

ANNA SMITH

Summit County, District #5

Interviewed by Geo. H. Conn, Writer

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In a little old rocking chair, sits an old colored "mammy" known to her friends as "Grandma" Smith, spending the remaining days with her grandchildren. Small of stature, tipping the scales at about 100 lbs. but alert to the wishes and cares of her children, this old lady keeps posted on current events from those around her. With no stoop or bent back and with a firm step she helps with the housework and preparing of meals, waiting, when permitted, on others. In odd moments, she like to work at her favorite task of "hooking" rag rugs. Never having worn glasses, her eyesight is the envy of the younger generation. She spends most of the time at home, preferring her rocker and pipe (she has been smoking for more than eighty year) to a back seat in an automobile.

When referring to Civil War days, her eyes flash and words flow from her with a fluency equal to that of any youngster. Much of her speech is hard to understand as she reverts to the early idiom and pronunciation of her race. Her head, tongue, arms and hands all move at the same time as she talks. A note of hesitancy about speaking of her past shows at times when she realizes she is talking to one not of her own race, but after eight years in the north, where she has been treated courteously by her white neighbors, that old feeling of inferiority under which she lived during slave days and later on a plantation in Kentucky has about disappeared.

Her home is comfortably furnished two story house with a front porch where, in the comfort of an old rocking chair, she smokes her pipe and dreams as the days slip away. Her children and their children are devoted to her. With but a few wants or requests her days are quiet and peaceful.

Kentucky with its past history still retains its hold. She refers to it as "God's Chosen Land" and would prefer to end her days where about eighty years of her life was spent. On her 101st birthday (1935) she posed for a picture, seated in her favorite chair with her closest friend, her pipe.

Abraham Lincoln is as big a man with her today as when he freed her people. With the memories of the Civil War still fresh in her mind and secret longing to return to her Old Kentucky Home, Mrs. Anna Smith, born in May of 1833 and better known to her friends as "Grandma" Smith, is spending her remaining days with her grandchildren, in a pleasant home at 518 Bishop Street.

On a plantation owned by Judge Toll, on the banks of the Ohio River at Henderson, Kentucky, Anna (Toll) Smith was born. From her own story, and information gathered from other sources the year 1835 is as near a correct date as possible to obtain. Anna Smith's parents were William Clarke and Miranda Toll. Her father was a slave belonging to Judge Toll. It was common practice for slaves to assume the last name of their owners. It was before war was declared between the north and south that she was married, for she claims her daughter was "going on three" when President Lincoln freed the slaves.

Mrs. Smith remembers her father who died at the age of 117 years. Her oldest brother was 50 when he joined the confederate army. Three other brothers were sent to the front. One was an ambulance attendant, one belonged to the cavalry, one an orderly seargeant and the other joined the infantry. All were killed in action. Anna Smith's husband later joined the war and was reported killed.

When she became old enough for service she was taken into the "Big House" of her master, where she served as kitchen helper, cook, and later a nurse, taking care of her mistress' second child. She learned her A.B.C.'s by listening to the tutor teaching the children of Judge Toll.

"Grandma" Smith's vision is the wonder of her friends. She has never worn glasses and can distinguish objects and people at a distance as readily as at close range. She occupies her time by hooking rag rugs and doing housework and cooking. She is "on the go" most of the time, but when need for rest overtakes her, she resorts to her easy chair, a pipeful of tobacco and a short nap and she is ready to carry on.

Many instances during those terrible war days are fresh in her mind: men and boys, in pairs and groups passing the "big house" on their way to the recruiting station on the public square, later going back in squads and companies to fight; Yankee soldiers raiding the plantation, taking corn and hay or whatever could be used by the northern army; and continual apprehension for the

menfolk at the front. She remembers the baying of blood hounds at night along the Ohio River, trying to follow the scent of escaping negroes and the crack of firearms as white people, employed by the plantation owners attempted to halt the negroes in their efforts to cross the Ohio River into Ohio or to join the Federal army.

Referring to her early life, she recalls no special outstanding events. Her treatment from her master and mistress was pleasant, always receiving plenty of food and clothing but never any money. In a grove not far from the plantation home, the slaves from the nearby estates meet on Sunday for worship. Here under the spreading branches they gathered for religious worship and to exchange news.

When President Lincoln issued his proclamation freeing the slaves, and the news reached the plantation, she went to her master to learn if she was free. On learning it was true she returned to her parents who were living on another plantation.

She has been living with her grandchildren for the past nine years, contented but ready to go when the "Good Lord calls her."