

Interviewer Mary D. Hudgins
Person Interviewed Miss Adeline Blakeley Age 87
Home 101 Rock Street, Fayetteville, Arkansas.

There is no hint of elision in the speech of Adeline Blakeley, scarcely a trace of vernacular. All of her life her associations have been with white persons. She occupies a position, rare in post-slavery days, of negro servant, confidant and friend. After the death of Mrs. Hudgins, family intimates, wives of physicians, bankers' wives and other Fayetteville dowagers continued periodically to come to see Adeline. They came not in the spirit of Lady Bountifuls condescending to a hireling, but because they wanted to chat with an old time friend.

Interviewer's note.

As told by:

Adeline Blakeley

"Honey, look in the bible to get the date when I was born. We want to have it just right. Yes, here's the place, read it to me. July 10, 1850 ? Yes, I remember now, that's what they've always told me. I wanted to be sure, though. I was born in Hickman County, Tenn. and was about a year when they brought me to Arkansas. My mother and her people had been bought by Mr. John P. Parks when they were just children--- John and Leanna and Martha. I was the first little negro in the Parks kitchen. From the first they made a pet out of me. I was little like a doll and they treated me like a plaything-----spoiled me----rotten.

After Mr. Parks came to Arkansas he lived near what is now Prairie Grove, but what do you think it was called then-----Hog Eye. Later on they named it Billingsley for a man who settled there. We were two miles out on the Wire Road, the one the telegraph line came in on, Honey, Almost every community had a 'Wire Road'.

It was the custom to give a girl a slave when she was married. When Miss Parks became Mrs. Blakeley she moved to Fayetteville and chose me to take with her. She said since I was only 5 she could raise me as she wanted me to be. But I must have been a lot of trouble and after she had her baby she had to send me back to her father to grow up a little. For you might say she had two babies to take care of since I was too little to take care of hers. They sent a woman in my place.

Honey, when I got back, I was awful! I had been with the negroes down in the country and said 'hit' and 'hain't' and words like that. Of course all the children in the house took it up from me. Mrs. Blakeley had to teach me to talk right. Your Aunt Nora was born while I was away. I was too little to take full charge of her, but I could sit in a chair and hold her on my lap.

Mrs. Blakeley taught her children at home. Her teaching was almost all they had before they entered the University. When I was little I wanted to learn, learn all I could, but there was a law against teaching a slave to read and write. One woman----she was from the North did it anyway. But when folks can read and write its going to be found out. It was made pretty hard for that woman.

After the war they tried to get me to learn, but I tossed my head and wouldn't let them teach me. I was about 15 and thought I was grown and wouldn't need to know any more. Mary, it sounds funny, but if I had a million dollars I would give it gladly to be able to read and write letters to my friends.

I remember well when the war started. Mr. Blakeley, he was a cabinet maker and not very well, was not considered strong enough to go. But if the war had kept up much longer they would have called him. Mr. Parks didn't believe in seceding. He held out as long as it was safe to do so. If you didn't go with the popular side they called you 'abolitionist' or maybe 'Submissionist'. But when Arkansas did go over he was loyal. He had two sons and a son-in-law in the Confederate army. One fought at Richmond and one was killed at Gettysburg.

The little Blakeley boy had always liked to play with the American flag. He'd march with it and carry it out on the porch and hang it up. But after the trouble began to brew his mother told him he would have to stay in the house when he played with the flag. Even then somebody saw him and scolded him and said 'Either burn it

or wash it.' The child thought they meant it and he tried to wash it. Dyes weren't so good in those days and it ran terribly. It was the awfulest thing you ever saw.

Fayetteville suffered all thru the war. You see we were not very far from the dividing line and both armies were about here a lot. The Federals were in charge most of the time. They had a Post here, set up breast works and fortified the square. The court house was in the middle of it then. It was funny that there wasn't more real fighting about here. There were several battles but they were more like skirmishes----just a few men killed each time. They were terrible just the same. At first they buried the Union soldiers where the Confederate Cemetery is now. The Southerners were placed just anywhere. Later on they moved the Northern caskets over to where the Federal Cemetery is now and they took up the Southern men when they knew where to find them and placed them over on the hill where they are today.

Once an officer came into our home and liked a table he saw, so he took it. Mrs. Blakeley followed his horse as far as she could pleading with him to give it back because her husband had made it. The next day a neighbor returned it. He had found it in the road and recognized it. The man who stole it had been killed and dropped it as he fell.

Just before the Battle of Prairie Grove the Federal men came thru. Some officers stopped and wanted us to cook for them. Paid us well, too. One man took little Nora on his lap and almost cried. He said she reminded him of his own little girl he'd maybe never see again. He gave her a cute little ivory handled pen knife. He asked Mrs. Blakeley if he couldn't leave his pistols with her until he came back thru Fayetteville. She told him it was asking too much, what would happen to her and her family if they found those weapons in her possession ? But he argued that it was only for a few days. She hid them under a tub in the basement and after waiting a year gave them to her brother when he came through. The Yankees met the Southerners at Prairie Grove. The shots sounded just like popcorn from here in Fayetteville. We always thought the man got killed there.

The soldiers camped all around everywhere. Lots of them were in tents and some of the officers were in houses. They didn't burn the college---where Miss Sawyer had taught, you know. The officers used it for their living quarters. They built barracks for the men of upright logs. See that building across the street. It's been lots of things, a livery stable, veterinary barn, apartment house. But it was one of the oldest buildings in Arkansas. They've kept on remodeling it. The Yankees made a

7

commissary out of it. Later on they moved the food up on the square and used it for a hospital. I can remember lots of times seeing the feet of dead men sticking out of the windows.

Your Aunt Nora's mother saved that building from being burned. How did it happen ? Well you see both sides were firing buildings----the Confederates to keep the Yankees from getting them, and the other way about. But the Southerners did most of the burning. Mrs. Blakeley's little boy was sick with fever. She and a friend went up, because they feared burnings. They sat there almost all night. Parties of men would come along and they would plead with them. One sat in one doorway and the other in the building next. Mrs. Blakely was a Southerner, the other woman a Northerner. Between them they kept the buildings from being burned, saved their own homes thereby and possibly the life of the little sick boy.

It was like that in Fayetteville. There were so many folks on both sides and they lived so close together that they got to know one another and were friends. Things like this would happen. One day a Northern officer came over to our house to talk to his wife who was visiting. He said he would be away all day. He was to go down to

Prarie Grove to get 'Old Man Parks, dead or alive'.

Not until he was on his way did somebody tell him that he was talking about the father of his wife's hostess. Next day he came over to apologize. Said he never would have made such a cruel remark if he had known. But he didn't find his man. As the officers went in the front door, Mr. Parks went out of the back and the women surrounded him until he got away.

There was another time when the North and South took refuge together. During the war even the little children were taught to listen for bugle calls and know what they meant. We had to know----and how to act when we heard them. One day, I remember we were to have peas for dinner, with ham hock and corn bread. I was hungry that day and everything smelled so good. But just as the peas were part of them out of the pot and in a dish on the table the signal came 'To Arms'. Cannon followed almost immediately. We all ran for the cellar, leaving the food as it was.

The cellar was dug out only a little way down. It had been raining and snowing all day--melted as it fell. It was about noon and the seep water had filled a pool in the middle of the cellar. They placed a tub in the water

and it floated like a little boat. They put Nora and a little girl who was visiting her, and me in it. The grown folks clung to the damp sides of the cellar floor and wall. After the worst bombing was over we heard someone upstairs in the house calling. It was the wife of a Northern officer. He had gotten away so fast he had forgotten his pistols. She had tried to follow him, but the shots had frightened her. We called to her to come to the basement. She came, but in trying to climb up the slick sides she slid down and almost into our tub. She looked so funny with her big fat legs that I giggled. Mrs. Blakeley slapped me---- it was one of the few times she struck me. I was glad she did, for I would have laughed out. And it didn't do to laugh at Northerners.

It was night before the fighting was over. An old man who was in the basement with us went upstairs because he heard someone groan. Sure enough a wounded man had dragged himself to our door. He laid the man, almost fainting down before the fireplace. It was all he could do. The man died. When we finally came up there wasn't a pea, nor a bit of ham, not a crum of cornbread. Floaters had cleaned the pot until it shone.

We had a terrible time getting along during those years. I don't believe we could have done it except for the Northern soldiers. You might say the Confederacy was kept up by private subscription, but the Yankes had the whole Federal government

back of them. They had good rations which were issued uncooked. They could get them prepared anywhere they liked. We were good cooks so that is the way we got our food-----preparing it for soldiers and eating it with them. They had quite a variety and a lot of everything. They were given bacon and coffee and sugar and flour and beans and somthing they called 'mixed vegetables'. Those beans were little and sweet---not like the big ones we have today. The mixed vegetables were liked by lots of folks---I didn't care for them. Everything was ground up together and then dried. You had to soak it like dried peas before cooking.

After the war they came to Mrs. Blakeley, the soldiers did, and accused her of keeping me against my will. I told them that I stayed because I wanted to, the Blakeleys were my people. They let me alone, the whites did, but the negroes didn't like it. They tried to fight me and called me names. There was a well near the square from which everybody got water. Between it and our house was a negro cabin. The little negroes would rock me. I stood it as long as I could. Then I told Mrs. Blakeley. She said to get some rocks in my bucket and if they rocked me to heave back. I was a good shot and they ran. Their mother came to Mrs. Blakeley to complain, but she told her, after hearing her thru that I had stood all I could and the only reason I

hadn't been seriously hurt was because her children weren't good shots. They never bothered me again.

It was hard after the war. The Federals stayed on for a long time. Fences were down, houses were burned, stock was gone, but we got along somehow. When Nora Blakeley was 14 a lady was teaching a subscription school in the hall across the street----the same hall Mrs. Blakely had saved from burning. She wanted Nora to teach for her. So, child that she was, she went over and pretty soon she was teaching up to the fourth grade. I went over every morning and built a fire for her before she arrived.

That fall she went over to the University, but the next year she had to stay out to earn money. She wanted to finish so badly that we decided to take boarders. They would come to us from way over on the campus. There were always lots more who wanted to stay than we could take. We bought silver and dishes just as we could pay for them, and we added to the house in the summer time. I used to cook their breakfasts and dinners and pack baskets of lunch for them to take over to the Campus. We had lots of interesting people with us. One was Jeff Davis----later he was governor and then senator. He and a Creek Indian boy named Sam Rice were great friends. There were lots of Indians in school at the University then. They didn't have so many Indian schools and tribes would make up money and send a bright boy here.

Ten years after she graduated from the University Nora married Harvey M. Hudgins. They moved to Hot Springs and finally ran a hotel. It burned the night of Washington's birthday in 1895. It was terrible, we saved nothing but the night clothes we were in. Next morning it was worse for we saw small pox flags all over town. Our friends came to our rescue and gave us clothes and we went with friends out into the country to escape the epidemic. There were three or four families in one little house. It was crowded, but we were all friends so it was nice after all.

About ten years before Mr. Hudgins had bui~~ld~~t a building in Fayetteville. They used the second floor for an Opera House. When we came back here after the fire we took it over to run. Mr. Hudgins had that and all the billboards in town. ~~We~~ saw all the shows. Several years later the twins, Helen and Wade were born. I always went to see the shows and took them with me. Folks watched them more than the shows. I kept them neat and clean and they were so cute.

We saw the circuses too. I remember once Barnum and Bailey were coming to Fort Smith. We were going down. I didn't tell anybody, but I put \$45 in my purse. I made money then. Mr. Hudgins got me a cow and I sold milk and butter and kept all I made. Why the first evening dress Helen had and the first long pants Bud (Wade) had I bought. Well, we were

going down to Fort Smith, but Bud got sick and we couldn't go. You know, Mary, it seemed so queer. When Helen and I went to California, we all saw the same circus together. Yea, I've been to California with her twice. Whenever the train would stop she would come from the pullman to the coach where the colored persons had to ride to see about me. We went out to visit Sister (Bess Hudgins Clayton) and Bud. While we were there, Barnum and Bailey came to Los Angeles. It seemed so funny. There we were---away out in California---all the children grown up and off to themselves. There we were---all of us---seeing the show we had planned to see way back in Arkansas, years and years before.

You know, Honey, that doll Ann has---she got it for her seventh birthday (Elisabeth Ann Wiggans---daughter of Helen Hudgins Wiggans). It was restrung for her, and was once before for her mother. But it's the same doll Baby Dean (Dean Hudgins) carried out of that fire in Hot Springs in 1895. Everybody loves Ann. She makes the fifth generation I've cared for. When Helen is going out she brings Ann down here or I go up there. It's usually down here tho. Because since we turned the old home into apartments I take care of them, and it's best for me to be here most of the time.

All the people in the apartments are mighty nice to me. Often for days at a time they bring me so much to eat that I don't have to cook for myself. A boy going to the University has a room here and tends to the furnace. He's a nice boy. I like him.

14

My life's been a full one, Honey, and an interesting one. I can't really say which part of it is best. I can't decide whether it's a better world now or then. I've had lots of hard work, and lots of friends, lots of fun and I've gone lots of places. Life is interesting.