

Wadley "Shorty" Clemons

Interview with Wadley "Shorty" Clemons

—*G.L. Clark*

He was bent over the lawn, carefully trimming the border into a neat line. A small black figure in overalls, clean but worn blue chambray shirt, the misshapen remains of shoes and a nondescript hat, from under which protruded thin white sideburns.

"Good morning, Uncle," I said, "Mr. Lee was telling me about you. He said you lived back in slavery times. Is that right?"

"Yes suh, I sho' did. I'll be 92 years old de second of August, and I was a slave for 20 year. I had a good ole massa and mistis, de bes' dere was. Ole massa was a great big man, an' he wa'n't scared of nothin' dey was. He wouldn't go nowhere without me. He always took me wid him. My grandma was a cook and my ma was a house girl.

"We lived in Pine Hill, a summer resort in Jefferson County, Georgia, across the river from Louisville. From home we could look over and see de people walkin' about in Louisville.



Wadley (Shorty) Clemons, [TR: Village Springs?], Alabama

"I remembers de day de Yankees come to Louisville. We could see them goin' about from one house to anudder, settin' fire. Den dey come on to de river and sot fire to de bridge. Dey wouldn't use our bridge. Dey built dese here pontoon bridges and dey could build dem before you could look away and look back. Den dey come across de river to Pine Hill.

"Ole massa had his hosses an' mules hid down in de swamp but my uncle Tom went and got 'em an' brung 'em to de Yankees at de big gate. He didn't had to do it. He was jes' mean. He hadn't been much good to massa since de war commenced; lay off in de swamp mos' of de time. Arter he brung massa's hosses an' mules to de Yankees he went wid dem into massa's bedroom and dey jes' throwed massa and mistis close all outa' de closet and wardrobe and he give em' mistis gold yearings and bracelets and dey took de yearings and put dem on de hosses' years and put de bracelets on de hosses' ankles.

"Ole massa was sittin' on de long porch smokin' one of dese Meerschaum pipes wid a stem way so long and dat pipe was white as snow. He had a big can of tobacco on de table in front of him. In dem days people made dey own tobacco and I wisht I had some of it now.

"Massa had 'bout thutty fattening hogs and de Yankees jes' went in de pen and cut dem hogs in two. He had jes' lots of turkeys and guineas an' de Yankees shot dem down. He had thutty hives of bees in one long row an' one Yankee run up to de firs' hive an jump in it head first, and de bees stung him till he died. De udders pull him out and took him to de well and poured water over him but he stayed dead so dey just dug a hole down by the side of the road and bury him in it. Yessir, dat's de trufe!

"Dey stayed dere all night and camped out and cooked massa's good smoked meat and burnt down de barns and done all de devilment dey could. I couldn't see no use in dere doin' what dey did, but dat's what dey done.

"Massa had 71 slaves when dey was made free. De next county wasn't fit for much farming and atter we was freed my Uncle Andy went dere an' bought a place. De land sold for 50 cents de acre atter de timber was cut off. Uncle Andy had a brudder Sam and Sam had a steer. Dey plowed wid de steer.

"Uncle Andy worked at de sawmill in daytime an' at night he cut two cords of wood before he go to bed. He make two bales of cotton de first year and de next year he make four. Den he tuk up preachin'. He was a Methodist preacher.

"Den ole massa die and ole mistis lose all her land. Uncle Andy was right good fixed so he took keer of her a year or more 'fore she died. Den when she died, he went to pay all de expenses of de funeral but de white folks won't let him kase dey say he done his share already.

"My massa's name was William Clemons and dey name me Wadley for ole man Wadley, de president of de Center Road.

"Dem days is gone a long time an' I still heah, but dey was good times den. I had plenty to eat, plenty close to wear and when I gets sick, ole massa come to give me some medicine and I don't need no doctor.

"People worship God in dem days and not bother wid church houses so much. Ev'ry Sunday ole massa get out by de back do' and teach us Sunday school. Den we cut tree limbs and make brush arbors for

preaching. In de summer atter crops been laid by, us all, black and white, go to camp meetin' and stay a week. De white preacher preach on one side and de nigger on de udder. We carry lots of vittles and feed everybody. Niggers sho' was better off in slavery times."