

ANDREW (Smoky) COLUMBUS was born in 1859 on the John J. Ellington plantation, one mile south of Linden, Texas. He continued in the service of the Ellingtons until about 1878, when he moved to Jefferson, Texas. He carried meals to Abe Rothchild, who was in jail, charged with the murder of Diamond Bessie Moore. Andrew was 37 years a servant of Hon. Tom Armistead, and was a porter in the Capital at Austin when Armistead was a senator. Andrew now lives in Marshall, Texas.

"I was bo'n a slave of Master John Ellington, who lived in Davis County (now Cass Co.), Texas. Master John had a big house and close by was a long, double row of slave quarters. It looked like a town. There was four boys and two girls in Master's fam'ly and one daughter, Miss Lula, married Lon Morris, that run the Lon Morris School.

"Master John was one white man that sho' took care of his niggers. He give us plenty wa rm clothes and good shoes, and come see us and had Dr. Hume doctor us when we was sick. The niggers et ham and middlin' and good eats as anybody. Master John's place joined the Haggard place, where they was lots of wild turkey and the slaves could go huntin' and fishin' when they wanted.

"We had a church and a school for the slaves and the white folks helped us git book learnin'. Mos' of the niggers allus went to preachin' on Sunday.

"The hands didn't work Saturday afternoons. That's when we'd wash our clothes and clean up for Sunday. There was parties and [Pg 247] dances on Saturday night for them as wanted them. But there wasn't no whiskey drinkin' and fightin' at the parties. Mammy didn't go to them. She was religious and didn't believe in dancin' and sech like. On Christmas Master John allus give the slaves a big dinner and it didn't seem like slavery time. The niggers had a sight better time than they do now.

"Master John did all the bossin' hisself. None of his niggers ever run off 'cause he was too good for them to do that. I only got one whippin' from him and it was for stealin' eggs from a hen's nest. My pappy was carriage driver for Master. I didn't do much of the work when I was a boy, jes' stayed round the house.

"Master John raised lots of cotton and after it was baled he hauled it to Jefferson on ox wagons. I'd allus go with him, ridin' on top of the bales. I'll never forgit how scared I was when we'd cross Black Cypress on Roger's Ferryboat and it'd begin to rock.

"I don't remember much about the War. When it was over Master John calls all his slaves together and says, 'You'se free now and you can go or stay.' He told the men who wanted to leave they could have a wagon and team, but most of them stayed. Pappy took a wagon and team and left but mammy and us children stayed and lived with Master Ellington 'bout 15 years after the war was over.

"When I left Master John I moved to Jefferson and married Cora Benton and we had three boys and two girls. While I was in Jefferson Sheriff Vine goes to Cincinnati after Abe Rothchild, for killin' 'Diamond

Bessie.' Abe shot hisself in the forehead when he heared Sheriff[Pg 248] Vine was after him, but it didn't kill him. There was sho' some stirrin' about when the sheriff fotch Abe back to Jefferson.

"Mr. Sam Brown was the jailer. Abe wouldn't eat the jail food and hired me to bring his meals to him from the hotel. His cell was fixed up like a hotel room, with a fine brussels rug and nice tables and chairs. He kep' plenty of whiskey and beer to drink. He'd allus give me a drink when I took his meals.

"I worked 37 years for Mr. Tom Armistead, who helped W.T. Crawford and his brother defend Rothchild. Mr. Eppenstadt, he was mayor of Jefferson then and acted as a go-between man in the case.

"Master Tom Armistead never married and I kep' house and cooked for him. He give me lots of fine clothes. I bet I owned more fine shirts than any nigger in Texas. He got me a job as porter in the Capitol at Austin while he was senator. I was workin' there when they moved in the new Capitol in 1888. They was gonna put on a big party and say all the porters had to wear cutawaysuits. I didn't have one, so the day 'fore the party I goes over to Mr. Tom's room at the Bristol Hotel and git one of his. I didn't know then it was a right new one he had made for the party. When I goes back to the Capitol all dressed up in that cutawaysuit, I meets Mr. Templeton Houston and he recognises the suit and says. 'You sho' look fine in Mr. Tom's new suit,' 'bout that time Mr. Tom walks up and, you know, he give me that suit and had him another one made for the party! I wouldn't live where there wasn't no good white folks. [Pg 249]