

"But Mamman" what is a Block House? I want to know what kind of place my great great "courted" in. You said they met there in the sweetheart days and got married. Some day I will grow up to be a big girl and may have a sweetheart too." Well dear, replied the grandparent, a Block House is made for protection and not for social affairs, but they met there really for safety, but she said love happens when one least expects. Well, the country was new and uncivilized. It was peopled by fierce Indians. There were also white people coming in and both wanted to own the land. Fights occurred often and the white men built large high houses and placed many holes around in it to shoot out of. The house was surrounded by a strong high wall built stockade fashion.

In times of danger the whites for miles around assembled in these strongholds, and the men stationed themselves at the holes and watched for the approaching of the Indians. Tom Jefferson Woolf and the beautiful bride did not tarry in the rich Delta bottoms so long but made another pioneer trip each on horse back but this time a baby boy was added to the pioneer travelers which blessed the union of this young couple. Again the long journey through the perilous country till they reached what is now Dayton, Marengo County, Alabama and decided to pitch their tent there. The wee son was carried there "papoose fashion" and was transferred from the arms of one parent to another in order to rest their tired arms.

The father "blazed" (a term used then to express making a clearing) a way toward a location for building a home and cut suitable trees to be used in its construction. A lone one-room hut was the result and while its preparation was going on the young couple camped out in the wilds.

Levicy was to again contact the dangerous Red Skins because they were as dangerous and antagonistic in her new environments as they had been in her former home. Her husband had to return to the home he had just left to bring

possessions that he could not bring the first time, as it was an obvious fact that very little could be conveyed on horse back. He could not carry his wife and baby with him after the possessions for they were a "horse back full", so they were left in the lone log hut in the wildwood. The hardships and terrors of the brave woman could not be described. Through the long cold days and nights she could not have a fire and had to eat cold food because a smoke from the chimney would attract the Indians.

The log cabin was the beginning of Dayton which is and has been through the century, outstanding on account of wealth, culture and educational influence. The town today stands on the location that Thomas Jefferson Woolf blazed through the wild forests back in that far and distant day. A large handsome home on the Vermont, New England type was an old landmark in that town which took the place of the pioneer hut and was the home in later years of the man who founded the town. The son, James B. Woolf, who was for many years Probate Judge, and who helped to shape the destiny of the county his father had founded, was the little baby boy the parents brought there on horse back." "Now tell me what the little Mary Gilchrist said about the kin on Daddy's side and the big old College. Oh! yes, replied the mother, you want to hear about the Davidsons.

That family is on a main limb of your tree but the one is six generations older than you are, but the line is direct and has been carefully traced. Gen. William Lee Davidson is the one you want to hear about. He gave the land on which Davidson College, N. C. is built and in appreciation of it the College when founded was named in his honor.

He was a member of one of the oldest and most exclusive organizations in the U. S. "The Society of Cincinnati. To be eligible to its membership, one had to be most distinguished in some way, that is to be so on account personal

act or deed. Gen. Davidson distinguished himself for heroic service in Rev-War during in which he lost his life. His family down and through the years were noted for their brilliant mental attainments, and many of them became prominent educators in different sections of the southern states. In the flourishing years of the 1850's his niece, Mrs. Mary Davidson, was among the brilliant array of teachers on the faculty of the Lowndesboro Female Institute.

Her lovely character, gentle and cultured manner lives today in the memories of some surviving pupils. In the passing years the little Mary Gilchrist grew away from the Kindergarten school and entered the village school. She was so well prepared that she entered a class ahead of her age and in the years to come she was so studious, she remained ahead.

As a child she was a splendid student and applied herself to her school work and the study of music (piano). In and out of the home she was sweet, pleasant and affable, fond of her school duties, her Sunday school work and her pets. One of her characteristics was her consideration and kindness to older people and the "under-dog". As a small girl she visited the sick and when the other children of the village were indulging in games and gaities, she and her young brother could be seen carrying some dainty bite to a "shut-in" or going to scatter some of the charm of their younger lives where was gray and drab.

In the school room she was always ready to work a hard "sum" for the little mate that would play instead of "getting" her lessons. There was always around some where a small girl or boy who were not able to have the nice clothes and good things of life and were picked upon and "kicked about" by the fortunates. These were always befriended by her and her small brother. Their lunches were shared with those who could not bring any and often the

day after the imposition, Mary Gilchrist would bring a bundle to the little shabby child who wanted to learn inspite of the shabbiness and taunts and in it would be a worn coat, a neat little dress or some things she was willing to divide. At an early age she was quarantined at home with diphtheria and her entertainment was the care of a small kitten which the almost kitten like mother refused to accept responsibility and deserted.

She nursed and cherished the little pet and named her "Weet." She was so small and soft that the little girl would slip her in the bed and conceal her between the bedding. "Weet" was so pleased with her home and petting and received such good attention that she lived to arrive at the age of 16.

"Pudding", was the name given to Mary Gilchrist by the house hold due to the fact of her sweet, kind and affectionate disposition. "It never sounded sweeter to me than it did the day my father called me and told me I had made the highest mark of any one in my class when we stood the test for the Senior High school entrance." Having completed the required grades at Junior High, every student in every school in the county were compelled to stand and pass an examination in order to enter Senior High at Hayneville. Papers were made out at state educational office and were corrected at Superintendent's office. Mary Gilchrist made highest mark. When her father received the message, he approached the house "saying Pudding Powell, you come out ahead." From the home town schools and Hayneville High she continued her education at the Agnes Scott, Decatur, Georgia. She was an outstanding pupil there in her collegiate course, as well as in music and was graduated from there with honors.

Her ambition was to teach and soon after graduation she accepted a position as teacher in a large school in the county where she taught three years. However, the confinement of the school room did not agree with her, and she was urged to enter the welfare work. For this she attended the University of Alabama, also University of Mississippi, taking a course in welfare work at each place. She

did welfare work at Birmingham, Alabama also in the Mill Village District at Lanette, Georgia. In May, 1938, Miss Powell was appointed case reader and investigator on the WPA at Montgomery, Alabama with offices at 200 Commerce Street.

Mary Gilchrist Powell is a young woman of unusual ability. At an early age she displayed a talent for writing and has written several short stories and poems which have been published in some of the popular magazines. She is a member of the Presbyterian Church and in her school days was organist for the Sunday School.

She does not "go in" for young peoples frivolities but enjoys good wholesome sports. She is a good horse woman - enjoys tennis and croquet. She is a handsome blonde with fair hair and complexion and has bright and beautiful blue eyes. She is tall and stately and in evening attire she makes a magnificent appearance. Recently Miss Powell has been promoted to supervisor in one of the larger counties of Alabama with 1500 to look after. In her district the extermination of the Pink Worm (a crop destroyer worse than the boll weevil) is one of the large projects.

Her home environments at Lowndesboro are most attractive. Marengo, the home on Main Street is an ante-bellum structure. Its setting is charming with lovely shrubs and flowers and the interior is more charming with its handsome and antique furnishings. She says this home is the "core of my heart" no matter where my business leads me. The parents and one brother, Lindsay James Powell, Jr. constitute the family. He is a student at Vanderbilt and is the representative that that University has selected to compete for the scholarship to be awarded for European training at an early date.

3/20/39  
MS

L. W. Reese (white)  
Lowndesboro, Alabama

Marie Reese  
Lowndes County, Ala.



"MAUDE"

The Story of a Horse That Had a False Mane and Tail.

Maude was a beautiful animal and as she was speeding along the country roads she was the admiration of all who saw her. She had a black satiny coat and her mane and tail was unusually thick and luxuriant. Her appearance was so attractive and appealing that it would open the purse of any prospective buyer. To those who are fond of our four footed friends, to see her was to want her.

She was bought and carried to a large plantation near the County seat to be used by the owner in fancy driving when "buggy driving" was in vogue. It was during the uncertain days of the World War when the flower of our young manhood was called to the front and when those left behind were called upon to raise food to sustain the fighting forces.

Lewis was the son of a large family where farming was the predominant occupation and where Maude was brought to make her home. The aged mother wanted to do her "patriotic bit" in the nation wide conflict, but was glad her boy was not eligible for oversea duty as she had just stood by the open grave of her other son and too, she remembered the horrors of 61-65. The call and urge was made for the planting of more food, and she with her son, responded by enlarging their agricultural operations. The planting possibilities were extensive and every idle acre was tilled. To increase activities, more stock had to be purchased and that meant signing on the dotted line in a big way.

Mules were expensive and when ever the planter had to replenish his livestock it was a lucky break for some one in the mule and horse business in the city markets near by. Any where from a span to a score were purchased with prices ranging from \$200.00 to \$350.00 a head and that

spelled a neat sum of money. The prosperous planter gave a fat check while those who were operating farms "on time" made a fat mortgage on his incoming crop. And the dealer scored. Lewis went into town to buy a pair of mules and a horse for his personal use. He was of the "stepping out" age and wanted a knock out.

He made arrangements for the trip which was 35 or 40 miles from the capitol city. Several negroes on the farm was selected to make the trip to bring the stock back and ones chosen were in high glee as it was an event - As the blacks expressed it they were going and coming "by dirt", and about three days were required in transit.

They were delighted to go with Little Boss - because he would give them money - and good eats - plenty of "red eye" (whiskey) and carousing was on their program. Old historical Tallawassee Creek was usually the camping-out place. On the return trip a longer time was required to stop in order to sober up before reaching the Big House where another stop was made for Mistus to inspect the drove. The drove was led one by one to the rear door of the ante bellum plantation mansion and the Mistus was wheeled out in a luxurious rolling chair by a mulatto woman.

The Mistus was reared in the lap of luxury, and was a product of the southern aristocracy and with resources to back up her ideas of extravagance. She could not get away from it. When Maude was led up for inspection she was proud that her son would have the prettiest team in town and was glad he paid twice as much for her as they usually paid for a family horse. As the drove trotted down the Highway, Maude was a beautiful brute. Her black coat shon out in the sunlight. It was smoothe as satin and as glossy. At that time one of the favorite customs among the young people was buggy rides in the afternoon. A

When she arrived at the home of the "best girl" "Maudie's Bird Place".



girl counted her popularity by her invitations to go driving. Lewis was "itching" to show out his new horse and could not wait till Sunday P. M. come (which was usually the high point in pastime in rural districts.) A note was sent to the home of his best girl asking her for a date to help him christen his new beauty.

For this purpose (sending the note) he selected a most likely Negro and some time was spent in dressing him up to impress the girls family. a high standing celluloid collar was always on hand to be used by the messenger. If one could arouse from a sleep such as Rip Van had, they could recognize Sunday in a small town by the "Piccaninies" flying to and fro with notes. And it might be added that the maidens were on the sly expecting one.

Perhaps she had been kept awake half of the previous night because in secret anticipation she had put her hair up in rags or curl papers or kid rollers and sleep was next to impossible. In the days of kid rollers - kid gloves were also slept in, and the face had an overnight buttermilk spread or mask - sometime even worse. There were no local telephones for date making - neither were there beauty parlors in that period - but primping and love making prospered the world over, and in some way Maude got her "make-up".

The invitation was answered with a sweet acceptance and Maude was brushed and brushed till her hide was soft and slick. Her mane and tail was also thoroughly combed and brushed. The H. M. T. (Hug Me Tight) buggy was also rubbed up and polished and she was hooked to it. The buggy which was commonly known by that name was light weight, expensive and had a small seat. It was usually used for sporting purposes.

It was noticed that she was very frisky and was "rareing" to go. When she arrived at the home of the "best girl" "Mocking Bird Place",



she could scarcely be held in check long enough for the "best girl" to get in and she could not get in till two men were called to hold the horse down and cover her head with sacks. For the occasion the "date" attired herself in a charming dress of Dolly Varden organdie, white sandals and picture hat. The dainty outfit was accompanied by a white sunshade covered with ruffles and a feathered fan.

After the dainty girl finally got in a white ribbon was tied in a large bow around the buggy whip. This was too much "agony" for Maude so she made a start on her wild drive. Lewis "showed" her and the outfit to the home town people and then decided to show her off to his friends in the capitol of Lowndes.

The seven mile fun from town to town meant nothing to the speeding Maude, and was rapidly covered. The girl was holding on and Lewis secretly admitted that they had to go where the horse willed. Those who saw them said they were traveling at such speed that it took two to see them. Wherever a stop was made for a cold drink, two men had to hold her and again her head was covered. Lewis only thought she had wonderful speed and needed "breaking in", so he was still proud of his buy.

Several of the principal streets were driven up and down and then he began to circle around the public square. The climax of the wild ride (which he was enjoying immensely) came as he was passing the Courthouse. Maude was daintily trotting along when Alas! her tail dropped off in the highway! The beautiful luxurious tail that was one of her great attractions.

It was about five P. M. when the streets were crowded and around the courthouse at that time the elite of the town and county were gathered. It would be difficult to describe the embarrassment of the



couple. The amusement of the bystanders and the amusement of everyone. A horse had lost his tail and trotted on and around the square without ever stopping. An occurrence that it was said by spectators that no one ever heard before. And it was not a case of "they say", but it was witnessed by outstanding citizens. Maude was carried on the last stages of her journey to the farm.

Upon investigation it was found that the false tail was made of beautiful horse hair and made with some attachment by which it was fastened to and around her own tail which was but a "nub". Of course, the job was not secure, hence the discovery. The "once over" which she was then given disclosed the fact that the mane was also false.

This was an abundant amount of glossy horses' hair made into a mane and stuck on with a heavy glue, and her wonderful amount of spirit and speed was due to the fact that she had been "pepped up" with quantities of Cocaine. By the time she reached her destination the effects of this had worn off and when her "make up" was taken off, she would not have been recognisable and was too worn out to be of any service. Her "make-up" and transformation was a neat piece of work.

Lewis goes back to horse trader and a small adjustment was made, but the joke lives on, and is still resurrected and laughed over by those who saw it.

Not a Tall Tale - but an actual honest to goodness incident that took place in Lowndes County. Maude was a knock-out but of short duration.

4/4/39

MS.



Mr. L. W. Reese, my informant, is a land owner and planter at Lowndesboro, Alabama. He is a grandson of N. M. Reese, a pioneer in Lowndes, and who aided in the development of the village. L. W. Reese attended home schools and Howard College, Birmingham, Alabama - past merchant at Lowndesboro, and at time the incident written of occurred he operated the extensive "Turner Farm", property of his mother, 7 miles south of the county seat, and he was the purchaser of the horse with the "make-up". He is a bachelor 55 years of age, weighs 145 Lbs., pepper and salt hair, dark complexion and gray eyes. Democrat and Episcopalian.

Interviewed in his home, with a view of again getting the story I had heard before.



4/5/39  
MS.

As of January 29, 1982 the article, "The Ex-Slave Seston" (Earnest Robinson), written by Marie Reese of Lowndes County, Alabama apparently is an Ex-Slave Narrative interview.

The title nor informant's name does not appear in George P Rawick's THE AMERICAN SLAVE, Volume I, Supplement Series I, Alabama Narratives, and Volume 6, Alabama and Indiana Narratives, published by the Greenwood Publishing Company, Westport, Connecticut, 1941 original and 1976 3d Greenwood Reprint.

The Library of Congress INDEX should be consulted.

As told by Earnest Robinson,  
Nov. 16, 1938, at his home,  
Lowndesboro, Alabama.

Marie Reese  
Lowndesboro  
Lowndes County, Ala.



*Manuscript*

#### THE EX-SLAVE SEXTON

"Ole Earnest", the ex-slave is an interesting character in "Markeydom" today and an interesting relic of the yesterdays when the southern white village was in full bloom. Dark as to color, but doing his bit in making history as the years rolled on and on. His advent was in time to see the small town bud, then blossom. He saw its decline until it (for the most part) was mere shadows of its former glories.

He is now in the list of the has-beens, and as is characteristic of that class, he swells with pride in reminiscing. Earnest Robinson with his wife, Lizzie, and the children who have not flown from the home nest, live in one of the oldest houses near the destroyed business section. Traditionally it was one of the first homesteads here, erected by the pioneers from the Palmetto State.

From its appearance the tradition should not be questioned, as looking upon it, one would think it was built for Adam and Eve at the beginning of time when our Maker made the world, instead of it being the homestead of early pioneers. The shack of the ex-slave was bought from "Ole Marster" after, years after the "surrender," as the colored element date many events. "Ole Marster" said a man not owning his own fireside was not much man and he 'vised me never to put a scratch ag'in'it."

"He done gone to glory, but dis ole nigger ain't disremembered his words and there is nary scratch ag'in' it. I was "hitched" 80 years ago in the kitchen room in the white folks back yard. In them days in slavery time the "cookaman" lived in a room joining the kitchen

out-doors. No cookin' in de house then."

"Ria run in de big house on dat Christmas morning and 'nounced to the marster sumpt'n done happen. Santy Claw done come out dare, done fetch ma a fine nigger boy. Us been looking for dat nigger in all de stumps, but he done come down the "chimly" and brung me. White folks was powerful proud! cause I was one more nigger to work, one more nigger slave and marster said I was a fine brat and would be worth piles of money when I growed up. He made 'em ring de bells and knock de sweep and said a nigger was as easy to raise as a pig. Give him all de milk and bread he could "lay to" and he would grow.

"Marster and Missus, dey give de niggers a big blow-out that night 'cause a fine little nigger done been birthed. Bonfires - barrels of apples was opened - big boxes of streaked pep'mint candy, "hoppop" and stage plank cake. You bet dem niggers was glad I was birthed that day. Dis coming Christmas will be 80 years ago.

Ole Marster, lemme tell you was a "world burner". He more knowed how to lay de plat and use de strop on de niggers. He set de shade and counted his dough; he counted his niggers, plantations full of 'em. He counted how much cotton, corn, 'lasses and 'taters us would make but lo and behold while white folks was counting dem folks up Horf outcounted them some way, and "set us free" so dis nigger never did get to bring dem thousand dollars. 'Mancipation set us free as de birds in de air.

"One day 'noration got out. Yankees was coming and us was skeered. Marster, he runs and hides in de swamp. Mistus and de white gals buried der money in de graveyard near de garden and sewed der rings and such like in de bosoms and prayed powerful praying.

Us black folks was rampant and said de judgment day was coming. Us mammy's catch us chillun up and ripped up planks and de flo' and



hide us under de flo'. She got old tab - de black kitten housecat - tied her in a sack and put her in de crack wid us for good luck. You know black cats always give good luck. She nailed de plank back and us chillun stayed under dat kitchen room all night. I sets against the cat and he tuk and scratched me in de face. I'm going to carry dis scar on my face to de grave and I'se carrying de name "cat" to my grave too. Dey call me "Cat" all my days most, and cats for short too you know. Anyway the black uns sho bring us niggers luck dat time, 'cause dem Yankees rid on and lef us niggers, but tak' all ole marster's good hosses and hams what would make your mouth water to look at.



"But us - marster and mistus, niggers and all - was glad to git off wid letting of de hosses and de hams and save us hides. Us tuk notice of one thing in special. I done tole you marster was a "world burner" wid de strop, but when dat swarm of men-folks come he burned de wind and tole us to "root hog or die".

"I hearn tell much of freedom and 'mancipation 'round de grown niggers, but I couldn't git my mind off de hosses, dem juicy hams and barrels of lasses what de army men poured out. (Us lil niggers sopped it running down de hill and de old wet muss said, "Let de chillun sop, what won't kill 'em will fatten." And I don't spec de white filks keered 'cause us lil kinky heads w'ant going bring dem thousands now.

"Us keep thinking what marster going say now when he race de fine race hosses and puffs de pipe from N. O. and brags about how many fine slaves he got. 'Mancipation done come. De strop and de plat done got outer date. Some ob de niggers git biggety, but little as dis nigger wus, I keep lookin' at dat smoke house full ob meat even if de hams was gone.

Hog killing time when us eat jowl and chitlens tillus couldn't stand up - all de lasses and banks - yes, sum rows of banks taters what de sweetness run out when de was roastin', us call 'em taters and "niggerkillers"

but de sweetest ones, de young white gals call 'em yams in de big house, candy yams. You say "gals" yes, sho as shootin, ole marster and mistus had litters of chillun and 'mongst 'em was three putty gals, dey was putty as speckled pups and all wid coal black hair, and de had "lewsoms", I tell you (beaus) and de lewsoms would send 'em candy hearts with de words "I love you" writ on one side de heart and candy valentines wid sweet words written on them.

"Ole marster made dese gals le tickler too. No young bucks come courtin' of his gals lessen he's pa had many niggers and land as he had. Dey called dey selves big land owners, big slave holders and if there's didn't come up to his'n he would made de yard man sick de dogs on him or tell de young buck he would send him an "answer" when any lady wanted to see him. 'No po' white trash courtin' my gals.'

"He went on to have vigorous bull dogs too. Better never put foot on his land. At night de bulldogs wuz turned loose and twixt de bulldogs and de plat, nothing went wrong on dat place, but I recollect 'emancipation done come and all us 'member luck of dat cat. So we catch us de left hind foot of de rabbits in de graveyard. De menfolks carry a rabbit foot and 'omens tied a silver dime wid a string round de leg above de ankle bone.

"Der was some big thinking done and scratching de head. Peers like us need all de good luck pieces 'cause de keep saying root hog or die, no more free eatin' / De smoke house done been nailed up. My mammy sot us around de fire one night and tole us de old story "Ev'y man fo' heself and God for all, my chillun git to work if you want victuals.

"She tole us 'bout marster having big money and said he was a big man. Dat long fo' I was bred and birthed he hooked up de fattest steers



in de lot to de steer wagon and sent it down by de river to somewhere and hauled through de roads full of mud part of steeple to go on church of his own old mistus. Clem, my old man, drive de steers. Better scratch your head good niggers, us slavery time marster is a big man, he bought dat top off de "captible", he got bags er money and niggers you see dat smokehouse done been nailed up." !!!

Time passed, the world changes and we changed with it. Ernest the ex-slave sexton and one-time a possession of Maj. Wm. Cold Bill Robinson (who was in the historical limelight in the 1840's, having obtained for his church one of the most interesting relics of Alabama), grew to manhood and in his terms "had Lizzie". According to him, he decided to follow in the footsteps of his owner in connecting himself with the village history.

He got married, he bought his own home and became sexton of most of the churches in the town between the years of 1880 - 1882 and is still actively in harness and on the job. He claims to have rung the bells and performed the duties of Sexton for almost 60 years. A remarkable record. He says, "I am slightly disfigured but still in the ring and the old nigger can make a weekly day too, by hiring out by the day."

He swells with pride in telling about "Tonine" his bells. He has rung them in the days of sunshine and in hours of sorrow. They call the community to worship, they ring out joyously as wedding bells. They have rung sixty-odd years into the past and as new ones in. He has with bowed head, tolled many a departed one on the first stage of the endless journey. and old Earnest is at the end of the rope on his job.

He said if he had as many "lucks" as he had "toned" (tolling he means) persons over the hill, he would lean on easy street. Also the old darky has made almost an unparalleled record in doing his bit toward populating the town. The couple have been the parents of nineteen children, all of



whom have been normal and healthy. Some died in after years, but on being asked about them he said they had been very fortunate (?) He boasts of his 'ligion and said the scriptures told him to be fruitful and multiply the earth and he certainly followed his Biblical teachings in that respect.

He said the Sundays his clothing ain't fitten to go to meetin' he reads his "good book" and the favorite selection is "David meeting Goliath", till he gets skeered then he "talks with God". He remembered the words and admonition of his owner, "a man without his own fireside ain't much man" and as soon as he married he bought the cottage on Main St. The cottage built by the "blue blooded" South Carolinians, but now looks like it was built for Adam.



The ex-slave sexton was ambitious and wanted a nice home for his little flock, so when his Lord blessed his home with a baby he added another shed room to the original pioneer cottage which was of a non-descript type and its age old type now certainly does not typify any style. He said he and his ole 'oman "made minds" to add a room every time there was an addition to the family. Several new babies came soon and fast and he said their minds had to change.

If their increase would be that rapid the house would have to be added to so much that it would gread all over the business part of town. So they decided to "pack in" and then too he was fortunate with his children. Many went home to the God that gave them, others flew the coop and now the family consists of six. The aged couple, two children and two grandchildren.

The old darky says times are hard. He is getting old and thinks he ought to get on the pension list. Has paid taxes since '82. Ringing the bells don't bring much, and 'visions are high and he can't live or work without his 'bacco so wants to get "on" or get some of the free government

what this one and that one is getting and he wants a slice in the pie. He can write and read, and when out of work, or is down in the back, he spends his time with his Bible and reading True Stories and at times is an aspirant to historical reading, especially any pertaining to the "surrender".

A chapter in his life, between this surrender and settling down in the own home advised by his white owner, he loves to tell is of his work as waiter and cabin boy on the steamers Mobile and Ruth, which plied the Alabama river in the '70's, under the command of the popular Lowndes Countian, Capt. C. J. English.



He recalls the glories of steamboat life, the handsome captain, the prosperous river plantation planters who were passengers, the finest victuals you ever flopped your mouth on. The Bar that was wide open on the river, but was closed on the approach to each city. Last, but certainly not least, he tells of himself, the best looking nigger on board. "Man, you oughter seen me, hair all straightened and busted open in the middle and me in a whitecoat. I was some struttin' nigger.

The greater part of a century has rolled by. The old major is sleeping in sight of the historical dome. Old Earnest, the ex-slave sexton, is still tolling the bells. He with his colored mate, is still walking down the years hand in hand. His bent form is indicative of a not so far off reunion with his old marster, where there will be no white, no black and no outcounting, or miscounting.

12/7/38

S.J.

U "Wm. (Bill) Robinson,"  
Unique and large store owner,  
told by a surviving slave,  
Earnest Robinson,  
Lowndesboro, Alabama.

Marie Reese  
Lowndes County



Earnest was sitting on the steps reading a worn and very much soiled True Story which was a way back copy and he said had been given to him by a white lady to help him pass away time when he was not able to work. The old colored man was warming his wornout body and painful limbs in the sunshine of a gorgeous and beautiful morning in March.

He was waiting while his old woman was cooking dinner and the fragrance of coffee and the sizzling meat in the adjacent kitchen was tempting. He put the True Story aside and, scratching his head that was now bald, began to tell about his old Master in slavery time days. He warmed up to the occasion and his eyes grew animated as he gave accounts of those good old days when "grub" was plentiful.

"My old Master (Major William Robinson) was what you call a "Big Shot." He had so many niggers he couldn't count 'em and so much money he couldn't spend it, but he was so mean that his own chillun wouldn't stay with him but got out soon as they were half way old enough to scuffle for themselves. They left him, money and all and said they would wait and get their part after he died for no matter how much "dough" he had, he couldn't buy a shroud with a pocket in it and when he was laid out on his "cooling board" he would quit his meanness, then.

"I tell you," he continued, "my white boss was the meanest and cruelest man I ever seed and everybody dat eat his bread and meat walked light and "skittish" around him from his wife down to de suckling babies. De old Mistus was skeered of him mightily and I most know his family and niggers were glad when he was good and dead, but 'course us was free then, but you know, some folks never forgits and I spec' they would be glad to know he was in torment.

"Bless your bottom dollar he was a "Big Ike" in them days and 'scusing his meanness, nobody was going to projeck with him. He cuss at de folks dat talk about him and say "My money will back me up," and you know de world moved 'long by dat. You got money in your jeans and you can get by doing anything till you get to the Judgment Bar, but don't you fool yourself 'bout that.

"Your"long green" ain't going to impress St. Peter. If you git in whar dat milk and honey is, you sho' gwine to toe de 'ligious line on dis side. Every time my Master tuk and whup a nigger, I say to myself, "The devil sharpening up his pitchfork for him now and he will git punishment like he is giving us poor critters," and we will be in Heben in blessedness." 'Course I believe niggers goin' to Heben. Slavery time niggers got their hell here and had to 'cept it and when my Lord called they flew right through them pearly gates whar de milk and honey run free as water. And de white bucka-here he gnawed off a piece of Brown mule tobacco and paused-I'se a poor victualless nigger and won't say whar mean white folks gwine, but turn about is fair and I believe de Lord gwine 'venge us race. I puts on my specs and reads de gospel eve'y Sunday. I won't read this here (pointing to the True Story), eve'y day 'cause it's imbellishing, but its too dominating to read on de holy day.

"Then I gets out my Bible. Fust I listen to singing yonder in de white church and then I starts my worship and opens my book. I sees that our Lord says its impossible for a rich man to get in de kingdom. I love dat part of the gospel, 'cause it gives us poor niggers a chance. Ev'y rule works both ways.

"My mind tells me two things. These old bones of mine will land on de Lazarus side and Old Bill my slavery time Master, is br'iling on de gridirons of torment. He had hundreds of slaves. Some were down on dem fine plantations along de Rivers, some wuz on de plantations near Lowndesboro and a gang lived



in de slave quarters near on de horse branch near de big house. He had regular "whupping days" and would write down all the week de 'fenses agin them and on dat day he would drive around from place to place and lay de plat on 'em.

"He had whut in dem days wuz called Bull Whups (whips) and he made the other slaves ketch and hold down de one who had 'mitted de 'fense, and he would regular work on 'em with de bull whup till de blood run. Sometime he would make 'em lay down in de hot sun and he straddled 'em and rub de head wid a hot brick bat, till his nigger git good and blistered.

"Den when he said de nigger was 'tremely bad de boss man got a barrel and driv' nails all in the sides of the barrels with the pints inside. Mr. Nigger was put in it and the barrel was rolled fast down a steep hill. Dat nigger had to go to bed. Nobody could 'port him 'cause de man was his'n and de boss was lousy wid money. His wife "worked on" de women and chillun. I redon she is close to him now, 'cause she kept sometin in de house similar to a club or blackjacks.

"She mought been a reasoning woman but for him. He made her stand around and when he 'bused her, she tuk and tuk it out on de wimmen, so everybody knowed when she got her dose, and de chillun. He had a litter of 'um and soon as a boy got big enough, dey got a pulling out ticket for Texas, and what I am talking about t'want nary return ticket neither.

"Three of dem boys went and ain't come back from dat day to dis. When he fell off de high porch one night and mashed his insides so he died soon after, dem boys didn't move a peg to come to him. He died and some of 'em be dead too out there and they mought have met at de Golden Gate trying to get in, and they mought have sont back and got part of de money, but its dead sure when dey shook de dust off dey foots of dis land around here, it was as when "Katie barred de door" and you know what dat means."

I hear 'em say he got de preacher to come down and give him sacrament



'fo' he died, an' wid all his cruelty he was 'ligious. Just as eve'ybody knows his money most helt up de church up yonder what got de steeple on it what folks done plumb run talk about in the ground. He bought it and sent slap to 'Hawba atter it-dat's one reason why he was a big dog.

"I tell you most folks lick your boots if you got money." Taking another gnaw at the Brown Mule, he said, "I know he sent his teams down there for it and he went along on horseback to pay down the cash for it when it was tore of some big place. My old daddy Clem Robinson, drive the steers and it tuk weeks to make the trip. The roads were bad and muddy and de old steers would log up and stall. My daddy got bad whuppings on dat trip. When de devil got in him he got contrary. Passing by the swamps he would gather the toughest canes he could find and sharpen them and punch the oxen to make 'em balk-ruinous to the animal and retarding the trip.

"The boss burnt him up too. Old daddy Clem was a match for him. In meanness he met his daddy drunk, as the old saying goes, 'cause my daddy was a bad man too. Lots of the niggers wuz mean and got what wuz comin' to 'em and they knowed punishment would end it, because wouldn't 'stroy valuable property.

"When a big fine buck of a nigger walked about he meant thousands of dollars. Master kept a parcel of dogs too. 'Mong 'em was four great big bull dogs. Them scoundrels of beasts were whoppers and wuz on de job. We couldn't leave de place lessen you had a written pass signed by him and if you made a move to slip out you had to answer to de bull dog who knowed de creak of de gate. Not even a cat was 'lowed on his dirt.

"And he didn't want de white folks dere and said de so called comp'ny brought and carried lies and disturbance and if anyone that didn't suit come courin' his gals he told de niggers to sic the dogs on 'em and sent 'em an answer that he would invite 'em if anyone down there wanted to court 'em.



"Two of de gals died out of it. He was a racehorse man and trotted de finest ones in this neck of the woods, and once he driv the eyes out of one of them. One of the old sayings 'mong our race was "Run nigger run, patrol will catch you, but we were under patrol day and night, but we got all de good victuals we could say grace over. He was sutiful to his church and as he paid the mainest money he had the preacher to preach in his church to slaves every Sunday evenings 'cause we had no church. Regular as a new clock when Sunday evening come he lined us all up and marched us to church. He walked behind with a whip in hand and bull dog trotting by his side. If you nodded in church he tapped you on the head.

"The preacher had a special sermon for us-such advice as "Be good slaves. Mind your owners, don't steal and such like. I done worshiped under de old 'storic steeple more times than "Carter's got oats."

Earnest Robinson was born as best he could tell, 80-odd years ago. He was the slave of Maj. Bill Robinson, of Lowndesboro, Alabama. After freedom he remained in the family service many years. He then engaged in farming and served as Sexton at the local churches 50 years, and said he tolled the bells for funerals and marriages during those years. He was sitting on the steps reading True Stories and chawing 'bacco when I approached him. Putting his book aside, he glowed with pride and pleasure as he told me of his Master. and it was not mixed with any bitterness. He is a true product of the slavery life, well liked by all who know him.

3/29/39



S.J.

Corrie Rogers (Colored)  
Ex-CWA and WPA worker  
Lowndesboro, Alabama  
Personal Interview

Marie Reese  
Lowndes County



#### STORY OF A WPA WORKER

Corrie was a small woman with straight black hair with a slight natural wave and keen black eyes. She was a gingerbread color and always was neat and clean in some plain but nicely made clothes. She was reared by her well-to-do colored parents and always made a good appearance, but the attractive print dresses were due to the fact that she had been on the Sewing Project of Lowndes County through the period of five years.

She lived at the north end of the village in what is known as the "colored" settlement, in a small three-room house that is so dilapidated she calls it a hut. It has been in existence possibly a hundred years and from its appearance one would guess that two hundred was its age.

A few years ago a nice new room was added to the cabin when she and Pleas, her husband, came back to the paternal roof to live and care for the aged mother who had lost her eyesight and was completely helpless. Pleas was a short and thrifty farmer and got good wages. He was a good provider, and as the colored element expresses it, he had "plenty around him." He worked out for wages with a large white farmer nearby.

However, his hours "off duty" were spent at home making a garden and he raised a large number of fine hogs. They had nice milk cows and poultry in abundance. The appearance of the old cottage was almost forgotten then by the beautiful yard full of colorful annuals and the railings of the old porch was full of pretty bright geraniums growing in pots.

Corrie by trade was an excellent washerwoman and took care of the wash of two or three families' clothes, so the earnings she received from these and the wages her husband got was sufficient to meet the living

expenses of the three and apparently things were running smoothly until the husband began to philander. The first time Mr. A. (his white boss) wanted him to remain on the farm to drench his best mule which was sick(?) The fine mules represented from \$250 to \$350 and their sickness was the occasion of considerable anxiety. The loss of one meant an immediate duplicate or lose the entire crop worked by it.

A few nights passed and the colored philanderer claimed that his boss wanted him to remain late and weigh up the cotton picked that day. Soon he was sent after freight and the wagon broke causing another delay. Then the same excuses took the rounds the second time.

At last poor Corrie realized too many mules were getting sick and thought the boss must have a powerful unhealthy bunch and decided to make a tour of investigation. The result was that she found that her husband was sparking after a young Jane. The flashy young dandel took his eye and her helpmeet. Corrie without him had the full responsibility of her blind mother and could scarcely carry on her wash, so had to drop most of it. With the care of her mother and very little money coming in she was up against it.

The Welfare Department came to her assistance, gave her mother a monthly check and some groceries and Corrie got on the Sewing Project. However, she was beset with many difficulties. The center in which the work was done was located eight miles from her home and transportation was not provided and the poor woman had to make her daily trip there and back by foot.

Long before light on the cold winter mornings she would get up and prepare the simple breakfast and dinner for her mother, milk and tie out the cows for the day and set out walking the long distance up road #80 to the sewing center. Before leaving and often by the light of the moon she had to whip affairs in shape for the day. Water, the midday meal and



snuff box was placed on the table by the blind mother to serve her till Corrie returned long after the shadows fell.

She wrapped the mother in a bundle of quilts to protect her from the cold during the long winter day, as she was afraid a fire might prove disastrous - maybe burn up the house and her mother within. She had several nearby neighbors of her color and I asked her if they would not be kind enough to lend a helping hand during her absence.

She told me that they were mean niggers and were meddlesome. While she was away they would steal her chickens, pull up her flowers, either milk her cows or turn the cows and calves together so they would not give any milk that night when she came home and most often had to milk them by the light of the moon, in order to have something to help on the next day. And she said she could not afford to let them in, for they would steal inside and ruin her. They would stir up and discontent her mother, telling her she was locked as a jailbird and left alone to die.

She said they were jealous of her job and did all they could to dissatisfy her mother while she was away making the daily bread and she had to do this to turn the wolf from the door. That the money from "de 'oman over yonder" (The Welfare Director) - and will add that the Negroes in these environments put their faith and dependence on her as almost they do in the second coming of Christ - was enough to buy food and the necessaries.

Consequently, even under these almost unsurmountable difficulties and personal hardships she was forced to go. Another feature of the project which was a CWA one at that time, was a ruling that when one of these benefit checks for the aged or incapable was given out, if there was an able-bodied member in that family who suited the work of the project, he or she was put on it and that the worker received the pay less the check given the disabled one.

So Corrie told me she was "hogtied". They had to live, the older woman too old and totally blind, but she was able. The 'oman over yonder



came over personally and over looked conditions and pronounced it a worthy case, but the daughter must work it out.

Corrie walked eight miles there and the same on her return, making sixteen miles, daily, all told. She put in eight hours sewing per day and in event she was late she was docked. If she was docked too many mornings and too many hours it showed either that they were lazy and did not deserve the work or it was impossible to reach it and they were fired! She told me that sometimes she could catch a ride but not often, and she did not like to do this for even if she was dark in color, she'd been brought up right and had white ideas and principals.

The men who usually offered to pick her up were fresh and often drinking and she thought too much of herself to ride with liquor and God had given her feet to walk and she would use them. She said they could tell her she was a widow woman and if she was a "quit-widow", they always put blame on the woman and thought she wanted to spark after them.

"I'm colored," she continued, "but Corrie is going to hold myself up, and I ain't going to give another no chance. I will tell you, you can't count on mens - tricky is not the first name. Look at me. I was gingerbread color; black wavy hair, always neat and clean and always put that nigger between two sheets to sleep. Some niggers was unacquainted with a clean sheet. I went to State Normal training School.

"We had our little paid-for home when he married me and all he had to do was walk in and put his feet under the eatin' table. But believe me that was not enough. He swapped me off when that black gal stepped between us and she was too lazy to wash a pocket handkerchief.

"You can't put your hands on mens. They are like fleas. They hop and hop from one place to another. I got book-learning and I soon caught on. Too many mules got sick on that place and I will give my(ex) 'sperience to all 'wimminkind'. When their helpmeets keeps giving 'scuses, put it down



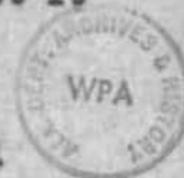
they 'wells as to' begin work in single harness and accept themselves as quit-widows. So that's why I let the cars and trucks roll on and hot foot it to the Center. So the days, weeks and months passed and the lone figure could be seen in the gray light of dawn trudging on road #80 to the small cabin which was where the unit met and worked.

This could be organized if there were as many as five eligibles and was accessible to as many more as desired. The hours were from 8 A.M. to 4 P.M. and for their work they drew \$9.50 twice monthly if they put in full time. The work consisted of making quilts, print dresses for women and children and some undergarments of outing. Also sheets and pillow cases were made by the sewers. Some of the work was done on machine and some by hand. The garments and articles made were sent to the Welfare Department at the County seat and they were distributed among those who were on relief together with the grocery commodities. The unit upon which she worked was one of the many which were stationed at different points over the county and was overlooked by an efficient supervisor. (white of course)

Another ruling later was that all the units of centers had to be consolidated and located at the county seat. A considerable number of the workers were weeded out. Some due to being incapable - suitable to the hoe rather than the needle - while the distance eliminated others. (Then the W.P.A)

From 35 to 40 Negroes composed this center with a white cutter. Corrie hung on with bull dog tenacity, and had to cover the same mileage in another direction. The lone figure was seen making the eight miles daily. Soon a visitor entered the hut that no lock and key could keep out. Death entered and carried the blind woman to the other side. This changed the affairs of Corrie. She still hung on, but providence had released from responsibilities and she thought the checks now without strings, would never end.

The old blind woman was put away in an expensive vault and casket (on time). The dealer took a chance. Corrie nailed up her house, disposed of her livestock and settled herself in a room and light housekeeping in Hayneville near her work.



As a result of bad management, her check was spent ere it was made. This time the strings were held by the small town delicatessen owner.

She said when she returned from her hours that her groceries had "swunk" up and she was continually buying more. The parties who rented her a room, she noticed, bought less. For noontime lunch she bought cheese, cream cones and delicate nicknacks. These were not filling, but ate a big hole in her money. She boasted that she was the best dressed woman on the job. All silk from head to toe. The "peoples" back home were jealous because they could not "get on" and "I'll show them something to be jealous for. "I will show that nigger what he missed by 'serting me for the black gal." But alas the WPA closed the project!

Corrie had to come home and unnaill the house. Out of work, no money, saved and a tremendous funeral bill facing her and she can't live off "silk" from head to toe "memories." She says the project closed two years ago and she hasn't made a penny since. Claims she has no work, no money and nothing around her, not even a cat or dog and is in need. Says she has appealed to the 'oman over yonder till she is disheartened. (disenheartened)

2/15/39



S.J.

Mr. and Mrs. Hubert Rowe  
Lowndesboro, Alabama

Marie Reese  
Lowndes County  
Alabama



### THE LOG COTTAGE

In a beautiful and picturesque grove of age old oaks on a main highway between a small village in Lowndes and the seat of justice, a small log cottage has been recently built. The rustic simplicity alone makes it attractive - in a near town that is noted for its plantation mansions and ante-bellum homes.

As a friend of mine and myself were driving about on one of the bright and lovely mornings of the first week of our New Year, the charming and unique cottage came in view and we decided to call upon its occupants, who were new comers, and with whom we had a pleasant acquaintance.

We turned off the highway and entered the grove, and as we approached the cottage the lady of the house waved us a cheery welcome. She was out front looking at some flower beds to see if the seed were coming up and they were. As soon as we all exchanged greetings, she showed us the many many tiny green specks and told us that there would be millions to volunteer and very sweetly offered us some plants later on, saying she would have enough to "set out" a plantation.

I inquired as to what they were and she said there would be petunias, larkspur, zinnias, phlox and goodness knows what all else. "I planted papers and papers full of seed last April when they were building the house and I really believe every single seed answered the "roll call."

They will come up all over the place, because when they went to seed, many fell on the ground, of course, also the wind blew them here, there and everywhere. The house was built in the large woodland enclosure, but had no yard proper. On seeing several hens with many "biddies" to each hen, we asked her how the flowers and chickens got on together. She said, as I have no chicken yard, and no yard fenced around the house, she had to

make the best of it, and they did scratch the flowers up, but she had so many annuals (in season) she did not miss them.

The approach to the house, or broad walk was bordered on either side with rich fat flower beds about a yard wide which were edged with small unhewn logs carrying out the rustic idea in correspondence with the house.

On both sides of the entrance steps into the small porch were two large flowering quince bushes, which one would have guessed were two or more decades old. She said "look at these, they are my husband's pride." He only set them out today. He dug them up from the front yard of the old homestead back yonder, and she pointed to the mere shadow of a onetime plantation home which would soon be a memory. "My husband says a small unpretentious home surrounded by bright flowers and pretty trees and vines is more attractive than a mansion with desolate surroundings."

The White family, which is composed of father, mother and small son Willie, moved to the small town in middle Lowndes two years ago, and are making good in the cattle business. Mr. White was born and reared on a small farm in an adjacent county.

Being in a large family, with small possessions, the head of the house instilled in the sons the urge to get out as soon as possible. Mr. White, the reason of this story, got out on "his own" and got a clerkship in a leading grocery store in the capitol city. He worked and he saved his earnings. He knew the story of how his boss forged his way ahead. How the boss who was now one of the moneyed men of the city, had left their small town as a bare-foot boy and gone into the city and made good. So Mr. White reasoned that he might do the same. If he could make money for the other fellow, he could make it for himself.

Mr. W. had dreams - he wanted to branch out for himself, so he

uptake and interest.



saved his wages. His dreams were of a farm and cattle raising. On every side he heard that there was good money in it and he decided to get out on the farm. But he had no land. He could not return home as there were already too many there dependent on the small farm. After many attempts, he located a nice place for rent in Lowndes and moved his small family into the village which was two miles distant from the plantation that he had rented, but the arrangement did not prove at all satisfactory and was too expensive. The house rent he thought was too high. The gas bill to and from his place of business was to be counted, the wear and tear on his nice automobile, and then he said a man should live on a farm in order to succeed.

He decided to build the log cottage on the frontage of the plantation which he was operating. The owner of the land contended that the rents he received would not justify him making any improvements, but thought it would be an excellent idea for Mr. W. (the renter) to live on the scene of operation. Mr. W. "bite" and thought he could save by living on the farm. He said he could build a nice comfortable cottage for less than he could pay house rent 12 months, and gas bill to and from business. But it occurred to him that it would be hard to build on the other man's land, for when moving time came, what he spent on improvements, were by law the property of the owner. In other words, he was just enhancing the value of the real estate for some one else. However, he still "figured" it would be cheaper in the long run, so the dream cottage became a reality.

Mr. W. said he was paying city prices on the small town cottage, and as to the farm out on the highway, he considered it cheaper to rent land than to own it. To own a place was to have to take care of the taxes, the upkeep and interest.



Yes, interest is the all important consideration in regard to farms now in this section, because nine out of every ten are loaded to the utmost with loans. Rentals on lands are cheap. He says, "pay your rent and that ends it for me, but the owner has to scratch up the three above yearly requirements whether the rent is low or high. If insufficient, he has to meet them otherwise, or some one else will, and its too bad for him." Mr. W. says rent everytime, because farming conditions are demoralized to such extent that land owners have to take what they can get.

In many instances the weevil and mismanagement in farmer operation has broken them so they can't operate their own business, so its cheap rent or let it "lay out", meaning - a year lost - no revenue, but pay day comes.

In cases like these, if the owners of lands have large acreage, he is "land poor". Too many acres to pay on, and the ones doing duty cant carry the entire financialburden. After we had discussed the pros and cons of the seedlings to some length, admired the flourishing flowering quince bushes which were already blooming in a few places (the first week in January) Mrs. W. invited us in, and as usual with housewives she began to excuse the untidyness of the porch, upon which were several articles used on the farm. A cross-cut saw was lying on one end, and she said that was used daily to saw fire-wood from the near-by forests.

My mind, however, was busy admiring a picture in real life directly in front of the front screen door. A beautiful black and white spotted setter dog was in the warm morning sunshine playing with a cat, which was also very pretty.

The setter had his paws around the cat and was playing with the cat with his other front paw or foot. One could tell that the two four-footed friends were fond of each other, as the dog was most gentle and affectionate in his teasing. My friend is "catty" in her taste, and I am "doggish" so



we lingered to admire the picture. These, said our hostess "are my little boy's two pets, but he is in school and they miss him so much and have to pet each other. We call the setter "Rip" and the cat "Pest". She is into everything and is the pest of my life. "We could not get along without Rip. He is a fine hunting dog. When my husband goes out every day, he carries the dog and hunts him a little in the nearby woods while he gets up the cows. Rip usually gets us something for supper."

"There is plenty of game in these woods. The place has almost 1,000 acres in it and of course in a place that large, a good part is in woodland, and Sam always carries his gun and Rip along. Sam was raised on the farm and knows exactly how to find the best covey of birds, the fattest squirrels, possums and we have nice game to eat when we want it. I suppose you noticed when you came in that there were plenty of squirrels in the large trees around us, but we don't allow any one to harm them."

"Last summer when we sat out in the open we enjoyed them at play, jumping from limb to limb in the trees. At time they would come down very near us when we were quiet and soon some would "ease down" and drink water I had put out for my chickens. I understand that they will be very friendly if you will not frighten them at first."

"I had a neighbor once who tamed those in her yard and they were so cute and cunning in their play that they attracted much attention. She lived in an old time house setting way back on a lawn studded with oak, hickory nut, pine trees and such. The little animals feed on the nuts from the hickory trees and the acorns from the giant oaks. Its interesting to know that they too like the wise human race try to provide for the future, the long cold winter by carrying supplies of nuts and storing them away in tree hollows, etc."

She told us that Mr. had planned the cottage. He purchased the



"However, when these supplies come low is the time to make friends with them as they come lower and lower to earth. My friend said at this season she collected up neat tin cups and cans and painted them bright with paint from the 5 and 10¢ stores."

"These she filled with any nuts convenient; peanuts, last seasons pecans, and some times crumbs from the table. She nailed the bright cups laden with goodies about on the trees. One here and one there. One or two were tacked on the posts which supported the portico. Very soon the graceful little fellows would slip down and nibble. Day after day they would venture more until they became tame. "I am sure", she added, every one in town remember "Rip". We brought him with us and the first Sunday we attended services there, he got lonesome with no one at home and followed us into church and sat down by the pew."

"I will not give you seats now she told us when we entered the living room, I want to show you my home. It is not a big fine house like some are in the village, but its mine as long as we pay rent, and I am proud of it."

She had every right to be too. It was most comfortable and convenient, and its very oddness and difference from the usual modern homes made it attractive and from front to rear it was as neat and clean as a pin. She led the way showing us the living room, kitchen and bed room, the three rooms into which it was divided. The living room occupied the entire front half of the house, while the rear half was divided making a nice bed room and the other as attractive dining room and kitchen combination affair.

The house was made of pine logs stripped of the bark with a cement filling the openings. This was the inside and outside of the entire house, making it rustic in its natural state and very warm and cosy, as the cement took care of the cracks between the logs, and made it proof against cold.

She told us that Mr. W. had planned the cottage. He purchased the

pine logs at 50¢ apiece. He had some trouble in securing as many as he needed in a uniform size and length. Then it required a lot of time and work to trim or peel the bark off. A feature of the house is a nice broad porch in front which has many porch boxes in which geraniums are growing. She told me that they had bloomed some all winter, but she had to cover them cold nights. There was an immense cerise colored one on the inside which was placed on a cabinet radio that she said was no good except as a rather nice looking piece of furniture.

The living room was attractively furnished with a mixture of stuffed sofas, chairs, tables, and a very pretty studio couch given to her as a Christmas present by her husband. She laughingly told us that he took especial pains to have this nice and comfortable, as it was his bed every night.

The most charming and outstanding feature connected with the entire place was a beautiful and exquisite small piano which set the living room off. Not a toy piano at all, but a child's piano, about half the size of the old fashioned square ones.

This being rather unusual, I asked her about it and in reply she told me about it and her young son with much pride. She said for some time (he is 6 now) he showed a great love for music and some well known tutor said he would in time develop great talent in that line.

They purchased the instrument, paying several hundred dollars for it. He took to it and plays and sings, of course not understanding music, but by ear. They believe he will in time be something celebrated and are planning to give him every musical advantage.

The small 6 year old son however, has been a semi-invalid for the years of his young life and the parents have spent much time, money and



anxiety over him. Mrs. W. told me yesterday that he was getting over his trouble and was now able to attend school and S. S. She did not think the doctor knew really what his trouble was, but she felt that with special diet and extra care he would outgrow the weakness. Any way she said he was able to go to school and that meant something.

While we were chatting Mr. W. drove up in his "Ford pick-up" which was filled with a load of grand hickory wood - cut and ready for the open fire place which they said would heat the entire cottage. After unloading the wood, he came in to help entertain us.

He began by telling us that he had traded his car for the pick-up. He said "I thought that was the practical thing to do and we do not go in for airs and foolishness." The car spends money, and this little truck makes it - See! "I can haul my cows to market in this, and on the return, load bring feed and groceries back, haul wood etc. etc., while the car was no help but an out-put. He then told us about his dairy and a lot of his other business. "Cows make you money he said. This place is nearly 1,000 acres and is good farming land.

"I pay \$800.00 for it but am not going to farm it except a small acreage to raise corn to feed on. I have 90 cows in my dairy and ship milk. The S-milk truck routes by my door and carries it to market and good money is in that."

"But come let me show you my steer corral, and I will show you how I thought up a good place to handle them cheap and make a neat profit. We drove back of the cottage to a ravine or gully about one mile away. In this ravine he had herded 50 steers and fenced in the opening which was only on one side. In the ravine he had made rough rocks for the hay and troughs for feed. A running branch through one end furnished water. He bought the steers up when poor and of course cheap. He fed them heavily for 3 months

then would sell at a profit which would be attractive. He said the improvised corral had several advantages."

That the other stock on the farm could not "horn in" and eat the fattening food. Down in the cave like place the wind and cold could not strike the animals, and best of all they could not wander off and be stolen. He fed them a mash of corn and meal, and plenty of it, but found it paid. As to help, he intended to do all the work himself with the assistance of one man, and said he was raised to work. His wife did her cooking, but did not think it hard work as she had every convenience."

When we returned from our trip to see the steers and cows, they showed us the chickens. There were several broods ranging from biddies to broilers. Mrs. W. did not believe in the fine bred and told us she had just "nigger" chickens, meaning a mixed flock. She claimed to have tried several fine breeds but the mixed flock proved more profitable in the long run.

We brought our interesting visit to a close with a promise to return when the plants were large enough to reset.



1/25/39

MS

Mr. & Mrs. C. C. Pledger  
and Family.  
Lowndesboro, Lowndes County, Ala.  
The English Place conceded to be  
most desirable.  
Entered from Government  
By Pioneer Nat Reese

THE WAYSIDE COTTAGE



On the highway which connects the two "sister villages" of Lowndes is a small old cottage, a landmark of the years of long, long ago. Over a hundred suns have set since the pioneer settlers traversed several states and selected this as a homestead. He "entered" the beautiful fertile lands surrounding it from the government, developed it and making it one of the most desirable plantations in this section.

Near the highway three miles south of L - this small four-room cottage is situated in a picturesque oak grove which would be most attractive were it not stamped with neglect and poverty on all sides. There is no evidence of the life of prosperity led by the settler of pre-war date. There is left nothing to remind one of the major part he took in developing first and worthwhile affairs.

To the passer-by an old tenement house is seen, which is the home of the Tenant Farmer and family and one would at once recognize the fact that the year had not been kind to him and his. On every side the eye met evidence of carelessness. The approach was unappealing. The front where a yard once enclosed the house was overspread with weeds and a few flowers, which were a total failure, were tangled over and together. Directly in front of the porch was a "would be" sweet potato patch, which was also a failure due to the extreme

dry weather. However, there were vines and vines running riot here, there and everywhere.

The lovely lawn which was one of the most charming characteristics of this picturesque location and which was used as a picnic ground in years gone by, was smothered or choked out with an overgrowth. It was littered with old cans, unsightly objects and the wrecks of two old automobiles. The porch was used to store away the piles of cotton just gathered from nearby fields.

Mrs. White was out in the garden, which was near the house and told me she would join me as soon as she could get some greens. She was picking the tender sprouts from collard plants preparatory for the midday meal, but soon came out and invited me in. First she offered me a seat on the front porch, but we soon discovered that none of the several chairs out there had any bottom so we went inside hoping to have better luck. Here we found some that seemed more certain.

Mrs. White, the mother of this home at once began to tell me of her condition which was a "near-sob-story," and she need not have gone over the grounds because it was written plainly over everything. The old house, itself, was bare, open and in bad shape - it had been moved so I was told four times and changed and patched up so that it was of the plainest type.

The flooring had large cracks in it and in some places small pieces were out. The walls had been papered with newspapers which had been torn down, leaving the walls in a most disfigured condition, and the windows were made of plank hung on hinges. The four rooms - two front rooms and two "shed" rooms contained very, very little furniture. There were five beds in



all the house and a cooking stove in one of the rear rooms. It's bareness was pitiful as there was not one particle of comfort or brightness to be seen.

On the verge of tears she told that a year ago she and most of her family were down sick with chills and fever caused from a low malarial district in which they were then living. They were employed to take cahрге of a Dairy for a large farmer and cattle owner in another part of the county.

They were ill and "down" most of the year and had to give up their work. Continued illness caused them to lose out completely. Nothing coming in, no money for food, clothing, medicine, etc. etc. Their condition became most desperate. Finally the physician told them they would surely die if they were not moved into a healthier location. The planter in whose employ they were at the time was operating the "model farm" near L - and transferred them to the present home as share-croppers". By that she explained that they were to cultivate 100 acres of land, planting some in cotton, some in corn. The landlord furnishes the land, seed, tractor and 1/2 the fertilizer (which is very expensive) and the white family works the land and pays the other half of the fertilizer.

But they had gotten behind, they started behind and could not work hungry, so had to get "advances" to live on which had to be paid out of their half of the "sharecroppers" profits. The prospects of a good crop looks gloomy. Too much rain when dry weather was needed and vice versa.

The farmers' trials are many, the yield seems to be disappointing. The advances will take a big slice from the profits. The crop is not harvested <sup>or</sup> sold yet. But living expenses go on



and on. How will the bills for the time intervening between now and time cotton is sold to be cared for? Conditions are desperate and winter coming on. The white family consisted of 12. Father, mother and 10 children, but only 8 children are in the home at present.

Four of the children try to attend school, 2 girls whose ages are fourteen and 17, two small boys who are 8 and 10 years old, but she sadly stated that as anxious as she was for them to get an education or as much as they could, she could not see how it could be done. The entire family tilled and toiled in the field including the 17-year old daughter, still older, but over the school age.

The father could not come up to his quota, as the attack of malaria has left him incapable in some ways. She went on to explain that the children would be compelled to have suitable clothing, shoes, books, etc., or discontinue school and winter was just around the corner, but she held with much tenacity the desire for them to learn. During the conversation I saw that she had received a sufficient education to speak correctly and it was evident that she had been brought up in better surroundings, however, with that, it would not have been on such high scale as her present condition was most pathetic.

She repeatedly said she wanted them to get "learning". As to preaching and Sunday School she said they never even considered it, that they had not attended since they came to Lowndes County, nearly seven years ago. However, she said she would like them to attend Sunday School, but was again handicapped with the same fact that they could not fix up like other children and said they had "pride" - too much pride to go out on Sunday, "patched up" even to worship the Lord.



She received me in a faded print dress and no hose or shoes on at all. She and the girls work in the field barefooted, as the shoes they manage to get must not be worn out every day. She asked me to make an inspection of the house to justify her statement but this was not necessary as the connecting doors were afar, or either off their hinges and the entire interior could be seen. All its bareness corroborated what she was saying. She needed 8 beds to sleep her family of 12, but only had 5 "steads," and these had insufficient mattresses and "scimp" cover.

She wanted in some way to get material for the additional mattresses and to get scraps from any one she could to piece up "on halves". During the long winter nights after the daily duties were over this "piecing" would be done by the cheery fireside. That is one assured comfort that the farmer, the renter, even the Negro renter has. A good roaring fire by day and by night. What other comforts he may miss, he makes it up with a cheerful fire.

This type of people, do not hesitate in some things. The renter is transient. Here today, gone tomorrow. The choice trees mean nothing to them, the beautiful and valuable woodland is not considered. The axe is not spared and wood is used to warm the room at night where the covering is inadequate. If the chimney or roof is defective and the house is destroyed by the carelessness of too much fire, it is just an "excitement" in the community that day or night. The renter has no regrets as a usual thing. On an average he has lost nothing.

For the most part, he can move his small household gods from the one-story cottage before it falls in or in event his furniture is lost, he seeks a new home and new furniture is



advanced him. Even in some instances the household possessions have been purchased on the installment plan, so the "installment man" and owner of the lost home does the worrying.

As a rule this type of people have a "make-up" in which "money worries" are not included. It matters not the name of the party to whom they are indebted or whose land they live on. If this program does not please them, they "turn on" another. They sense the fact that the extensive landowner must have labor. The dollar moves but has to do so through the medium of man power. The vast tracts of ~~land~~ lands does not cash in without it. The adjacent land owner waves new advances at the renter. He will get by and he knows it.

Mrs. White, complains on and on of her hardships and is to some extent resenting it. She has one cow which is almost dry and she does not see how the cooking can be done till the cow "comes in again", to say nothing of the milk and butter for the table use that helped out the grocery bill so much. There were seven hens "on the yard" that were some help.

The family in addition to working in the field managed to have two wonderful gardens in which an abundance of beautiful vegetables of almost every desired variety were raised. There was such an abundance of these that they were too much for their own use and the "women folks" decided to cash in the over plus and they put their heads together as to ways and means. It was "lay by time" an expression used by the farmer to indicate the period of time between the completion of work till it grows and ready to be gathered. Mrs. White decides to spend the above mentioned time in canning. Thereby conserving the vegetables for the long scant winter months. But she has no canning facilities,



no cans.

She goes to the courthouse and makes application for an outfit - the modern pressure canner that the rehabilitation agent lets out to farm women, but alas! for some reason her trip is vain. "Not eligible" is a sad sounding term. Many disappointed souls have had to hear many times.

However she is not daunted, she determined to can anyway, using the old long drawn-out method which means untold time, worry, and work. Seeing numerous adds in Progressive Farmer where farm women operate on halves, she found the container problem solved for her. The cans are supplied by one party, (only one wishing canned fruit and vegetables) while the farm wife furnishes whatever products are to be used and the outcome or number prepared divided equally. She did a land office business. Jars and cans were sent to her from all sides. She "put up" day and night. The lot consisted of delicious tomatoes, beans, corn, soup mixtures. Lovely looking fruit, pickles, relishes, etc.

Her share was to "carry" them this winter and a fall garden was planted to duplicate, the enterprise after cotton picking was over and she realized that her crowd could consume quantities of food. But the weather and fate also played a trick. The "advance money" gave out and winter was forgotten. The lovely rows of jars on shelf after shelf were used up.

The weather was too dry. The seed in the garden did not answer the robl call. A shadow fell o'er the picture. They are in tough till cottin is sold. They are impatiently and un-hopefully awaiting the next division which is all important. The division of the "share-cropper" meaning the payment of all expenditures first and the profits are divided between landowner and renter.



As a usual thing during the year if the renter calls for money to "go on" the picture is pretty, but as pay day approaches he grows dissatisfied.

While the canning went on during the summer time the two grown girls sold some of the surplus vegetables in the village. They rose early and gathered them, prepared the most attractive looking ones, placed them in baskets and after making themselves neat in cool, clean little cotton dresses, they set out in the cool of the morning on foot for the nearby town.

They went from house to house, selling to people who had no garden. Some were sold to housewives who were too busy at the card table to think of a garden till time to look up a menu for dinner. Others bought to help the girls who were "trying". Bright, young and deserving, who would not? Mrs. White has made repeated but vain attempts to get welfare aid. but there is some obstacle which embitters her. Her girls live a lonely life, with no recreation whatever. Apparently the life of the family is summed up in the one word "work".

The story is pathetic, her condition all too plainly pitiable and yet "difficult to take in". Something is wrong. Their working association is with as fine a character as Lowndes produces - on the square absolutely. The land is excellent. It must be ill-management. Their money ill spent or what is the answer.

10/7/38

S.B.J.

