

Tony Morgan

From record of a conversation in 1884

—*Francois L. Diard, Mobile, Alabama*

A SLAVE INTERVIEWS A SLAVE

George Washington extolling the virtues of a plain, homespun suit—granite-jawed Andrew Jackson defying the British at Pensacola—horror and massacre at Alabama's old Fort Mims—savages skulking near the fort, their bronzed bodies glistening in the hot August sunlight.

These were among memories of parchment-skinned Uncle Tony Morgan, who was interviewed on Oct. 1, 1884 by Jim Thomas, another slave, and a record of the conversation held in the files of a family in Old Mobile, Alabama. Uncle Tony was 105 years old then.

The story is told by Thomas, former slave of the Diard family. Uncle Tony was the slave of Mobile Judge H. Toulmin, grandfather of the later Judge H. T. Toulmin, who was appointed a judge by President Jefferson.

According to Jim Thomas, Uncle Tony told him:

"Did I knowed Gen'l Andrew Jackson? Lord bless you honey, why, I knowed him and remember Gen'l George Washington afore him."

Uncle Tony explained that he accompanied General Jackson when the war-loving Tennessean marched from Mobile against Pensacola in 1814. He said he was serving as a wagoner, and remembered distinctly that the British surrendered on November 6. He recalled that, during the battle, Jackson was standing talking with a group of officers when an enemy shell exploded near him.

"Move away, general," the old Negro quoted one of the officers as saying, "they'll kill you!"

And Jackson replied in a characteristic manner:

"Damn 'em—I'll have 'em all in hell tomorrow!"

Concerning George Washington, Uncle Tony told Jim Thomas that the great American leader visited the town of Frankfort, Ky., and while there made an address. He wore a home-spun suit, which he pointed out as an example of what people might do in utilizing their products.

Frankfort was highly excited when Washington arrived in the city, and Uncle Tony told of a tiny urchin exclaiming with bitter disappointment in his voice:

"Why, Pa, he ain't nothing but a man!"

Uncle Tony's memory of what occurred at Fort Mims was vivid, according to Jim Thomas. The older slave related that he was one of many Negroes in the fort at the time. He said the defenders had been sleeping off a night of dissipation the morning William Weatherford's warriors attacked.

Men, women and children were butchered in the ensuing slaughter and the buildings were fired. The massacre continued until noon, Uncle Tony said, when the Indians retreated with scalps and several Negro prisoners to their camping site, called the Holy Ground. Here, the half-starved Negroes lived in constant dread that they would be butchered by war-inflamed Creeks.

Uncle Tony also recalled carrying the mail from Fort Stoddert, in Alabama, through the State and Mississippi. On several occasions he barely escaped being scalped by Indians, he said.

The old Negro related further that his father was a wagoner under Cornwallis when that general surrendered to Washington at Yorktown.

Concerning his age and birthplace, Uncle Tony told Thomas he was born in Danville, Ky., about 1779. He went to Mobile in 1805 with Judge Toulmin.

At the time of the interview the old slave was extremely feeble and lame, and walked with the aid of a cane. His skin was dried and wrinkled, and cataracts on his eyes had totally deprived him of his sight. Despite these handicaps, however, Thomas said the old man's mind was exceptionally clear, and his recollection of events occurring almost a century before were remarkable.