de soldiers what killin' Yankees. One day de Yankees come along an' burnt up everything on de place, 'cept de nigger cabins. Dey took all de horses and everything us had to eat.

"Ol' Marster went off somewhar when dey come; I don't 'member where; an' when he come back he had to live in one of de nigger cabins 'twel he could build a house. But de new one wasn't big lak de old one.

"My pappy was a fiel' han' 'twel one time Ol' Marster put him on a horse to ride in a race, an' pappy beat de other horse so far Ol' Marster was tickled pink. He said a nigger what could ride lak dat had no bizness in de fiel', so he made a stable boy outen pappy.



*Theodore Fontaine Stewart, Eufaula, Alabama*

"Ol' Marster didn't have no Ol' Mistus. He say he so big all de little ladies look funny 'side of him. When company was dar his sisters, Mistus Mary an' Mistus Lucy, come an' kep' house; but dey lef' when de company did.

"My pappy was name Ed Stewart, caze Ol' Marster buy him from a Stewart. Atter de war dey call pappy's chilluns Stewart; but us is Fontaines by right, bet yo' life on dat.

"Ol' Marster was good to de niggers, but his overseers was mean. Ol' Marster fired dem atter awhile an' got some good overseers. He didn't 'low dem to whip a nigger 'cept when he say, an' he didn't say so much.

"My mammy was name Sarah, an' her an' pappy stayed right wid Ol' Marster when de surrender come. Dey was right in de room when Ol' Marster died, an' dey cried something awful. Us all stayed dar 'twel pappy an' mammy die; den us chilluns split up an' went everywhere.

"Mammy an' pappy had ten head o' chilluns sides me, but I don' know whar dey at now. Mammy raise all her chilluns right, an', long as I knowed dem, none of dem ever got in a jailhouse.

"Mammy didn't 'low her chilluns to steal. Her was Ol' Marster's house cook, an' when she kotch any of us takin' things from de kitchen, she sho' did tan us hides wid a brush.

"Me an' Carlotta; us calls her Lottie; was married in de ol' Mount Maria church, whar all de niggers went to meetin' every Sunday. Us had fo' chillun, two gals an' two boys; but dey all dead now 'cept de las' boy, an I ain't heard frum him since 'fore his mammy died.

"Yes, Massa, her was a good woman. It won't be long now 'fore us will walk dem golden streets han' in han'."