



**Issabella Boyd**

**ISSABELLA BOYD was born a slave of Gus Wood, in Richmond, Va., who moved to Texas by boat before the Civil War. Isabella still lives in Beaumont.**

"Lemme see, I come from Richmond, Virginy, to Texas. Massa Gus Wood was my owner and I kin recollect my white folks. I's born in dat country and dey brought me over to Richmond and my papa and mama, too. I was jus' 'bout big 'nough to begin to 'member.

"I come from Richmond yere on de boat, sometime de steamboat, sometime de big boat. When we left New Orleans dat evenin' we struck a big storm. Us git on dat boat in Richmond and went floatin' down to de big boat dat mornin'. Looks like it jus' fun for us, but every time we look back and think 'bout home it make us sad.

"I had a dear, good mistus and my boss man, he furnish a house for he servants, a purty good house. And dey had a place for de Sunday School. Dem was good times. De mistus cook dinner and send it down for de old folks and chillen to have plenty.

"My mistus kep' me right in de house, right by her, sewing. I could sew so fast I git my task over 'fore de others git started good.

"Lots of times when de gals wants to go to de dance I he'p make de dresses. I 'member de pretties' one like yesterday. It have tucks from de waist to de hem and had diamonds cut all in de skirt. [Pg 115]

"Our boss man was 'ticular 'bout us being tended to and we was well took care of. He brung us to Beaumont when it was de plumb mud hole, and he settle down and try to build up and make it a go.

"Massa Wood he allus takes de paper and one night they set up da long time and do dey readin'. Next mornin' de old cook woman, she say, 'Well, dey have de big war, and lots of dem wounded.' Befo' long us has to take care of some dem wounded soldiers, and dey has de camp place near us. Dey all camp 'round dere and I don't know which was de Yankees and de 'federates.

"When we all gits free, dey's de long time lettin' us know. Dey wants to git through with de corn and de cotton befo' dey let's de hands loose. Dey was people from other plantations say. 'Niggers, you's free and yere you workin'.' Us say, 'No, de gov'ment tell us when we's free.' We workin' one day when somebody from Massa Grissom place come by and tell us we's free, and us stop workin'. Dey tell us to go on workin' and de boss man he come up and he say he gwine knock us off de fence if we don't go to work. Mistus come out and say, 'Ain't you gwine make dem niggers go to work?' He send her back in de house and he call for de carriage and say he goin' to town for to see what de gov'ment goin' do. Nex' day he come back and say, 'Well, you's jus' as free as I is.'

"He say to me I could stay and cook for dem, and he give me five dollar a month and a house to stay in and all I kin eat. I stays de month to do dere work. [Pg 116]

"After dat I wishes sometimes dat old times is back 'gain. I likes to be free, but I wasn't used to it and it was hard to know how to do. I 'members de dances we has in de old times, when we makes de music with banjo and other things. Some de good massas 'lowed de niggers dance in de back yard and if we goes over dere without de pass de patterroles gits us maybe. One time my papa he runnin' from dem patterroles and he run slap into de young massa and he say, 'Oh, you ain't no nigger, I kin tell by de smell.'

"Dat mind me of de ghost story dey used to tell 'bout de ghosties what live in de big bridge down in de hollow. De niggers daysay dat ghostie make too much noise, with all he hollerin' and he rattlin' dem chain. So dat night one us niggers what dey call Charlie, he say he ain't 'fraid and he gwineter git him a ghostie, sho' 'nough. Us didn't believe him but purty soon us hears right smart wrastlin' with de chains and hollerin' down by de bridge and after 'while he come and say he git de best of dat ghostie, 'cause he ain't got strength like de man.

"Me and my old man us have twelve chillens altogedder. My husban' he come from South Car'lina whar dey eats cottonseed. I used to joke him 'bout it. I allus say Virginny de best, 'cause I come from dere. [Pg 117]