

Wes Woods
Garrard County
Interviewed by Eliza Ison

My first visit to uncle Wes Wood, and his wife Aunt Lizzie Wood, found them in their own comfortable little home in Duncantown, a nice urban section of the town, where most of the inhabitants are of the better class of colored people. A small yard with a picket fence and gate surrounded the yard, which had tall hollyhocks, rearing their heads high above the fence.

A knock on the front door brought the cordial invitation to come in. Upon entering, I was invited to have a chair and rest my hat. After seating myself and making inquiries as to their health, I told them the object of my visit, and their faces beamed when I asked if they remembered slave days. Aunt Lizzie set down the can of beans she was preparing for their meal and said with a clasp of her hands, Lordy, Honey, what I do know would fill a book.

Uncle Wes had been a shut-in for eleven months, and was in bed, but was cheerful and bright with an intelligent memory, rarely found in one his age. Uncle Wes tells me that he was born May 21, 1864, in Garrard County, near Cartersville, and was first a slave of Mrs. Eliza Kennedy, who later married John Yeakey, of that section of the county.

My father's name was Ben Woods, my mother's name was Janie Woods, but I do not know what family she belonged to except the Woods. My master owned about three or four hundred acres of land, and there were about twenty slaves, including the children.

There were three or four cabins for the slaves to live in, not so very far from the house. The cabin where my mother and father lived was the closest to the house, for my mother did the cooking. Our cabin was one long room, with a loft above, which we reached with a ladder. There was one big bed, with a trundle bed, which was on wooden rollers and was shoved under the big bed in the daytime. The oldest boys slept in a big wooden bed in the loft. The cabins were built of logs and chinked with rock and mud. The ceiling was of joists, and my mother used to hang the seed that we gathered in the fall, to dry from these joists. Some of the chimneys were made with sticks and chinked with mud, and would sometimes catch on fire. Later people learned to build chimneys of rock with big wide fireplaces, and a hearth of stone, which made them safer from fire.

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Second Interview:

I chopped corn and pulled weeds and the other work hands would let me ride behind them back to the big house, and my, how hungry I was and how we did eat. We would have beans, cooked in a big kettle in the backyard, cabbage, and potatoes, with cornpone bread, baked in a big oven in the yard, and plenty of good buttermilk to drink.

My young bosses, when I lived in the Kennedy family, would take the dogs and let me go coon hunting at night with them, and what big times we had. The possums were skinned and cooked in a big kettle hung over the fire, then taken out and put in a big oven to bake. A piece of streaked meat was put in and a small pod of red pepper—My, my, what eatin' we had!

We fished with a stock pole and a twine string. We had big times hunting fishing worms for bait. We used to catch Hockney, Hads, and Chubs. My mistress would not let me go fishing on Sunday, but I would slip off and go anyhow. I nearly always had a good string caught and I would tie them to a branch on the creek until the next day; then I would go fishing and in about two hours I would come back with the fish, and she would say, Wes, you had good luck today; and I would say, Yes Mistress, I did, but never did I tell her when I caught the fish.

My first wife was Lou Burnside and we had five children: Eliza, Fannie, George, Julia, and Jennie. All of them are dead but two. I have no children with my present wife.

I never saw a slave whipped or in chains. My boss did not believe in that kind of punishment. If the children needed whipping, it was done like all other children are whipped, when they need it.

The first colored preacher I recall was named John Reed, a Baptist preacher at Paint Lick. I joined the church at Lowell, not very far from here. The preacher's name was Leroy Estill, a Predestinarian.

Master Woods had five children, two boys, and three girls, none of them are living.

We were glad when the news came that we were free, but none of us left for a long time, not until the Woods family was broken up. My father hired me out to work for my victuals and clothes, and I got \$25.00 at the end of the year. I do not remember any wedding or death in my old master's house.

I believe in heartfelt religion and prayer. The Good Book teaches us we must be prepared for another world after this. I want to go to Heaven when I die, and I try to live by the Bible.