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Subject JOHN C. BECTOM

Story teller John C. Bectom

Editor Daisy Bailey Waitt

JOHN C. BECTOM

"My name is John C. Bectom. I was born Oct. 7, 1862, near Fayetteville, Cumberland County, North Carolina. My father's name was Simon Bectom. He was 86 years of age when he died. He died in 1910 at Fayetteville, N. C. My mother's name was Harriet Bectom. She died in 1907, May 23, when she was seventy years old. My brother's were named Ed, Kato and Willie. I was third of the boys. My sisters were Lucy, Anne and Alice. My father first belonged to Robert Wooten of Craven County, N. C. Then he was sold by the Wootens to the Bectoms of Wayne County, near Goldsboro, the county seat. My mother first belonged to the McNeills of Cumberland County. Miss Mary McNeill married a McFadden, and her parents gave my mother to Mis' Mary. Mis' Mary's daughter in time married Ezekial King and my mother was then given to her by Mis' Mary McFadden, her mother. Mis' Lizzie McFadden became a King. My grandmother was named Lucy Murphy. She belonged to the Murpheys. All the slaves were given off to the children of the family as they married.

"My father and mother told me stories of how they were treated at different places. When my grandmother was with the Murpheys they would make her get up, and begin

burning logs in new grounds before daybreak. They also made her plow, the same as any of the men on the plantation. They plowed till dusk-dark before they left the fields to come to the house. They were not allowed to attend any dances or parties unless they slipped off unknowin's. They had candy pullings sometimes too. While they would be there the patterollers would visit them. Sometimes the patterollers whipped all they caught at this place, all they set their hands on, unless they had a pass.

"They fed us mighty good. The food was well cooked. They gave the slaves an acre of ground to plant and they could sell the crop and have the money. The work on this acre was done on moonshiny nights and holidays. Sometimes slaves would steal the marster's chickens or a hog and slip off to another plantation and have it cooked. We had plenty of clothes, and one pair o' shoes a year. You had to take care of them because you only got one pair a year. They were given at Christmas every year. The clothes were made on the plantation.

"There were corn mills on the plantation, and rice mills, and threshing machines. The plantation had about 300 acres in farm land. The enclosure was three miles.

My marster lived in a fine house. It took a year to build it. There were about 16 rooms in it. We slaves called it the great house. Some of the slaves ran away and finally reached Ohio. There was no jail on the plantation. Sometimes the overseer would whip us.

"The Kings had no overseers. King beat his slaves with a stick. I remember seeing him do this as well as I can see that house over there. He became blind. An owl scratched him in the face when he was trying to catch him, and his face got into sich a fix he went to Philadelphia for treatment, but they could not cure him. He finally went blind. I have seen him beat his slaves after he was blind. I remember it well. He beat 'em with a stick. He was the most sensitive man you ever seed. He ran a store. After he was blind you could han' him a piece of money and he could tell you what it was.

"There were no churches on the plantation but prayer meeting^s were held in the quarters. Slaves were not allowed to go to the white folk's church unless they were coach drivers, etc. No sir, not in that community. They taught the slaves the Bible. The children of the marster would go to private school. We small Negro children looked after the babies in the cradles and other young

children. When the white children studied their lessons I studied with them. When they wrote in the sand I wrote in the sand too. The white children, and not the marster or mistress, is where I got started in learnin' to read and write.

"We had corn shuckings, candy pullings, dances, prayer meetings. We went to camp meetin' on Camp Meeting days in August when the crops were laid by. We played games of high jump, jumping over the pole held by two people, wrestling, leap frog, and jumping. We sang the songs, 'Go tell Aunt Patsy'. 'Some folks says a nigger wont steal, I caught six in my corn field' 'Run nigger run, the patteroller ketch you, Run nigger run like you did the other day'.

"When slaves got sick marster looked after them. He gave them blue mass and casteroil. Dr. McDuffy also treated us. Dr. McSwain vaccinated us for small pox. My sister died with it. When the slaves died marster buried them. They dug a grave with a tomb in it. I do not see any of them now. The slaves were buried in a plain box.

"The marsters married the slaves without any papers. All they did was to say perhaps to Jane and Frank,

'Frank, I pronounce you and Jane man and wife.' But the woman did not take the name of her husband, she kept the name of the family who owned her.

"I remember seeing the Yankees near Fayetteville. They shot a bomb shell at Wheeler's Calvary, and it hit near me and buried in the ground. Wheeler's Calvary came first and ramsaked the place. They got all the valuables they could, and burned the bridge, the covered bridge over Cape Fear river, but when the Yankees got there they had a pontoon bridge to cross on,--all those provision wagons and such. When they passed our place it was in the morning. They nearly scared me to death. They passed right by our door, Sherman's army. They began passing, so the white folks said, at 9 o'clock in the mornin'. At 9 o'clock at night they were passin' our door on foot. They said there were two hundred and fifty thousan' o' them passed. Some camped in my marster's old fiel'. A Yankee caught one of my marster's shoats and cut off one of the hind quarters, gave it to me, and told me to carry and give it to my mother. I was so small I could not tote it, so I drug it to her. I called her when I got in hollering distance of the house and she came and got it. The Yankees called us Johnnie, Dinah, Bill and other funny names. They beat

their drums and sang songs. One of the Yankees sang 'Rock a Bye Baby'. At that time Jeff Davis money was plentiful. My mother had about \$1000. It was so plentiful it was called Jeff Davis shucks. My mother had bought a pair of shoes, and had put them in a chest. A Yankee came and took the shoes and wore them off, leaving his in their place. They tol' us we were free. Sometimes the marster would get cruel to the slaves if they acted like they were free.

"Mat Holmes, a slave, was wearing a ball and chain as a punishment for running away. Marster Ezekial King put it on him. He has slept in the bed with me, wearing that ball and chain. The cuff had imbedded in his leg, it was swollen so. This was right after the Yankees came through. It was March, the 9th of March, when the Yankees came through. Mat Holmes had run away with the ball and chain on him and was in the woods then. He hid out staying with us at night until August. Then my mother took him to the Yankee garrison at Fayetteville. A Yankee officer then took him to a black smith shop and had the ball and chain cut off his leg. The marsters would tell the slaves to go to work that they were not free, that they still belonged to them, but one would drop out and leave, then another. There was little work done on the farm, and

finally most of the slaves learned they were free.

"Abraham Lincoln was one of the greatest men that ever lived. He was the cause of us slaves being free. No doubt about that. I didn't think anything of Jeff Davis. He tried to keep us in slavery. I think slavery was an injustice, not right. Our privilege is to live right, and live according to the teachings of the Bible, to treat our fellowman right. To do this I feel we should belong to some religious organization and live as near right as we know how.

"The overseers and paterollers in the time of slavery were called poor white trash by the slaves.

"On the plantations not every one, but some of the slave holders would have some certain slave women reserved for their own use. Sometimes children almost white would be born to them. I have seen many of these children. Sometimes the child would be said to belong to the overseer, and sometimes it would be said to belong to the marster.