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## [I Been 'Voted to Horses All My Days]

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I BEEN 'VOTED TO HORSES ALL MY DAYS

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Henry Rogers, (Negro Janitor)

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[M. S. ?]

I BEEN 'VOTED TO HORSES ALL MY DAYS

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I ain't never seen a horse ;yet that I couldn't do nothin' with if I wanted to, and I can make friends with any dog I ever saw." Said old Henry Rogers, who is 77 years old, a great lover of animals, a keen observer, and a philosopher.

"I moved to Washington from Sparta, Georgia, 45 years ago. In them years I has been, hotel waiter, lot man, livery [stable?] "[ostler?]," furniture store and undertaker assistant, and janitor, at one time or another.

"I is almost too old and [feeble?] now to have regular work, and I has a lot of trouble tryin' to manage my 'feets,' but I is still on the job and I has been the 'joniker' (janitor) of the Bank of Wilkes building for 17 years."

From Henry's description he suffers with [locomotor ataxia?]. A short time ago the Bank of Wilkes County building changed hands and the old man was replaced immediately by a spry young Negro. The office renters instantly refused to let their keys be given to anyone else, so faithful and reliable old "Deacon" as he is affectionately called, comes each morning and cleans up, for no stated salary, just what his white friends give him.

Henry has a neat, well furnished little home on Lexington Road quite a distance from his work. The night watchman at the building usually makes it convenient to be in that part of town about the time Uncle Henry is ready to come to work and 2 calls by for him. Almost every afternoon one of the town's most prominent citizens carries him home on the way to his farm farther out on Lexington Road.

"I'se comin' to work just as long as I is able." Said the old man. "Some days when I first wakes up I feels as if I can't make it, but I gets up and makes some good hot coffee and when 'the Law' (night watchman) blows for me, I reaches up and gets my hat and stick and comes on, and then it ain't long 'fore I feels better. If I'd give up and stay at home in bed I'd soon be where I couldn't go. Yes, Mam, I'se comin' down here and do what I can just as long as I can stand up."

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Uncle Henry has lost very little time on account of sickness during his long service at the bank building. In fact if he doesn't show up, somebody hurries to find out the reason for we know something very unusual has happened. Throughout my long acquaintance with Uncle Henry I have known of his great love for horses and dogs and at this point I asked him to tell me some of his experiences. He agreed readily.

"I been 'voted to horses all my days - just plumb 'voted to 'em.

"The [Hunt?] and [Alfriend?] families raised me over in [Hancock?] County. They lived on a big plantation and raised pretty much of all their stock.

"When I was nothin' but a kid boy, I went with the men to feed the stock. I couldn't do nothin; but get up in the 3 fodder loft and throw down roughage but I done that 'til I was big enough to do the feeding. After that/ when my [Marster?] saw how I loved the stock and what good care I took of 'em he called me in one day and said:

"Boy, I want you to look after these horses, and nobody else but you, do you hear?"

"I told him 'Yessir, thank you' and from then on I was in complete and entire charge of all the horses and rules on that plantation. I got up 'fore day and fed the stock and had my Marster's saddle horse at the rack all ready for him by good daylight.

"I broke in all the colts. I'd take one 'bout big 'nough to break and put a bridle on it then lead it up and down the long [lane?] 'til it was use to the bridle. Next I'd put a harness on it and lead it awhile. After it got good and use to the harness dangling around, I'd hitch it up to an old buggy I had there and then I'd ride in the [lane?] awhile, then take it out into the road a mile or so. I broke all the colts that way and never had no trouble with 'em.

"When I was 16 years old there came an Irishman out to the place from Sparta, we all called him 'Pat'. He had race horses, and he trained horses too.

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"He watched me what I was doing with the colts and after a little, he said to me:

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"Let me give you instructions 'bout horses'.

"I said 'Yessir, I'd thank you.'

"So he brought one of his fine racers out there, he did, and told me: 'Here, take [Nick?] and play 'round with him, he'll learn you a heap.'

"I took [Nick?] and jogged him 'round, and I did learn from handling him sho' 'nough.

"Some time after that I went to Sparta and worked in a livery stable. I and another '[ostler?], Charlie Hooks, worked together. One day he said to me, he did:

"Brit - (that's what everybody in [Hancock?] county called me) - let's take these horses out to the fair grounds and jog 'em 'round the race track.'

"So us did. We went 'round three times then started home. Well, sir, when us went out the fair ground gate, my horse dropped its head and lit out. We went through town a-flyin', right on to the stable. When my boss man saw us comin' he waved his hands and hollered: '[slack?] your lines! [slack?] your lines!' I done that and you know that horse stopped right dead still in its tracks. If he hadn't told me that I'd a gone bustin' right through that stable and me and the horse would have been killed. I ain't never forgot that when drivin' a race horse.

"I learned to drive horses good and then I went to Macon 5 and drove race horses. I stayed with Pat and he learnt me more about horses than anybody ever did.

"I've never seen a bulking horse or mule that I couldn't move. All I do is stand a little ways in front of 'em and talk and gesture this way - (Here the old man waved his arms

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beckoning the imaginary horses that wouldn't move, to come on. It was so real to him that his voice took on a soft persuasive tone) and they will come to me or break a wheel.

“When I come to Washington, Wilkes County in 1896, I first was a porter in a hotel, then lot man for several families here. But it wasn't long ‘fore I found me a job in a [livery?] stable where I could handle horses again. Different mens here [what?] [watched?] me, used to say!

“deacon, how come you can manage horses, Drive 'em and all, and not whip 'em?’

“I always told 'em that horses was like children, they wanted to be petted and loved, and you had to let 'em know that you was their friend, and never let 'em be scared of you. Let a horse know what you want him to do, make him understand that, and he'll do it and not give you not trouble, but you got to be [paciabable?] (peaceable) with 'em and never scare 'em.

“I was out with a [drummer?] on a trip when a new horse come to the stable. They wanted to see how she worked, so they hooked her up and she wouldn't go a step, just laid right 6 square down in the harness. They couldn't make her do a thing. They worried with her 'til my Boss man said:

“take her out, and don't bother her - wait 'til Henry comes, he'll 'tend to her.’

“When I come in they told me about her. I went in and rubbed her down good, petted her up, and hooked her up to a two horse wagon with a good old mule. She laid down again. I took me a wet sack and put it all around her head. She got up, and I hauled all day long with that sack on her head and I never hit her a lick. Us sold her next day, she was all right and didn't give no more trouble.

“It wasn't so long after that ‘fore we got in another hard horse to handle - we bought it in Athens and he was a goofy horse. Soon as I [got?] my eyes on him I said:

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“Huh, this is a goofy horse, and somebody is liable to get kilt by him.’

“My boss asked me how I know he's goofy. I told him jest like I know a man soon as I look him in the eyes I can tell what kind of a man he is, same way I can tell ‘bout a horse.

“I went on ‘bout my business but sayin' to myself: ‘Uh, um, this is another job for me with that horse’, and [sho?] ‘nough it was.

“But in a day or two, we got a notice there was a carload of corn at the depot, so I hooked up that goofy horse with a gentle mule and broke him good hauling that corn.

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“My boss went out of town on business in a day or two after that, and a man on an apple wagon come in. I traded him that pretty [bay?] goofy horse for his old chestnut sorrel with one eye, and [\$100?] boot. When my boss come in and I told him what I had gone he give me \$10 for doing it.

“Not long after that I had to drive a traveling man over to McCormick, South Carolina. I drove in a stable there and was rubbin' my horses off, when I happened to look around and there I saw the [bay?] goofy horse I had swapped not long before to the apple man. I stopped still and asked the white man what run the livery stable:

“‘Where'd you get that [bay?] horse?’

“He said: ‘Why? Have you ever seen him before? Where you from anyhow?’

“I said: ‘Yes sir, I've seen him before. I've from over in Washington, Wilkes County, Georgia, and I know that horse.’

“He said: ‘Well, if you have seen him before where'd I get him?’

“I said: ‘You got him from an apple wagon man, didn't you?’

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“He said: 'that's right, this horse was walking along behind the wagon. I can't work him - can't do a thing with him.’

I said: ‘Well, I can, ain't nothin' the matter with that horse, he'll work good as any horse if you know how to treat 8 him.’

“You know he said if I would show him how to work that horse he'd give me [?] and my lodging and not charge me a thing for my team staying overnight. I had to spend the night any how, so I hooked up the kickin' horse and a good gentle mule together to a big two horse wagon and got in. Well sir, when I said ‘Hey’ that horse pulled off just as pretty as anything you ever saw. I drove the wagon on to where the man wanted it to go.

“When I got back that white man looked at me, and looked at the horse and asked the boys that went off with me if the horse give us any trouble and they all said, ‘None.’

“He looked right hard at me and said: ‘What do you do to make horse like that work?’

“‘treat 'em nicely, don't whip 'em, and don't let 'em get scared of me.’ I said.

“After we took the second load he was satisfied that the horse would work. Then I hitched him to a buggy and the man got in an I drove him all around the town.

“That man was so happy, he said he would give me \$10 a week, a house to live in and board, if I would come live with him and work his horses.

“I told him, no sir, I had a good job back in Washington, Wilkes County, and had a family and we was gettin' along all 9 right over there, so I didn't want to move.

“Then he asked me to drive him around one more time and let him see the horse work, so I did, but I charged him an extra dollar for that.”

Deep in thought for a few moments, the old man said half to himself:

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"I never whipped but one horse in my life, and I never give it but one good lick. That was enough though, for the whelp stayed on it for a long time.

"Goodness, Uncle Henry!" I said. "What in the world made [younhit?] it so hard?"

He smiled a little, as he answered:

"Well, I'll tell you, that horse needed it, it sho did. It was this way.

"We got in some horses and I took a pair and hooked 'em up to try. Well sir, they run away, one of 'em did, and knocked me down and drug me clean across that square out yonder. Two white [gentlmans?] there at the corner runned out and stopped 'em or they would have kilt me.

"Dey helt 'em for me to git in the buggy. I got in and took the whip up and give the one what started the runnin' just one pop with that whip, I did. That was a plenty took, for that took him off his feet. They started then and I let 'em go hard as they could down Main Street to Lexington Avenue, 10 then I turned them there at the old drinking fountain and up the street they come back to the stable.

"A drummer was waiting there to go to [Tighall?]. I told him to get in and I would take him right then. He got in and I drive that distance (12 miles) over bad roads in 40 minutes. When we driv up to the hotel and the drummer got out, he said to the hotel man who was there to met him:

"I don't know which is the durndest in this outfit, the horses or the driver.'

"Well, sir, that was enough for me, I let out a good whoop and let the horses rest awhile and then brought 'em back to town.

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"Nobody in the stable ever could handle them horses but me. They was beauties too and I loved to drive 'em, they was fast as the wind. A man in Athens saw 'em and wanted 'em. He finally 'suated us to let him have 'em and I driv 'em over there to him.

"I cautioned him they was dangerous and whoever driv 'em would have to mighty careful or they would get out from under him. In three days they run away and tore up his carriage and one of 'em cut itself all to pieces.

"They had to be used every day or they would get too fiery. I used to hook 'em up on Sundays and go out in the country to church somewhere just to keep 'em in trainin'.

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"I stayed in the livery stable business 'til automobiles come and took possession of this country. When we crossed out me and my boss went out friendly and lovely to each other so far as I know.

"There's one other thing I wants to tell 'fore we leave this part of my paper.

"All right, let's hear it." I urged, and from the merry twinkle in Uncle Henry's big bright eyes, that have a way of seeing much in life that is worthwhile and amusing, I know it would be something good.

"Course I never said nothing 'bout it, but I knowed my boss man was havin' trouble with cotton [?], they was going down and he was miserable. So right after dinner one day he said to me, he did: 'deacon, look after everything. I'se going home.'

"I told him all right, and he went on.

"After he left, I took a [fork?] and went to cleanin' up [the?] mule pen. All at once I caught something on my [fork?] that struck hard. I looks at it and it was a great big brown leather pocketbook. I put it in my pocket right quick and said nothing. Me and the boys got through

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cleanin' up so I went in the office and locked the door and counted the money. It was exactly [\$531?] and a note. I didn't do nothin' but put it back in my pocket where I couldn't lose it. I told the boys 12 to go home, and I locked up for the night and went home.

"Next morning when the boss come down, I looked at him out of the corner of my eyes and saw he wasn't lookin' well a bit from some cause. He come on to me and said:

"'deacon, how's everything?'

"'All right, all right.' I answered. 'How is everything with you?'

"'I lost my pocketbook somewhere - had \$500 in it, and I haven't slept a wink all night.'

"'Urh, urh, I'se awful sorry.' I said to him.

"He went in his office and took a drink, then when he come out he said he was a-going to breakfast.

"I hollowed to him as he left, 'All right, eat a big breakfast and don't worry.' I knowed he was deep in them [?] and was about broke.

"Way long after awhile he come back and I saw he looked a little better. I let him go in his office and said nothing to him. After awhile I went in and handed him his pocketbook.

"He was the worst surprised man I ever did see and said, 'Where did you find it?'

"I didn't say nothin'. He kept looking at it - opened it to the money and counted it.

"'Why there is over \$500 here and I thought I didn't have but even \$500.'

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"I told him where I found it and he give a five dollar bill and said:

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“Yes, any other Nigger that found it would have kept it too.’

“He told everybody about that pocketbook up to the time us went out of business.”

Here the old man paused, apparently deeply lost in thought. In a minute or two, he spoke slowly and with a note of sadness in his voice.

“In them days I had plenty of money. I bought my home, paid for it and done a good part by my children. After the livery stable went out of business I went to work at [Harwell?] & Moore where I was in charge of the colored undertaking. I driv the hearse for 'em and worked around the store. I made a good salary and got extra for every burial I made. I furnished my house nicely then, and bought among other things a nice upright piano for my children.

“Now I thinks about them good days when I have come down to where I don't have but a little, not enough to go on. And Annie (his wife) sick all the time and can't get about and I has to have somebody to wait on her. I sho misses them good days, I tell you. But I must get on now about the dogs I promised to tell you about.

“I'll start my story with my stealing four hound puppies 14 from the Gypsies that camped one winter down on our creek over in Hancock County.

“They come down there and I use to go to their camp and one day I saw these puppies, four of the prettiest puppies I ever did see. I wanted 'em and I got 'em.

“One evening another little boy was helping me to get up the cows; I told him to take the cows on home for me and I went by the Gypsy camp and stole them puppies and took 'em to a old ginhouse in an out-of-the-way place where nobody ever went only in ginnin' time. I kept them puppies over there for months, sneaking food to 'em every day and [tending?] to 'em.

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“One day Mr. Alfriend went to the ginhouse for something and found my puppies. He said: ‘Whose dogs is these?’

“‘I and Benny's' I said.

“‘Where'd you get 'em?’ he asked.

“‘stole 'em from the Gypsies.’

“‘Why, Brit, don't you know the Gypsies are looking everywhere for 'em?’

“‘They was too, but they never did find 'em and went on and left me with four of the finest hound dogs ever seen in that country I always did think they had greyhound blood, cause they was so fast.

“‘I raised all four of 'em, Redbone, Pinky, Nelly and Slipper. Redbone was the fastest dog I ever saw, he never 15 took but one and three-quarter hours to catch [a fox?] or run it in it's hole. When he was runnin' his feets looked like nary one of 'em touched the ground.

“‘One day Mr. [?] come out from Sparta to run his dog, [Alto?]. My Marster [?] my dog, so he called me in.

“‘Mr. Hill say: ‘Here Brit, I wants to see them dogs.’

“‘I went to the well and brought 'em a [fresh?] bucket of water and set it down. While they was drinkin' Mr. Hill asked me if my dog was as fast as they said he was. I told him ‘no sir, he not so fast, but he secn a good dog.’ My Marster just laughed and said:

“‘Wait 'til in the morning, he'll show you.’

“‘Next morning way before day he had a race. I set my dogs out, all four of 'em. Mr. Hill say if his dog Alto don't catch that fox he won't take him back home.

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“When we saw the fox go by my dogs was close in behind him, old Redbone leading all the rest. I turned back and told the white mens to go on when they caught him and if my dogs caught the fox they would be standin' over him nippin' at the other dogs.

“Well, sir, a man [what?] lived further up from us heard the race and come out to see it. He said he was standin' near a high rail fence when he saw the fox jump over, and right behind him was Redbone and he jumped under the 16 fox and grabbed him 'fore he landed. He said that beat anything be ever did see.

“When they all come up to where the fox was, so they told me, my dogs was all standin' 'round him, and Mr. Hill's dogs (he had 8 but Alto was his brag dog) was standing way back and if one of 'em moved toward that fox, my dogs nipped at 'em.

“Soon after that I sold Redbone for \$50 and a Texas pony. In less than a year he come back to me all et up with mange and I never let nobody know he was back. But he never was much more good but I kept him 'til he died.

“That dog would tree possums all night long, but he wouldn't bother to run a rabbit for nobody, you couldn't make him get after a rabbit.

“Once I took him down to Sparta and entered him in a drag race, he got the \$10 prize, and a man offered me \$100 for him, but I wouldn't take it. He had a keep sharp mouth and I almost know he was part [greyhound?].

“I used to keep some kind of wild game to eat all the time. My mother was the cook at the big house and us all et there. They looked for me to furnish wild stuff to eat.

“One day in April I and Benny went down to the creek to catch a coon. We caught a wild cat, so I took and cut his head off, skint him, and hid the skin. I took him on to the kitchen to Mamma and told her he was a coon. She took 17 and cooked him up nice, she did, thinking all the time what a fine coon it was. All of us et him and enjoyed him too.

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“Nobody didn't think nothing about it until a little while after that up comes a rainy day. I went down and got the wild cat skin and was having a fine drag race with my dogs when the boss man saw it. ‘What kind of skin is that, Brit?’ he asked me.

“‘Coon skin,’ I told him.

“‘Let me see. No it ain't, it's a cat skin.’

“Well sir, Mamma took me in and said ‘yes and that's what you brought here and I cooked it for a coon too.’

“Gentlemen! With that she got a whip and took me to an outhouse, took all my clothes off me and what she done for me with that whip was a plenty. My young mistress come up and called her off me and I jumped out the window and got away.”

Here Uncle Henry gave a hearty laugh and continued:

“But you know one thing; after that I took everything I caught straight to my Mamma and let her see what it was, and if my dogs caught a rabbit and bit up tis head bad, I let them have it for the head had to be on everything I took to that kitchen after that. Mamma never trusted me no more about the game I brought in.

“I had another smart dog, his name was [Taro?]. He was the worst dog I ever did see, he wouldn't let no kind of animals nor [fowls?] stay anywhere near him, he kilt everything. And 18 Mamma could go way from home and leave the house open and tell him to stay there and not let nobody come in. He'd take his place before the kitchen door and it was worth a man's life to try to get in. He would let my young mistress in, but she had to talk mighty nice to get by.

“One day he was asleep out in the sunshine when a little black fice come up and bit him on the ear. He got up and killed that fice (it was mad) and I cut his ear off and treated it, but

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one year to that very day old [Taro?] went mad. I couldn't kill him, so I got a young white man to come over and shoot him for me.

"I had two little black [??] fices once that was smart. One day I got on my horse and was riding over the plantation after a big rain. They went along with me, and after we crossed a little spring branch they took out across the field after something. They made so much racket I rode over to see what it was. They was on something big and black, I didn't know what it was 'cause I had never seen nothing like it before.

"I sicked 'em on and kept talking to 'em, and they finally kilt this [thing?].

"I took it up and went on back to the house. I took it in and asked my Marster what it was:

"He was so surprised, and said 'Brit where in the world did you get this otter?'

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"I told him and he said it was the first and only one he had ever seen anywhere around. It was always a mystery to him where it come from.

"He had me to save the skin and he took it and had it tanned and sent off and made his wife the prettiest cape out of it. It was so black it just glistened. But you know that otter had the worst claws I ever saw, they was just like needles they was so sharp.

"Then another day I was hunting for possums down on our creek and my dogs treed something. It went up a little bit [of a?] tree and I saw it was a [baby?] something. I got it and it turned out to be a little coon. I put it in my pocket and carried it home and raised it. I named it Minnie and kept it two years. It was crazy about me, would eat everything I eat, and slept on my feet every night.

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“But you know that devilish little old thing would steal everything it could put its claws on. I had to be careful where I put my socks at night when I took 'em off or next morning, I would have to get out another pair for she would have 'em hid somewhere.

“And clean, she would wash her face with her paws like a cat does. And catch mice and rats, she kept the house free from them as long as I kept her.

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“I took her to the Macon State Fair one year and a man offered me \$5 for her. I sold her, but I sho' did hate to do it. She was so cute and loved me so. She would get up in my lap every time I come in the house and [sot?] down.”

Thinking a moment, Uncle Henry looked up with a smile.

“I've covered lots of territory in my life - different things I've done, lived a long time, I have.”

And he has, he has crowded much into his 77 years; he has lived long and well as all who know him will agree. He is tired now, and dependent, but he has been such a friend to all who needed him, and now that he needs [loyal?] friends, they will stand by him.