

AUNT ELLEN GODFREY

(Ex-Slave)

(Verbatim Conversation)

(Aunt Ellen is a misfit in her present environment. Born at Longwood Plantation on Waccamaw in 1837, all she knows is the easy, quiet life of the country. And the busy, bustling 'RACE PATH' near which her Grandson lives with whom she makes her home doesn't make a fitting frame for the old lady. All day she sits in a porch swing and when hungry, visits a neighbor. The neighbors (colored - all) vie with each other in trying to make her last days happy days. She says they do her washing and provide necessary food. When you start her off she flows on like the brook but usually her story varies little. She tells of the old days and of the experiences that made the greatest impression - the exciting times during the 'Confedrick' war - the 'Reb time day.')

Visitor: "Aunt Ellen home?"

Aunt Ellen's neighbor (from the washtub):

"No'um. She right cross there on the 'Race Path'" (So called because in Conway's early days races were run - horse races - on this street.)

Visitor: "Are you one of the neighbors who take such good care of Aunt Ellen?"

Neighbor: "No'um. I'm off all day. I work for Miss Bernice."

Visitor: "Miss Bernice who?"

Neighbor: "Miss Bernice something nother. I can't keep up with that lady title! See Aunt Ellen white cap yonder?"

Aunt Ellen (Sitting on chair at back door leaning on cane.)

"I want everybody come to my birthday! Seventh o' October coming be a hundred. Baby one dead jew (due) time! Five daughter - one sanctify preacher. Seven one - one Ports-smith Virginia. All dead! All dead! Marry three times; all the husband dead! My last baby child - when the Flagg storm kill everybody on the beach, (1893) the last child I have out my body been a year old!

"Last time I gone see the old Doctor, rap! rap!

Doctor: "Come in!" Gone in.

Doctor: "Great God! Looker Aunt Ellen! For the good you take care Daddy Harry, God left you live long time!"

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Ellen: "Flat 'em all up to Marlboro! (All the slaves) Ten days or two weeks going. PeeDee bridge, stop! Go in gentlemen barn! Turn duh bridge! Been dere a week. Had to go and look the louse on we. Three hundred head o' people been dere. Couldn't pull we clothes off. (On flat.) Boat name Riprey. Woman confine on boat. Name the baby 'RIPREY!' Mama name Sibby."

(Neighbor: "Aunt Ellen been looking for you all day! Keep

saying she got to go home. A white lady coming and she got to be there!")

Aunt Ellen: "Doctor come on boat. By name Doctor Lane. White lady come tend woman. Get to Marlboro where they gwine. Put in wagon. Carry to the street. Major Drake Plantation. One son Pet Drake. Wife leetle bit of a woman.

"I see Abram Lincoln son Johnny! Talk with him! Gimme tobacco. I been to loom. Weave. Sheckle flying - flying sheckle!

(Singing): "Tech (touch) me all round my waist!
Don't tech my water-fall!
Gay gal setting on the rider fence!
Don't tech my water-fall!"

"Clothes gone to wash this morning. (Can't go today.)
Clothes gone.

"I been here so long - I ax Jesus one day carry me next day! Can't make up my bed. Like an old hog sleep on a tus-sick." (I always heard it 'Toad on a tussock' - and you?)

(Four lean cats prowled about sniffing around the wood-pile where a boy was scaling some pale, dead fish.)

Visitor: "Aunt Ellen, how could you cook on the flat?"

Aunt Ellen: "Dirt bank up. Fire make on dirt. Big pot. Cook. Fry meat. Come PeeDee get off flat. Bake. Bake. Iron oven. Stay PeeDee week. Bake. Pile coals on oven top." (Another slave told of scaffold - four posts buried

and logs or planks across top with earth on planks. On this pile of earth, fire was made and on great bed of coals oven could be heated for baking. 'Oven' means the great iron skillet-like vessel with three legs and a snug lid. This oven bakes biscuit, pound cake, and some old timers insist on trusting only this oven for their annual fruit cake. It works beautifully on a hearth. Put your buttermilk biscuit in, lid on and pile live-oak coals on top. Of course only the ones who have done this a long time know when to take the lid off.)

"Dirt camp to stay in - to hide from Yankee." (Her gestures showed earth was mounded up.)

Visitor: "Like a potato bank? A potato hill?"

Ellen: "Dat's it! Pile 'em! Gone in dirt camp to hide we from Yankee. Have a Street Row of house. Yankee coming. Gone in dirt camp.

"I been weave. My loom at door. Six loom on dat side! Six loom on dis side! I see 'em coming. Hat crown high as this." (She measured off almost half of her walking stick - which had a great, tarnished plated silver knob.)

"And I tell 'em 'Yankee coming!' I talk with Abram Lincoln own son Johnny and, bless your heart I glad for Freedom till I fool!"

(Singing)

'Freedom forever!

Freedom everymore!

Want to see the Debbil run

Let the Yankee fling a ball

The Democrack will take the swamp!

"Massa been hide. Been in swamp." (This is history. All the old men, too old for the army, hid in Marlboro swamps and were fed by faithful slaves until Yankees passed on. My grandmother and mother gave vivid accounts of this - my mother telling of the sufferings of the women - mental - worrying about her feeble old grandfather down there with the mocassins) Ellen: "Yankee officer come. 'Where Mahams Ward and John J. Woodward? Come to tell 'em take dese people out the dirt camp! Put we in flat. Carry back!' (In first story Aunt Ellen told the Yankee Captain said, 'Tell 'em be Georgetown to salute the flag!')

"Put food and chillun in flat. We been walk." (Walking back to Waccamaw) We gone. (See 'um! See their feet like the children of Israel in Green Pastures!) In man's house. Man say, 'Come out! You steal my turnip!' Brush arbor. Night come. Make camp. Way down the road somewhere! Make a big bush camp. All squeeze under there. Left Marlboro Monday. Come Conway Friday sun down! Hit Bucksville, hit a friend. Say 'People hungry!' Middle night. Snow on ground. Get up.

Cook. Cook all night! Rice. Bake tater. Collard. Cook.
Give a quilt over you head. I sleep. I sleep in the cot-
ton. I roost up the cotton gone in there." (Burrowed down
in the cotton - 'rooted' it up)" December. Winter time.
Cook all night. Corn-bread, baked tater, collard. Git to
Bucksport, people gin to whoop and holler! Three flat gone
round wid all the vittles." (And with the very young and
very old) Easier coming home. Current helped. Going up
against the current, only poles and cant hooks - tedious
going) "Git 'Tip Top' (Plantation) all right. Come home
den! Git to double trunk (rice-field trunk) at 'Tip Top'
Whoop! Come bring flat! Mother Molly dead on flat! Bury
she right to Longwood grave-yard. Nuss. (nurse) Sam'l
Hemingway bury there. Horse kill 'em in thrashing mill.
Child name Egiburt bury there too. Horse gwine round in
thrashing. He lick the horse. Horse kick 'em. Whole gang
white jury come!

"Sing and pray all the time. Pray your house. Pray
all the time. (I wish to God I could get some of you clam!)

"Salem Baptist? I helped build Salem! I a choir in
Salem!"

Aunt Ellen Godfrey
Age 99 years 10 months
Conway, S. C.