

SHE COOKED FOR SHERMAN *ek John*

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Old Clinton History Told From Tales By Ex-Slave

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Junius Sims, who is almost an institution in Clinton because of his long years of service at Hillman College, Mississippi College, and in later years as sexton of Clinton's historic cemetery, probably knows more about the people and places of early Clinton than you can find in books. It's much more interesting to learn from him than to search through dusty records.

It isn't that Junius is so old—he was born in Clinton in 1835—but as he listened big-eyed as a young boy to the stories told by his grandmother, Sally Lee. He saw through her eyes what she remembered of the people and buildings of old, old Clinton—the terrifying experiences of the 1875 Clinton Riot which is credited with bringing to an end the Republican rule by scalawags, carpet-baggers and freedmen. But most exciting to him were her experiences during the War Between the States when Yankees marched back and forth several times while waging the Jackson-Champion Hill—Vicksburg campaigns.

When General Sherman stopped over in Clinton on one of these marches, he made a little brick house in uptown Clinton his headquarters. It was Junius Sim's grandmother who was picked up by a Yankee soldier and carried to headquarters "to cook for General Sherman." (Junius thinks Sally cooked for General Grant, too, and it's true he was in Clinton and consulted in the area with Sherman but there's doubt that Grant stayed long enough to need a cook).

WOULD BE 120

Sally's children think she'd "be about 120 years old" if she were living today. Born a slave, Sally Lee was not sure of her exact age but she told her children "I was eleven when the stars fell. All the stars fell but went back up." And this, she said, was when "she lived some place else" before she was brought to Yazoo county where she was bought by the family of Governor Leake and brought to Clinton. Here she lived all the rest of her life until her death in 1916.

Sally was both courageous and determined—two daughters had been taken from her during her slavery and she longed to find them. When she was freed after the war she relentlessly pursued every clue until she found Mary Washington and Roxie and brought them to Clinton to be with her.

As a small boy, Junius played among the rubble ruins of hotels and homes hunting for bits of bright colored china to be found among the brick. The old Clinton—the fabled Clinton that was Mt.

Salus until 1828—became real to Junius as Sally Lee described the many brick homes, hotels and schools that were still standing when she was first brought to Clinton, but that by the late 1800's had all but disappeared.

RUINS OF A HOTEL

It was while playing among the bricks of such a place that Sally told him he was playing in the ruins of what had been a hotel (located on the present site of the Clinton Public school) owned by a captain Brock and how he had met his death. Sally, who cooked for the Leake family, lived in a cabin on the Leake place located south of the present school grounds. She could hear "the shootin' from Jackson," she told Junius, but "she couldn't see anything" from the low land where her cabin stood. One morning about 10 o'clock she walked over to the higher land where the Brock House stood. As she came over the hill she saw Captain Brock down below and in the road (College St. which was then, as now, the road to Jackson. (A map of 1856 shows the "Brock House" at that location).

According to Sally's account, Capt. Brock was down on his knees looking at a horse track when suddenly Yankee soldiers on horses came over the road from around a curve—and not far from him. He looked up, saw the Yankees almost on him and "dropped dead." The soldiers didn't stop, she said, just rode their horses right over him. Sally thought they were on their way to Champions Hill. It was soon after this that a soldier took Sally Lee to Sherman's headquarters in the little house located on Jefferson St. at Main, the present site of the City Hall which was built about 1935.

MANY BRICK KILNS

Junius says there were many brick kilns scattered all over early Clinton and his grandmother knew all the bricklayers of the day, knew who made the brick for the college chapel," and lots about the people" of her early Clinton years "but no one wrote it down."

She remembered when Dr. Walter Hillman, president of then Central Female Institute, started to build a new school just before the War Between the States. It was located on the east end of the school property and in sight of the railroad. He had a brick kiln at the site and two of the best known brick workers had been engaged. "Old Man Charlie Williams" burned the brick, as told by Sally, and Charlie Brown, "who had come from Yazoo City and belonged to Steve Reynolds during slavery times, made the mortar."

These two were working on the school and had gotten the brick walls up seven feet when, Sally told her grandson, Yankee soldiers marching down the railroad, stopped and knocked down the walls. The existing school was left untouched but apparently Dr. Hillman did not again attempt to build a new school.

Today, practically all the bricks above ground have been carried off to fill gullies, or muddy roads, or build garden paths, but the outlines of the extensive foundation may be traced, particularly where trenches have been dug to salvage the bricks underground.

SAVED BABE IN RIOT

Sally remembered reconstruction days and told Junius that during that time the long block on Jefferson St., from the corner of Leake (where a hotel and bank were located) down to the railroad depot," was all stores built out of logs and run by colored people. There were just a few stores uptown run by white folks."

Junius' favorite Clinton Riot story as told him by his grandmother was how she "saved" her youngest child, Tony Lee, a babe in arms. She liked to point out a certain hollow sycamore tree—it's gone now—over on the Old Sand Road that ran along the base of Moss Hill north and a little west of town. Almost all of Clinton's Negroes were attending the county-wide political picnic on Moss Hill that ended in the infamous Clinton Riot. When the shooting started Sally said she ran, carrying the baby. Terrified, she saw the large hollow in the tree and popped the baby into it. Staying out of sight but near the tree, Sally waited hours until it seemed safe to get him out and go home.

(STORY CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE)

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SALLY LEE, who cooked for General Sherman when his headquarters was in downtown Clinton, was photographed on the steps of the "Babe" Menger home on Leake St. sometime before her death in 1916. She was smoking her pipe in which she used "Lucy Hinton" chewing tobacco, which she would cut up and dry in the stove. Born into slavery, Sally was brought from Yazoo county by members of the Leake family and cooked for them until freed after the War Between the States. She vividly remembered the people and buildings of the pre-war prosperous Clinton, lived through the War, reconstruction times, and the Clinton Riot. As her grandson Junius Sims says, "my grandmother knew all about Old Clinton but nobody ever wrote it down."