

MR. MATTHEW HUME

Dist. 4, Jefferson County

Interviewed by Grace Monroe

Mr. Hume had many interesting experiences to tell concerning the part slavery had played in his family. On the whole, they were fortunate in having a good master who would not keep an overseer who whipped his "blacks".

His father, Luke Hume, lived in Trimble County Kentucky and was allowed to raise for himself one acre of tobacco, one acre of corn, garden stuff, chickens, and have the milk and butter from one cow. He was advised to save his money by the overseer but always drank it up. On this plantation, all the slaves were free from Saturday noon until Monday morning and on Christmas and the Fourth of July. A majority of them would go to Bedford or Milton and drink, gamble, and fight. On the neighboring farm, the slaves were treated cruelly. Mr. Hume had a brother-in-law, Steve Lewis, who carried marks on his back. For years he had a sore that would not heal where his master had struck him with a blacksnake whip.

Three good overseers were Jake Mack and Mr. Crafton, Mr. Daniel Payne was the owner who asked his people to report any mistreatment to him. He expected obedience, however.

When Mr. Hume was a small boy he was placed in the fields to hoe. He also wanted a new implement. He was so small he was unable to keep near enough to the men and boys to hear what they were talking about, he remembered bringing up the rear one day, when he saw a large rock he carefully covered it with dirt, then came down hard on it breaking his hoe. He missed a whipping and received a new tool to replace the old one, after this, he could keep near enough to hear what the other workers were talking about.

Another of his duties was to go for the cattle, he had to walk around the road about a mile, but was permitted to come back through the fields about a quarter of a mile. One afternoon his mistress told him to bring a load of wood when he came in. In the summer it was the custom to have the children carry the wood from the fields. When he came up he saw his mistress was angry this peeved him, so that he stalked into the hall and slammed his wood into the box. About this time his mistress shoved him into a small closet and locked the door. He made such

a howl that he brought his mother and father to the rescue and was soon released from his prison.

As soon as the children were old enough they were placed in the fields to prepare the ground for setting tobacco plants. This was a very complicated procedure. The ground was made into hills, each requiring about four feet of soil. The child had to get all the clods broken fine. Then place his foot in the center and leave his track. The plants were to be set out in the center and woe to the youngster who had failed to pulverize his hill. After one plowing the tobacco was hand-tended. It was long green and divided into two grades. It was pressed by being placed in large hogsheads and weighted down. On one occasion they were told their tobacco was so eaten up that the worms were sitting on the fence waiting for the leaves to grow but nevertheless in some manner his master hid the defects and received the best price paid in the community.

The mistress on a neighboring plantation was a devout Catholic and had all the children come each Sunday afternoon to study the catechism and repeat the Lord's Prayer. She was not very successful in training them in the Catholic faith as when they grew up most of them were either Baptists or Methodists. Mr. Hume said she did a lot of good in leading them to Christ but he did not learn much of the catechism as he only attended for the treat. After the service, they always had candy or a cup of sugar.

On the Preston place, there was a big strapping negro of eighteen whom the overseer attempted to whip receiving the worst of it. He then went to Mr. Hume's owner and asked for help but was told he would have to seek elsewhere for help. Finally, someone was found to assist. Smith was tied to a tree and severely beaten, then they were afraid to untie him when the overseer finally ventured up and loosened the ropes, Smith kicked him as hard as he could and ran to the Payne estate refusing to return. He was a good helper here where he received kind treatment.

A bad overseer was discharged once by Mr. Payne because of his cruelty to Mr. Luke Hume. The corncrib was a tiny affair where a man had to climb out one leg at a time, one morning just as Mr. Hume's father was climbing out with his feed, he was struck over the head with a large club, the next morning he broke the scoop off an iron shovel and fastened the iron handle to his body. This time he swung himself from the door of the crib and seeing the overseer hiding to strike him he threw his bar, which made a wound on the man's head which did not knock him

out. As soon as Mr. Payne heard of the disturbance the overseer was discharged and Mr. Mack placed in charge of the slaves.

One way of exacting obedience was to threaten to send offenders South to work in the fields. The slaves around Lexington, Kentucky, came out ahead on one occasion. The collector was Shrader. He had the slaves handcuffed to a large leg chain and forced on a flatboat. There were so many that the boat was grounded, so some of the slaves were released to push the boat off. Among the "blacks" was one who could read and write. Before Shrader could chain them up again, he was seized and chained, taken to below Memphis Tennessee, and forced to work in the cotton fields until he was able to get word from Richmond identifying him. In the meantime, the educated negro issued freedom papers to his companions. Many of them came back to Lexington, Kentucky where they were employed.

Mr. Hume thought the Emancipation Proclamation was the greatest work that Abraham Lincoln ever did. The colored people on his plantation did not learn of it until the following August. Then Mr. Payne and his sons offered to let them live on their ground with conditions similar to our renting system, giving a share of the crop. They remained here until Jan. 1, 1865 when they crossed the Ohio River at Madison. They had a cow that had been given them before the Emancipation Proclamation was issued but this was taken away from them. So they came to Ind. homeless, friendless and penniless.

Mr. Hume and his aged wife have been married 62 years and resided in the same community for 55 years where they are highly respected by all their neighbors.

He could not understand the attitude of his race who preferred to remain in slavery receiving only food and shelter, rather than to be free citizens where they could have the right to develop their individualism