

Wade Owens

Interview with Wade Owens

—*Preston Klein, Opelika, Alabama*

WADE OWENS HEARD ABE LINCOLN SPEAK

The Reverend Wade Owens of Opelika was born in Loachapoka, Alabama, in 1863 and just missed slavery, but he has heard his homefolks talk so much about freeing the Negroes, he feels as if he was grown then. His mother and father, Wade and Hannah Owens, came from Virginia and moved into "Jenks Quarters" on the Berry Owens place. They had several children, Wade, Nettie, Chance, Anderson and Iowa. Wade used to help drive up the cows. This cabin was of logs, mud and sticks with leaf and mud chimneys and slab floors. The beds fitted into the wall with plank sides, two posts with planks nailed on top, resembling tables. A box served as a dresser.

"All ash-cakes were cooked on poplar an' chestnut leaves, when dey roasted taters," Wade says. "Us chillun used to go early in de mornin' an' lick de honey offen de leaves for sweets den. Us didn't wear nothin' but our long shirts, an' us had homemade hats and brogans, hard as bricks with brass caps on de toes. I thought dey was de prettiest things I ever seed.

"Marsa Berry an' Miss Fanny Owens was good to us niggers. My daddy was de carriage driver for Miss Fanny, but take keer of dat man Ben Boddy, the overseer. He was de meanes' man God ever put life in. He wouldn't let us have no fire, matter not how cold, us had to work jes' de same or de nigger hounds 'ud sho' get you. Iffen not dog caught, dey would beat you to death nearly. He was so mean marsa run him off. Dey blew de risin' horn an' us worked from daylight 'twell dark or frum can to can't.

"Marsa had a pretty two-story log house, big columns an' big porch. He had 'bout two or three hundred acres an' worked 'bout three hundred slaves. Us had a jail an' locked runaways in hit. Brother Lockhart used to preach to us niggers in de white church at Lebanon an' us walked to hit.

"My daddy was sold fer \$160. When dey put chains on de niggers dey was put 'roun' de legs and arms an' to a post. Dey took pains to ho'p my mammy an' pappy to learn. Dey would teach de Bible to 'em too. Marsa used to sing dem good ole songs, 'My heart frum de tomb, a doleful sound. My ears attend to cry,' and 'Amazing grace how sweet it sounds.'

"At baptising dey'd give de water invitation an' den go in water. An' didn't dey come out happy, shouting and praying? Ol' man Buck could hear dem two miles off, but hit was a glorious baptising.

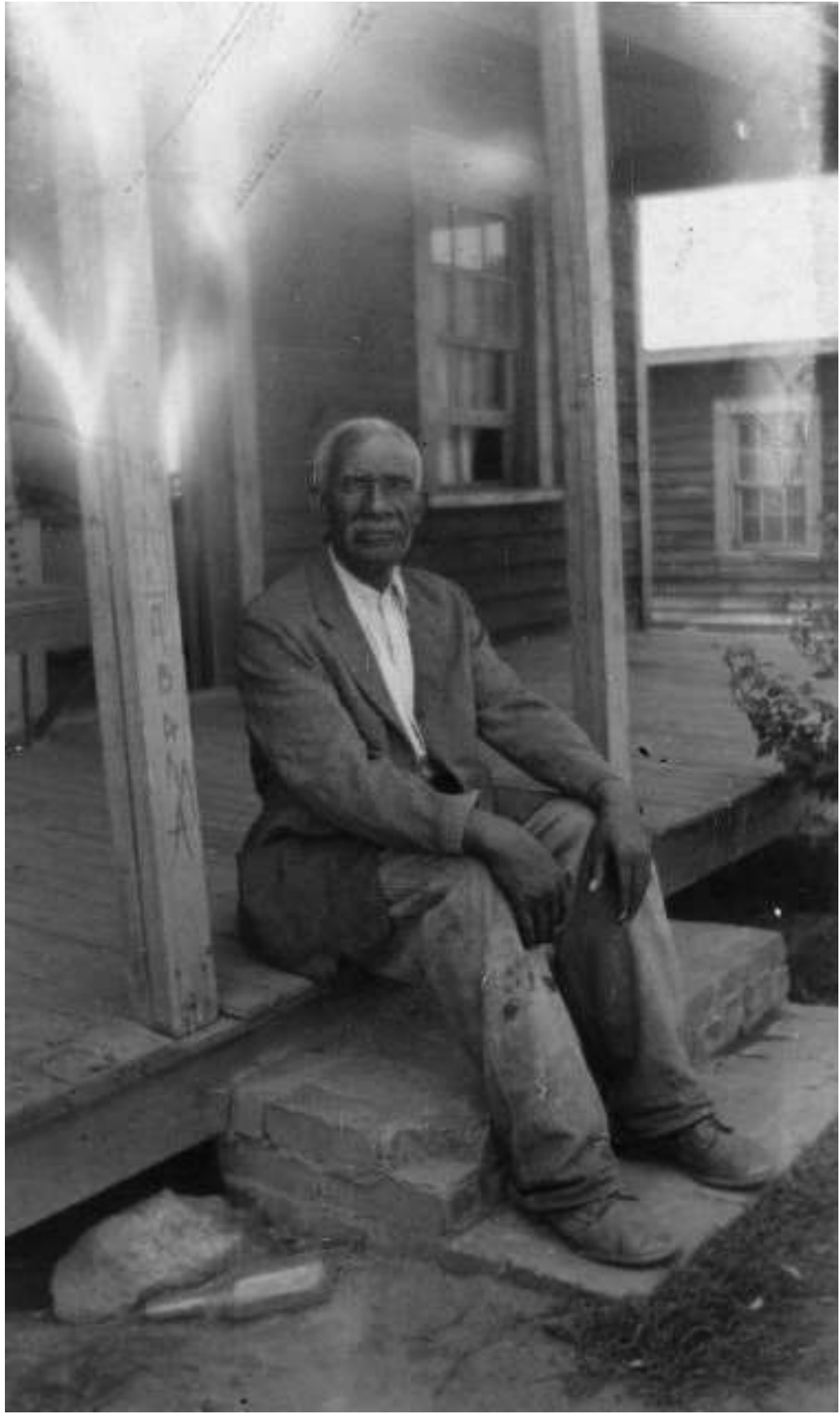
"All de hands stopped when dey was a funeral an' didn't work no mo' 'till de body was buried. All de whites would go too. Dey would make de boxes, pour hot water over de plank to shape it up into a

casket, den take turpentine an' smut to paint it. Den another big time, settin' up wid de dead, sing, shout an' holler an' try to preach.

"De patrollers would come to de colored frolic, an' one time a han' slipped off an', gentlemen, didn't he give 'em trouble to ketch him, an' dey didn't. When dey had dem Saddy night frolics an' dance all night long an' nearly day when hit was goin, dey would turn de pot upside down in de floor to hold de soun' in. My daddy pick de banjo. At de cornshuckings dey'd sing 'All 'Roun' de Corn Pile Sally,' an' dey had whiskey an' gin. Us had good time on Chris'mas, give us toys, syrup candy, light bread an' grape wine.

"My brother married up at de Big House an' dey giv' him a big dance an' marsa made me drunk. 'Twas fust one den t'other giv' it to me an' knocked me out. Dey had de preacher an' didn't jump de broom. Dey had de preacher so would be tied good. Dey would tell us chillun all kinds of ghos' stories 'bout witches gittin' outter dey skins. Us had free jumping grapevine ropes an' mumble peg. One night I was at Notasulga an' I heerd some singing. I stopped an' hit was right at my feet an' would go futher off. I took out wid hit an' hit kept stoppin' an' startin' off ag'in 'twell hit giv' out entirely. I looked to see where I was an' I was at de cemetery an' nothin' didn't bother me neither. I eased out an' shut de gate an' never foun' whut carried me dere.

"When us 'ud git sick, dey would bleed you, stick somp'n in your arm and draw de blood. Den dey would giv' us scurrygrass and fever weed. Bone-set was use' as teas for colds an' fever to sweat you. An' hit sho' would sweat you, too. Marsa said war was comin' an' thought hit was to free us. Pappy went to war with young marsa an' stayed 'twell he got killed.



Rev. Wade Owens, Opelika, Alabama

"Dey hid de carriage horses, meat, silver an' plates. Yankees asked iffen marsa was good, an' us said yes. Dey searched de smokehouse an' some scraps no good an' nothin' but scrappy horses so dey didn't bother a thing. Us stayed one year an' worked on one-eighth farm. The Ku Klux Klan was turrible. One John Lyons would cut off a woman's breast an' a man's ear or thumb.

"Atter I got growed I married Leila Benford at Mr. Lockhart's house, an' us had a nice little frolic, wid cake, syrup pudding an' wine. It was a fine night wid me, 'caze all kissed de bride. Us had fourteen children, jes' eight living, Minnie, Wade, Robert, Walter, Viola, Joe, Jim and Johnnie, an' ten grand-chilun.

"I heered Abraham Lincoln speak once at Chicaumagee Mountain an' he said 'For people, by people, and through people.' I always 'membered dat. I jined de church 'caze I got converted."