

Callie Williams
504 Eslava Street, Mobile, AL
Interviewed by Mary A. Poole
Mobile, AL

Callie Williams was only four years old at the time of the surrender, but stories told to her by her mother are vividly remembered, and the fact that she has had the same environment continuously throughout the years imprinted these happenings permanently on her mind. She lives at 504 Eslava Street, Mobile. Aunt Callie needed little urging to tell of the old days, and she claims to vividly remember her master's family.

My mammy and pappy were brought to Alabama by speculators who sold them to Mr. Hiram McLemore at Newport Landing, on the Alabama River, Mammy's name was Vacey and she was born in Virginia, but my pappy was born in Kentucky. His name was Harry. Mr. McLemore had about three hundred head of slaves, some of them on one plantation of about two thousand acres and the rest on another place of about five hundred acres. He sure did have a pretty house. It was all white and rambling-like and had big trees around it. There was a cool well and a big dairy right close by it and then the cabins were all in a row in the back, some of them made out of planks, but most of them were made with logs. They were all named after whoever lived in them.

His wife was named Axie Bethea and he had seven children. One of them I never will forget, Miss Julia, because she gave me the first calico dress I ever had and I was proud as a peacock with it. Miss Julia was the oldest little girl and they gave me to her.

My mammy said that they waked up in the morning when they heard the sweep. That was a piece of iron hanging by a string and it made a loud noise when it was banged with another piece of iron. They had to get up at four o'clock and be at work by sun up. To do this, they almost all the time cooked breakfast the night before.

Pappy was a driver under the overseer, but Mammy said that she stayed at the little nursery cabin and looked after all the little babies. They had a cabin fixed up with homemade cradles and things where they put all the babies. Their mammies would come in from the field at about ten o'clock to nurse them and then later in the day, my mammy would feed the youngest on pot-

licker and the older ones on greens and pot-licker. They had skimmed milk and mush, too, and all of them stayed as fat as butterballs, me among them. Mammy saw that I always got my share.

The slaves got rations every Monday night. There would be three pounds of meat and a peck of meal. There was a big garden that all of them worked and they had all the vegetables they needed and there was always plenty of skimmed milk. They cooked the meals on open fireplaces in the big iron 'spiders', big pots hanging over the fire from a hook. They'd do the cooking at night and then warm it over the next day if they wanted it that way.

While mammy was tending the babies she had to spin cotton and she was supposed to spin two 'cuts' a day. Four 'cuts' was a hard day's work. What was a cut? You ought to know that! They had a reel and when it had spun three hundred yards it popped. That was a "cut." When it had been spun, then another woman took it to the loom to make cloth for the slaves. They always took Saturday afternoon to clean up the clothes and cabins, because they always had to start work on Monday morning clean as a pin. If they didn't, they got whipped for being dirty.

Some of the niggers, after they'd been beaten, would try to run away and some of them got loose, but the patterollers caught a lot of them and then they'd get it harder than ever before and have shackles out on their feet with just enough slack for them to walk so they could work.

If they wanted to go 'possum hunting or fishing, they could get passes from the overseer. Two things they really loved to eat was 'possum and fish. They'd eat and eat 'until they'd get sick and then they'd have to boil up a dose of Boneset tea to work them out. If that didn't make them feel better, they'd go to Master. He always kept calomel, bluemias and quinine on hand. If they got too bad off sick, then Master would call the doctor. The children weren't bothered with anything much but worms and they'd take Jerusalem oak. It was the seed of a weed that was cooked and mixed with molasses to make it taste like candy. Boneset was a bush and they'd boil the leaves to get boneset tea.

Most of the time the slaves would be too tired to do anything but go to bed at night, but sometimes they would sit around and sing after supper and they would sing and pray on Sunday. One of the songs that was used most was 'Yon Comes Old Master Jesus.' If I

remember, it went something like this:

'I really believe Christ is coming again
He's coming in the morning
He's coming in the morning
He's coming with a rainbow on his shoulder
He's coming again by and by'

They tried to make them stop singing and praying during the war because all they'd ask for was to be set free, but the slaves would get in the cabins and turn a big wash pot upside down and sing into that, and the noise couldn't get out.

I don't remember anything about this except what Mammy said. When the Surrender came, she said that a whole regiment of soldiers rode up to the house yelling to the niggers that they were free. Then the soldiers took the meat out of the smokehouse and got all the molasses and meal and gave it all to the niggers. They robbed the bees and then they'd eat dinner and go on to the next place, taking the menfolk with them, all except the ones too old, my pappy among them.

After it was all over my pappy rented land on Mr. McLemore's place and he and mammy stayed there till they died. They were buried in the same graveyard that Mr. McLemore had set aside for his slaves.

I married Frank Williams in Montgomery, Alabama, but our marriage was nothing like mammy said her and pappy's was. She said they 'jumped the broomstick.' When any of the slaves wanted to get married they would go to the big house and tell Master and he'd get his broomstick and said, 'Harry, do you want Vacey?' And Harry said 'Yes.' Then Master said, 'Vacey, do you want Harry?', and she said 'Yes.' Then Master said, 'Join hands and jump the broomstick and you are married.' The ceremony wasn't much but they stuck lots closer then, and you didn't hear about so many divorces and such as that.

All my children are dead but two. I had five. One is living in Atlantic City, N.J., and I live here with the other one. I expect I'll just go on living here until I die, serving Ole Master as best I can.

If all the people on this here earth would do that, we wouldn't be pestered with all these here troubles like we are nowadays.