

JEFF CALHOUN, about 98, was born a slave of the Calhoun family, in Alton, Alabama. After his master died, a son-in-law, Jim Robinson, brought Jeff and 200 other slaves to Austin, Texas. Jeff was 22 when the Civil War began. He stayed with his old master, who had moved to Stewart Mills Texas, after he was freed, and raised 23 children. He says, "I 'spect I has near a thous- children, grandchildren and great grandchildren." He makes his home among them, drifting over five states when and as he wishes.

"My name am Jeff Calhoun and I was born in Alton, in Alabama, about 1838, 'cause I's told by my massa. Dat makes me 'bout 98 year old now. My father was Henry Robinson and my mammy, she Mary Robinson. She was born in Maryland, in Virginia, but didn't know much 'bout her folks, 'cause she was sold off young. Dere was four of us brothers and ten sisters, but dey all dead now but me.

"We makes our beds out of forked saplings drove in the ground, 'cause de floors was dirt. We sets de pole in dat ground and it run to de top of de cabin and we makes one bed down low and one bed above. De big folks sleeps in de low beds and de chillun above, 'cause dey can climb.

"My massa had 15 chillun and my mamma suckled every one of dem, 'cause his wife was no good to give milk.

"We allus had lots to eat, but for meat we has to go to de woods and git deer and turkey and buffalo and some bear. I have eat hoss and skunk and crow and hawk. [Pg 189]

"We has a big fire to cook on, and to make de corn cakes we put one leaf down and put batter on dat and put another leaf over it and cover with hot ashes and by noon it was done. Same thing for supper. We never have biscuits 'cept on Sunday or Christmas.

"My mama was de spinner so I has plenty shirts and some britches, and we raises indigo on de place and makes dye of it. We never wore no shoes in de summer and some winters neither. We has a good pair of pants and shirt we wears Sundays and holidays and was married in.

"De way dey done at weddings dem days, you picks out a girl and tell your boss. If she was from another plantation you had to git her bosses 'mission and den dey tells you to come up dat night and git hitched up. They says to de girl, 'You's love dis man?' Dey says to de man, 'You loves dis girl?' If you say you don't know, it's all off, but if you say yes, dey brings in de broom and holds it 'bout a foot off de floor and say to you to jump over. Den he says you's married. If either of you stumps you toe on de broom, dat mean you got trouble comin' 'tween you, so you sho' jumps high.

"My massa was good to us. He lived in a log house with a floor and was all fixed up with pretty furniture and mirrors and silver on de table. De missus was little and frail, but she was good to us and so was de massa. He wasn't no hand to whip like some of he neighbors. Dey would tied de slaves' hands to a pole and whip de blood out of them. Dey was whipped for runnin' away. [Pg 190]

"I knowed a slave call Ben Bradley and he was sold on de auction block and his massa chained him hand and foot and started for Texas. Dey got to de Red River and was crossin' and de chains helt him down and he never came up. And I have a uncle what run off and dey took a pack of hounds—a pack were

twelve—and dey got on his trail and I heard dem runnin' him. Dey run him three days and nights and took a gun loaded with buck shot but was sposed not to shoot above de legs. Dey come back and said he got away, but some boys was out huntin' and finds him and he been shot four times with buck shot.

"De only time we got to rest was Sunday and de fourth of July and Christmas, and one day Thanksgiving. We got de big dinners on holidays. After supper was have corn shuckings, or on rainy days, and sometimes we shucks 500 bushels. We allus picked de cotton in big baskets, and when we gits it all picked we spreads on big and has a celebration.

"I was in Texas when de war broke out and I hauls corn lots of times to de gin where was de soldier camp, and I helped cook awhile and would have been in de battle of Vicksburg only dey takes another man 'stead of me and he gits kilt. I's glad I's a sorry cook, or I'd got kilt 'stead of him. [Pg 191