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PLANTATION LIFE as viewed by Ex-Slave

CHARLIE HUDSON  
258 Lyndon Avenue  
Athens, Georgia

Written by: Sadie B. Hornsby  
Athens -

Edited by: Sarah H. Hall  
Athens -

Leila Harris  
Augusta -  
and  
John N. Booth  
District Supervisor  
Federal Writers' Project  
Res. 6 & 7.  
Augusta, Ga.

CHARLIE HUDSON  
Ex-Slave - Age 80.

Charlie listened with eager interest to the story related by Carrie, his wife, and frequent smiles played over his wrinkled black face as her reminiscences awakened memories of younger days. His delight was evident when the interviewer suggested that he tell his own impressions of slavery and the period following the War between the States.

"Miss," he said, "I been takin' in what de old 'oman done told you. Dat was de beginnin' way back yonder and de end is nigh. Soon dere won't be nobody left livin' what was a sho' 'nough slave. It's somepin' to think about, ain't it?"

"Anyhow, I was born March 27, 1858 in Elbert County.

Ma lived on de Bell plantation and Marse Matt Hudson owned my Pa and kept him on de Hudson place. Dere was seven of us chillun. Will, Bynam, John and me was de boys, and de gals was Amanda, Liza Ann, and Gussie. 'Til us was big enough to wuk, us played 'round de house 'bout lak chillun does dese days.

"Slave quarters was laid out lak streets. Us lived in log cabins. Beds? Dey was jus' makeshift beds, what was made out of pine poles. De side of de house was de head of de beds. De side rails was sharpened at both ends and driv' in holes in de walls and foot posties. Den dey put boards 'cross de side rails for de mattresses to lay on. De coarse cloth bed ticks was filled wid 'Georgy feathers.' Don't you know what Georgy feathers was? Wheat straw was Georgy feathers. Our kiver was sheets and plenty of good warm quilts. Now dat was at our own quarters on Marse David Bell's plantation.

+ "Didn't evvybody have as good places to sleep as us. I 'members a white fambly named Sims what lived in Flatwoods. Dey was de porest white folks I ever seed. Dey had a big drove of chillun and deir Pa never wukked a lick in his life - He jus' lived on other folkses' labors. Deir little log cabin had a partition in it, and 'hind dat partition dere warn't a stitch of nothin'. Dey didn't have no floor but de ground, and back 'hind dat partition was dug out a little deeper dan in de rest of de house. Dey filled dat place wid leaves and dat's whar all de chilluns slept. Evvy day Miss Sallie made 'em take out de leaves what dey had slap' on de night before and fill de dugout wid fresh leaves. On de other side of de partition, Miss Sallie and her old man slept 'long wid deir hog, and hoss, and cow, and dat was whar dey cooked and et too. I ain't never gwine to forgit dem white folks. ✕

..... "My grandma Patsy, Pappy's Ma, knocked 'round lookin' atter de sheep and hogs, close to de house, 'cause she was too old for field wuk. Ma's Mammy was my grandma Rose. Her job was drivin' de oxcart to haul in wood from de new grounds and to take wheat and corn to mill and fetch back good old home-made flour and meal. I never did hear nothin' 'bout my grandpas. Ma done de cookin' for de white folks.

"I don't know if I was no pet, but I did stay up at de big house most of de time, and one thing I loved to do up dar was to follow Miss Betsy 'round totin' her sewin' basket. When wuk got tight and hot in crop time, I helped de other chillun tote water to de hands. De bucket would slam 'gainst my laigs all along de way, and most of de water would be done splashed out 'fore I got to de field.

\*Marse David and his fambly most allus sont deir notes and messages by me and another yearlin' boy what was 'lowed to lay 'round de big house yard so us would be handy to wait on our white folks. Dey give you de note what dey done writ, and dey say: 'Boy, if you lose dis note, you'll git a whuppin'! All de time you was carryin' dem notes you had your whuppin' in your hand and didn't know it, lessen you lost de note. I never heared of no trouble to 'mount to nothin' twixt white folks and Niggers in our settlement.

\*Us et good, not much diff'unt f'um what us does now. Most times it was meat and bread wid turnip greens, lye hominy, milk, and butter. All our cookin' was done on open fireplaces. Oh! I was fond of 'possums, sprinkled wid butter and pepper, and baked down 'til de gravy was good and brown. You was lucky if you got <sup>to</sup> eat 'possum and gnaw de bones atter my Ma done cooked it.

\*Dey cotch rabbits wid dogs. Now and den, a crowd of Niggers would jump a rabbit when no dogs was 'round. Dey would tho' rocks at him and run him in a hollow log. Den dey would twiss him out wid hickory wisps (withes). Sometimes dere warn't no fur left on de rabbit time dey got him twisted out, but dat was all right. Dey jus' slapped him over daid and tuk him on to de cabin to be cooked. Rabbits was most gen'ally fried.

\*Grown boys didn't want us chillun goin' 'long 'possum huntin' wid 'em, so all right, dey tuk us way off crosst de fields 'til dey found a good thick clump of bushes, and den dey would holler out dat dere was some moughty fine snipes 'round dar. Dey made us

hold de poke (bag) open so de snipes could run in. Den dey blowed out deir light'ood knot torches, and left us chillun holdin' de poke whilst dey went on huntin' 'possums.

"Atter dinner Saddays all of us tuk our hooks, poles, and lines down to Dry Fork Crick, when it was de right time of de year to fish. Sometimes dey stewed fish for old folkses to eat, but young folkses loved 'em fried best.

"Winter time dey give chillun new cotton and wool mixed shirts what come down most to de ankles. By de time hot weather come de shirt was done wore thin and swunk up and 'sides dat, us had growed enough for 'em to be short on us, so us jus' wore dem same shirts right on thoo' de summer. On our place you went bar foots 'til you was a great big yearlin' 'fore you got no shoes. What you wore on yo' haid was a cap made out of scraps of cloth dey wove in de looms right dar on our plantation to make pants for de grown folks.

"Mr. David Bell, our Marster, was born clubfooted. His hands and foots was drawed up evvy which a way long as he lived. He was jus' lak a old tom cat, he was such a cusser. All he done was jus' set dar and cuss, and a heap of times you couldn't see nothin' for him to cuss 'bout. He tuk his crook-handled walkin' stick and cotch you and drug you up to him and den jus' helt you tight and cussed you to yo' face, but he didn't never whup nobody. Our Mist'ess, Miss Betsey, was allus moughty kind at times lak dat, and she used to give us chillun a heap of ginger cakes. Deir seben chilluns was

Dr. Bynam, Marse David and little Misses Adeline, Elizabeth, Mary and Mildred. Dey lived in a big old two-story house, but I done forget how it looked.

"Dat overseer, he was a clever man, but I can't recollect his name. He never paid no heed to what sort of clothes slaves wore, but he used te raise merry cain if dey didn't have good shoes te ditch in. Marse David was de cussin' boss, but de overseer called hisself de whuppin' boss. He had whuppin's all time saved up special for de 'omans. He made 'em take off deir waistes and den he whupped 'em on deir bar backs 'til he was satisfied. He done all de whuppin' atter supper by candle light. I don't 'member dat he ever whupped a man. He jus' whupped 'omans.

"Evvybody was up early so dat by sunrise dey was out in de fields, jus' a whoopin' and hollarin'. At sundown dey stopped and come back to de cabins. In wheat harvestin' time dey wukked so hard dey jus' fell out f'um gittin' overhet. Other times dey jus' wukked 'long steady lak.

"Marse David never had no sho' 'nough car'iage so he never needed no car'iage driver. He had what dey called a ground sleigh. In de spring Marse David sent a man to de woods to pick out a lakly lookin' young white oak saplin' and bent it down a certain way. Hit stayed bent dat way 'til it growed big enough, den dey sawed it lengthways and put a mortise hole in each front piece to put de round thoo' to hold de singletrees. Holes was bored at de back to fasten de plank seat to. Dey put a quilt on de seat for a cushion and hitched a pair of oxen to de sleigh. Come winter, come summer, snow or rain, dey went right on in de old sleigh jus' de same!

"Now, Miss, dis sho' is right! Many times as I is done been over dat plantation f'um one side to de other I couldn't tell you to save my life how many acres was in it. I would be 'fraid to say, how many slaves Marse David owned, but I'm here to tell you dere was a bunch of 'em 'round dar.

"Dey didn't have no jail house or nothin' lak dat 'round dat plantation, 'cause if slaves didn't please Marster dey was jus' made to come up to de yard at de big house and take deir beatin's. I seed dem traders come thoo' f'um Virginny wid two wagon loads of slaves at one time, gwine down on Broad River to a place called Lisbon whar dey already had orders for 'em. I ain't never seed no slaves bein' sold or auctioned off on de block.

"Wunst a white man named Bill Rowsy, come and begged Marse David to let him teach his Niggers. Marse David had de grown mens go sweep up de cottonseed in de ginhouse on Sunday mornin', and for three Sundays us went to school. When us went on de fourth Sunday night riders had done made a shape lak a coffin in de sand out in front, and painted a sign on de ginhouse what read: 'No Niggers 'lowed to be taught in dis ginhouse.' Dat made Marse David so mad he jus' cussed and cussed. He 'lowed dat nobody warn't gwine tell him what to do. But us was too skeered to go back to de ginhouse to school. Next week Marse David had 'em build a brush arbor down by de crick, but when us went down dar on Sunday for school, us found de night riders had done 'stroyed de brush arbor, and dat was de end of my gwine to school.

"Dere warn't no church for slaves whar us was. Marse David give us a pass so us wouldn't be 'sturbed and let us go 'round from one plantation to another on Sundays for prayer meetin's in de cabins and under trees if de weather was warm and nice. Sometimes whem dere was a jubilee comin' off, slaves was 'lowed to go to deir Marsters' church. Me? I used to ride 'hind Miss Betsey on her hoss what she called Puss, and away us went jiggin' down de road to jubilees at Millstone and Elam churches. I was a rich feelin' little Nigger den.

"De chillun had to take a back seat whilst de old folks done all de singin', so I never larned none of dem songs good 'nough to 'member what de words was, or de tunes neither. Now and den us went to a fun'ral, not often, but if dere was a baptizin' inside of 10 miles 'round f'um whar us lived, us didn't miss it. Us knowed how to walk, and went to git de pleasure.

"Atter slaves got in f'um de fields at night, de 'omans cooked supper whilst de mens chopped wood. Lessen de crops was in de grass moughty bad or somepin' else awful urgent, dere warn't no wuk done atter dinner on Saddays. De old folks ironed, cleant house, and de lak, and de young folks went out Sadday nights and danced to de music what dey made beatin' on tin pans. Sundays, youngsters went to de woods and hunted hickernuts and muscadines. De old folks stayed home and looked one anothers huids over for nits and lice. Whenever dey found anything, dey mashed it twixt dey finger and thumb and went ahead searchin'. Den de 'omans wropt each others hair de way it was to stay fixed 'til de next Sunday.



"Chris'mas us went f'um house to house lookin' for locust and persimmon beer. Chillun went to all de houses huntin' gingerbread. Ma used to roll it thin, cut it out wid a thimble, and give a dozen of dem little balls to each chile. Persimmon beer and gingerbread! What big times us did have at Chris'mas. New Year's Day, dey raked up de hoss and cow lots if de weather was good. Marster jus' made us wuk enough on New Year's Day to call it wukkin', so he could say he made us start de New Year right.

"Marse David had cornshuckin's what lasted two or three weeks at a time. Dey had a gen'ral to keep dem brash boys straight. De number of gen'erals 'pended on how much corn us had and how many slaves was shuckin' corn. Atter it was all shucked, dere was a big celebration in store for de slaves. Dey cooked up washpots full of lamb, kid, pork, and beef, and had collard greens dat was wu'th lookin' at. Dey had water buckets full of whiskey. When dem Niggers danced attar all dat eatin' and drinkin', it warn't rightly dancin'; it was wrastlin'.

"Dem moonlight cotton pickin's was big old times. Dey give prizes to de ones pickin' de most cotton. De prizes was apt to be a quart of whiskey for de man what picked de most and a dress for de 'oman what was ahead. Dem Niggers wouldn't take no time to empty cotton in baskets - jus' dumped it out quick on baggin' in de field.

"Dey went f'um one plantation to another to quiltin's. Atter de 'omans got thoo' quiltin' and et a big dinner, den dey axed de mens to come in and dance wid 'em.

"Whenever any of our white folks' gals got married dere was two or three weeks of celebratin'. What a time us did have if it was

one of our own little misses gittin' married! When de day 'rived, it was somepin' else. De white folks was dressed up to beat de band, and all de slaves was up on deir toes to do evvything jus' right and to see all dey could. Atter de preacher done finished his words to de young couple, den dey had de sho' 'nough weddin' feast. Dere was all sorts of meat to choose f'um at weddin' dinners - turkeys, geese, chickens, peafowls, and guineas, not to mention good old ham and other meats.

'Pitchin' hoss shoes and playin' marbles was heaps and lots of fun when I was growin' up. Atter while, de old folks 'cided dem games was gamblin' and wouldn't let us play no more. I don't know nothin' t'all 'bout no ghosties. Us had 'nough to be skeered of widout takin' up no time wid dat sort of thing.

'When Marse David changed me f'um calf shepherd to cowboy, he sent three or four of us boys to drive de cows to a good place to graze.'cause de male beast was so mean and bad 'bout gittin' atter chillun, he thought if he sent enough of us dere wouldn't be no trouble. Dem days, dere warn't no fence law, and calves was jus' turned loose in de pastur to graze. De fust time I went by myself to drive de cows off to graze and come back wid 'em, Aunt Vinnie 'ported a bunch of de cows was missin', 'bout 20 of em, when she done de milkin' dat night, and I had to go back huntin' dem cows. De moon come out, bright and clear, but I couldn't see dem cows nowhar - didn't even hear de bell cow. Atter while I was standin' in de may-berry field a-lookin' crost Dry Fork Crick and dere was dem cows. De bell was pulled so clost on de bell cow's neck whar she was caught in de bushes, dat it couldn't ring. I looked at dem cows - den I looked

at de crick whar I could see snakes as thick as de fingers on your hand, but I knowed I had to git dem cows back home, so I jus' lit out and loped 'cross dat crick so fast dem snakes never had no chanct to bite me. Dat was de wust racket I ever got in.

\*Marse David and Miss Betsy tuk moughty good keer of deir Niggers, 'specially when dey was sick. Dr. Bynam Bell, deir oldest son, was a doctor but Miss Betsy was a powerful good hand at doctoring herself. She looked attter all de slave 'omans. For medicines dey give us asaafiddy (asaafetida), calomel, and castor oil more dan anything else for our diff'unt ailments.

\*Marse David's nephew, Mr. Henry Bell, visited at de big house durin' de war, and he was out down jus' a few days attter he left us and went back to de battlefield.

\*Us had been hearin' fust one thing and another 'bout freedom might come, when one mornin' Mr. Will Bell, a pattereller, come ridin' on his hoss at top speed thoo' de rye field whar us was at wuk. Us made sho' he was attter some pore slave, 'til he yelled out: 'What you Niggers wukkin' for? Don't you know you is free as jay birds?' 'Bout dat time de trumpet blowed for dinner and us fell in line a-marchin' up to de big house. Marse David said: 'You all might jus' as well be free as anybody else.' Den he promised to give us somepin' to eat and wear if us would stay on wid him, and dere us did stay for 'bout three years attter de war. I was burnt up den, 'cause I didn't have de privilege of ridin' 'hind Miss Betsy on old Puss no more when she went to meetin'.

"Whar us lived, Ku Kluxers was called 'night thieves.' Dey stole money and weapons (weapons) f'um Niggers atter de war. Dey tuk \$50 in gold f'um me and \$50 in Jeff Davis' shimplasters f'um my brother. Pa and Ma had left dat money for us to use when us got big enough. A few Niggers managed somehow to buy a little land. I couldn't rightly say when de school was set up.

"Me and Carrie Rucker, us ain't been married long. I thinks big weddin's is a foolish waste of time and money. Yessam, I'm moughty proud of all of Carrie's grandchillun and I'm fond of evvyone of dem 24 great-grandchillun of hers.

"Well, it was a God-sent method Mr. Lincoln used to give us our freedom. Mr. Davis didn't want no war, and he 'posed it all he knowed how, but if he hadn't a gone ahead and fit, dere never would have been nothin' done for us. Far as I knows, Booker Washin'-ton done some good things in his day and time, but I don't know much 'bout him.

"In a way, I'm satisfied wid what confronts me. A pussen in jail or on de chaingang would ruther be outside and free dan in captivity. Dat's how I feels.

"When dey read dis passage of de Bible to me, I 'oided to jine up wid de church. 'Come ye out f'um amongst dem, and ye shall be my people.' I think evvybody ought to read dat verse, jine de church, and den live 'ligious lifes. I done been changed f'um darkness to light, 'Oh, for a closer walk wid God.'

"Yes Ma'am, Miss, I done been here a long time I done seed

many come and go. Lots of changes has tuk place. I done told you 'bout f'um de eradle to de grave, and I enjoyed doin' it. All dat ricollectin' sho' tuk me back over many a rocky road, but dem was de days what ain't never gwine to be no more.

