

Page 1  
241 - Dempsey Pitts, Ex-Slave, Coahoma County  
F.C.  
Carrie Campbell

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On December the 10th, of this year, 1937, I will be one hundred and seven years old, if the good Lord spares me that long. How I kept up with it, is this: There was a white man in the place I lived that was born on the same day I was, the 10th day of December. Long as he lived, he kept up with it, and told it to me. After he died, I kept up with it myself, and I is kept it right, and proper.

I was born, in North Carolina, near Charlotte. My father Ned, and my mother Liza, and all their children, was born there too. I had five brothers, Jerry, Tom, Dave, Miles, and Ben, and five sisters, Lil, Haager, Judie, Rose, and Calline. All of us lived in the quarters. Our houses was made of hewed logs. They was nice and warm. The beds the grown folks slept in, was built side of the house and was helt up by ropes. The children all slept on the floor.

I can remember my grandpa, Dave, and my grandma, Haager. I don't know where they was born, but I knows the very spot where they was buried. They belonged to Mr. Pitts. That was my father's name, and for that reason, I changed my name from Avant to Pitts, after the war.

We didn't raise no cotton, in North Carolina. Tobacco

Page 2  
241 - Dempsey Pitts, Ex-Slave, Coahoma County  
F.C.  
Carrie Campbell

was the big money crop. Besides that, we grew indigo, rice, and corn. I didn't work in the field, cause I was raised to be the carriage driver. We didn't get no money, for work we done, but we sure did git plenty something to eat. We didn't have to steal. No sir, you git whipped for that sure. We had plenty hogs, beef, mutton and rabbits. We set out nets, and when the tide come in, caught more fish than we could eat. Didn't have no possum, but that mutton could take its place. We loved that, better than anything. Each person had his own garden and had to work it hisself, like they does now.

Our clothes was made on the place. The cloth they used, for the clothes, was wove there too. We wore jeans, both winter and summer. Nothing under it in the summer, but warm woolen underclothes in the winter. On Sundays, the women's clothes was all colored pretty, so they looked nice. The shoemaker, on the place, made all the shoes. The bottom part of the shoe was made of wood and the upper part of leather. When the tops wore out, new tops were screwed on. There warn't no difference in our wedding clothes; just wore our usual, every day clothes, when we married.

Page 3  
241 - Dempsey Pitts, Ex-Slave, Coahoma County  
F.C.  
Carrie Campbell

My master's name was Ben Avent. His wife was Miss Polly. They had five boys, Ben, William, Tom, Joe and Charles, and five girls, Mary Ann, Elizabeth, Beckie, Winnie and Delia. The house they lived in was nice looking. It was painted white and had pillars out in front. Every few weeks we had a different overseer. Master turned them off 'cause they couldn't handle them women on the place. Them overseers was poor white folks. The women didn't like none of that for their boss, so they would not do nothing he tell them. When he make complaint to Master that he can't do nothing with them, Old Master tell him, "All right, I get some body what can." There was poor whites, all around us, but Master didn't allow them on his place. The leader was a colored man, by the name of Dantel. He blowed the horn every morning, before day for the hands to get up, cook their breakfast, and be ready for work, by sun up. The hours of work was from sun to sun. Don't know how many acres in the place, but it ran for eight miles. Master had a sight of slaves. So many, he didn't know them all, when he seed them. The biggest thing the slaves done, to be punished for, was stealing. They got whipped for that, if

Page 4  
241 - Dempsey Pitts, Ex-Slave, Coahoma County  
F.C.  
Carrie Campbell

they were caught. There warn't no jails, sept for the poor whites. I remember one day, Mr. Sandfort, one of the neighbors came by. I ask him if he going to town, to attend court. He say, "No, Nobody don't attend court, but poor white trash." I has seen a half mile long stream of slaves pass by, chained together, going to New Orleans and other places in the South. When there was so many, they could slip away if they warn't chained. They walked every step of the way. When night came they slept on the ground. One woman, a cousin of mine, named Calline, sold on the block for \$1,800.00. The slaves wasn't allowed to learn to read and write. They couldn't so much as have a book or a pencil.

There wan't no separate churches for the colored. We all attended the white folks Methodist Church. At eleven o'clock they had the service for the whites. After they left, our sermon started. First the preacher read out of the Bible. Then he say, "You must be obedient to your Master and Misties. If you don't take their chickens, and don't steal nothing, you will have rest, when you die." They all said that same thing, 'cept one man, a preacher, whose name was Sawyer. When he gave his sermon, he told the

Page 5  
241 - Dempsey Pitts, Ex-Slave, Coahoma County  
F.C.  
Carrie Campbell

colored folks they was all going to be set free. The white folks sure got after that man, about that sermon. He say he didn't care, he going to preach the Bible. Lord! I never 'spected to see the day that them words of his come true. They held big baptizings on the place. Everybody wanted to go down under the water. They believed the water would wash all their sins away. All that didn't do them no good, 'cause the cleansing has to come from the inside before you can be washed clean. Heaps of folks now uses the church for a cloak, thats all. Their hearts ain't right. If a slave died, the white preacher buried him. Everybody was allowed to go to the grave yard where the funeral was held.

The men worked all day Saturday, but the women knocked off, so as to do the washing. We didn't do no work on Sunday, if we knowed it. One day we was all out in the field, when a gentleman came by, and said, "Mr. Ben, what you doing, working your niggers on Sunday?" Master said, "It sure did slip me; it was Sunday. Well, I will just let them have Monday off instead."

Several of the slaves ran off to the North. Master called Mr. McGee to get after them with the hounds. He

Page 6  
241 - Dempsey Pitts, Ex-Slave, Coahoma County  
F.C.  
Carrie Campbell

didn't get them, and they didn't come back, till the war was plumb over. There was patrollers, all around, for catching the runaways, but they couldn't catch them, that went to the North. The only news we ever gathered was through the white folks. They knowed what was going on, by the papers, and we knowed it, by what we heard them say.

Never heard of any trouble between the colored and white. If there was any such as that, they kept it from us ears.

When we went home, after our day's work, we could do whatever we pleased. Sometimes we had prayer meetings; sometimes, dances. The women held their little quiltings, if they wanted to. Sometimes we just took our rest. The corn shuckings was always held at night. We sure did have jolly times when that took place. They had fine prizes for the winner. Sometimes we would get five dollars, or maybe a new hat. When we got money, they would give us a pass to go to town and spend it. In them days you could buy more with a dollar than you could carry home. Christmas was held same as is now. Santa Claus for the children and all that. Everybody on the place went to the big house, to see Master

Page 7  
241 - Dempsey Pitts, Ex-Slave, Coahoma County  
F.C.  
Carrie Campbell

and Miss on Christmas morning. Didn't know nothing about New Years, but the 4th of July, was the day for the big barbecue dinner. No work that day. Nothing but feast and merry making. The biggest feast, what we ever had, was when Mr. Tom Avant got married. My mother was the cook, and she was cooking for that wedding for a solid week. Don't ask me what they had, cause I could tell you in less time what they didn't have. Besides all the good things to eat, they had wine, of all kinds, to drink. The bride looked beautiful. She wore some kind of a long white garment like a robe. Had a veil over her head with flowers all around. It covered her face, but was so thin you could see right through it. She carried a big bouquet of flowers in her hands. Every slave on the place went to that wedding. It was sure something to see. Children, in them days, didn't play games like they do now. All the white and colored children would go to the grove and ride saplings for horses all day. They didn't study devilment, like they do the present day. All of them wore asafetida bags round their necks to keep them from having diseases. They stayed mighty pert and healthy. I am not sure that the White children wore

Page 8  
241 - Dempsey Pitts, Ex-Slave, Coahoma County  
F.C.  
Carrie Campbell

them, but I know the colored ones all did. That's the only charm of any sort that they knowed about. I has never seed a ghost, or hant in all my life. I had a son, born with a cord over his face, and he could see all those things. Sometimes when I would be walking with him, he would stop and step aside. Say he doing that to let the gentleman pass. I couldn't see no gentleman but he could. Anybody born with a cord over their face can see them. I stayed with a man once that seed them things so much he was most worried to death with them. About four years before the Civil War started, Master bought a tract of land in Mississippi, half way between Coffeerville and Water Valley. He moved his family and all of his slaves down here. We came in covered wagons, and it took a long time to get here. I heared a heap more about ghosts in this part of the country, than I ever hearded in North Carolina. There is a house right now in Water Valley, what the owner can't rent 'cause nobody can live in it for the hants. There is something hid there by a Doctor, who died in the house. If the folks wasn't so scared, they could go get whatsoever it is, but there ain't nobody brave enough to



Page 9  
241 - Dempsey Pitts, Ex-Slave, Coahoma County  
F.C.  
Carrie Campbell

find it. The surrender brought all of that Hoo doo with it. I got no faith in it. I don't believe the Lord going to let nobody do the things he does. I don't put no man above the Lord. If I had my way, I would have all them Hoo Doo Doctors put in the penitentiary. When a slave got sick, on Master's place, the old folks took care of him and the white doctor gave the medicine. They brought the medicine with them, in saddle bags. Later on the Doctors got to writing on the paper the name of the medicine and you have to send to town and buy it. Old Master, he didn't like that at all. He told the Doctor when he came, "How you think anybody can live, paying two men at once for the same sickness. If you brings your medicine with you, I pay you before you go, but if you don't bring it, I is going to pay the man I gets it from and that's all the pay there will be."

Soon as War was declared, all five of Master's sons went to the Camps, to get trained to fight. They had to learn them to catch their guns and how to march right. Four of the boys was in the same regiment and one was in a different one. Mr. Tom was made flag bearer, Mr. William a Lieutenant; the other four was just plain soldiers at first. When they left

Page 10  
241 - Dempsey Pitts, Ex-Slave, Coahoma County  
F.C.  
Carrie Campbell

the camp to go to fight, I went with them and stayed with them from the time the first gun was fired, till peace was declared. Not one of them boys got killed. Two of them got wounded but soon as they was able, they was back fighting again. Miss Elizabeth's husband, Mr. Bankhead, was killed. He told us to take his watch back home to his wife. We set him up side of a tree and left him there. There was nothing we could do. I didn't do no fighting. I was the wagoner, and hauled the food for the soldiers to eat. When them battles was going on, the noise was something awful. One of the first ones I heard seemed like the cannons never ceasted. I said "Master Tom, you better stop all that shooting. Didn't you low it, at home, how you could whip all them Yankees, and be back by breakfast time." Us was right there in Vicksburg when the Yankees took the City.

When peace was declared some of the slaves left, but most of them stayed. When we got back home, old Master had done died. When they buried him, they put a pot of gold in his grave, to hide it for old Miss. The Yankees was camped all around the place. They sure was nice to old Miss. They gave more than they took. Old Master was a big Mason, and

Page 11  
241 - Dempsey Pitts, Ex-Slave, Coahoma County  
F.C.  
Carrie Campbell

so was the officer in charge, and that was why he was so kind to all the family.

The slaves had been promised forty acres and a mule. The only ones that got it was the ones that made money and bought it. None of us thought Old Master's place would be divided. Nor, did we feel we had to stay there, lest we wanted to. Them Reconstruction days was bad times. The Ku Klux was doing their work then. The only time I ever see them was the night they came to my house. They was looking for a white man. When they seed he wasn't there, they went on, about their business and didn't harm nothing. Never did see the night riders, but is heard of them. I is voted, and the man I voted for got put in office. Plenty of colored folks I knowed held public offices. The colored people are not allowed to vote now. They got disfranchised for some reason, but I don't know what it was.

During the Reconstruction period schools was started for the colored. They had white people, from the North, to teach in them. I learned to read and write, but I can't do it now.

About five years after freedom, I married a woman by

Page 12  
241 - Dempsey Pitts, Ex-Slave, Coahoma County  
F.C.  
Carrie Campbell

the name of Anna. We had seventeen children. We lived right there on that same place forty-eight years. I bought six lots in the town of Coffeeville, fifty acres of old Master's place. I then started out as a preacher. The Bishop tried me out, found I could read and write, and knowed how to preach. I organized the first colored church in Coffeeville. While I was preaching, my wife and children was making the cotton crop. After my wife died, I went to Louisiana, and then to Arkansas to preach. After two years, I went back to my little farm. I married again. My second wife was named Bird. We farmed for fifteen years before she died. All of my children are dead, except the youngest boy. I don't know whether he is living or not. He went to France with the Army, during the World War, and hasn't been heard from since. I has ten or twelve grand children, but don't know where none of them is. They is scattered from Panola County to Chicago. Can't keep up with them. All of old Master's family has left the old place. Its done gone into different hands. I left there, because I heared one of Master's sons was living in the Delta, and I been trying for years to catch up with where he's at. They say he is worth

Page 13  
241 - Dempsey Pitts, Ex-Slave, Coahoma County  
F.C.  
Carrie Campbell

a million dollars. He would sure care for me the rest of my life, if I could find him. They say he lived near Minter City. That's where I was when I got hurt. The plough handle hit me in the side, and I ain't been much good since. When my niece heard about it, she came down and got me and I has been living here with her ever since.

When I could see to read, I took the paper and kept up with everything that was going on. Now I has to let it all get by me. I knows all about Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis. One was the president of the North, and the other of the South. When the trouble first came up about the slaves, Mr. Lincoln, made this offer to the south. He said "Every slave should be turned loose with a horse and bridle, when he was twenty-five years old." The South won't accept that, so then he said if they won't do that, they just have to get together and fight it out. That suits Mr. Davis, so that what they done. I could tell much more about it, but I don't like to talk. I ain't never going to tell nobody, all I knows about that. Will be gone pretty soon, and what I knows is going with me. I has seen Mr. Davis at Vicksburg, and Mr. Lincoln at Richmond, Va. Booker T. Washington, I knowed

Page 14  
241 - Dempsey Pitts, Ex-Slave, Coahoma County  
F.C.  
Carrie Campbell

well. Have shook his hand a many a time. That man was a statesman. Lord! how he helped the colored to get learning. Things is better now than they was in slavery times, 'cept they don't take care of the poor like they should. Wasn't no trouble of that kind them days. Another thing, I never heard of one colored people killing each other. That didn't happen. Now its a going on every day. This younger generation too is awful. They don't study nothing but foolishness. One half of them is up all night long. What for? I don't know. They is bring up their children for three things-- The County Farm, the Penitentiary, and the Gallows.

There wasn't never no uprising among the slaves. If there ever comes a war between the colored and the whites, it will be on account of the mixed race. A nigger ain't got no business with no white blood. Never heard of no rebellion in Virginia. Never heard of one nowhere.

They is done stopped me from preaching now, 'cause they say I ain't able to preach no longer. I preaches anyhow whenever I gits a chance.

I don't like them old spiritual songs what they used

Page 15  
241 - Dempsey Pitts, Ex-Slave, Coahoma County  
F.C.  
Carrie Campbell

to sing. When they carries me to church, and they sings  
them, I don't join in with them, but my voice rings out,  
loud as the next one, when they sings some beautiful hymn  
out of the book like "How firm the Foundation ye Saints  
of the Lord."