



Martha Spence Bunton

MARTHA SPENCE BUNTON, 81, was born a slave, Jan. 1, 1856, on the John Bell plantation, in Murphreesboro, Tennessee. Mr. Bell sold Martha, her mother and four sisters to Joseph Spence, who brought them to Texas. Martha married Andy Bunton in 1880, and they had nine children. Martha now lives with her sister, Susan, on twelve acres of land which their father bought for \$25.00 an acre. The farm is picturesquely located on a thickly wooded hill about six miles east of Austin, Texas.

"I was born on New Year's Day. Yes, suh, in 1856, on Massa Bell's plantation over in Tennessee. De name of de town was Murphreesboro, and my mammy and my four sisters and me all 'longed to Massa John Bell, but he done sold us to Massa Joseph Spence, and dat how I come by my name.

"I 'members how Massa Spence brung us to Texas in wagons, and the way we knowed when we hit Texas am 'cause massa 'gin to talk 'bout a norther. When dat norther done strike, all de weeds and leaves jus' starts rollin'. Us poor, ig'rants niggers thunk at first dey was rabbits, 'cause we'd never seed a rabbit den. Massa Spence rid his hoss and Missie Spence come 'long in de richer way, in a coach. De chillen walked mornin's and de older folks walked afternoons.

"Massa Spence come to Montopolis, right nigh to Austin, and settled down. I helped carry dinner pails to de field workers, and dey was full of meat and cabbage and biscuit. Pappy wasn't dere then, 'cause he was own by Massa Burrows, over in Tennessee. But when his massa died, my massa bought pappy and he come out to Texas. Befo' I's a sizeable child, mammy took sick with diphtheria and died and pappy had to be mammy and pappy to us. [Pg 175] Pappy was a big-bodied man and on Sunday mornin' he'd git out of bed and make a big fire and say, 'Jiminy cripes! You chillen stay in you beds and I'll make de biscuits.' He would, too. I laughs when I thinks 'bout dem big, rye biscuits, what was so big we called dem 'Nigger heels.' Dey sho' was big biscuits, but dey was good. We never did git no butter, though, and sometimes we'd ask the white chillen to give us a piece of biscuit with butter on it. We got plenty other eats—sliced meat and roastin' ears and sweet milk.

"After freedom pappy sent us to school to de white teacher, and dat's why I can read and write. I went to de sixth grade and quit. Pappy was drinkin' a lot then. He'd take alcohol and mix it with 'lasses and

water. But he was good to us. Sometimes a Texas norther come up and we'd be on the way home and we'd see something comin' what look like a elephant and it was pappy, with a bundle of coats.

"I was twenty-four years old when I married Andy Bunton and he jes' rented farms here and yonder. We had a big weddin' and pork and turkey and cake. Aunt Lucy Hubbard, what weighed three hundred pounds, done de cookin' dat day. We had such a good time nobody knowed when one de guests stole a whole turkey.

"I was mother of nine chillen and three of dem is livin' now. Andy made a purty good livin till he had a paral'sis stroke. Poor old feller! In de end, I took care of him and had to work like I was young again. I cut wood and carried water and washed and cooked. I had to feed him.

"I owns my place here. It am twelve acres and pappy bought it long ago for \$25.00 de acre. My sister lives here too, and my son, Howard, comes home sometimes, but he's got eight houn' dogs he can't feed. I sho' can't feed dem on dat \$11.00 pension what I gits. [Pg 176]