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[Gabriel Washington]

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LIFE HISTORY

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Charles A. Von Ohsen,

McClellanville, S. C.

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Life History GABRIEL WASHINGTON

Gabriel Washington was born on the Peafield Plantation. His early home was a one-room house made of poles. It had an old-time clay chimney, everything but straight. The furniture consisted of handmade benches, tables and beds.

His father and mother worked in the rice fields, which "Gabe" says were in their bloom then. The first work that Gabriel ever did was to hoe in these fields, helping his parents finish their tasks. All the Negroes were given task work in those days. After he became old enough, he plowed in the rice fields.

It was at Wesley School, a one-teacher school on Montgomery Plantation that Gabriel learned to read, spell and write his name. His teacher was John Whiney. "Gabe" studied his lessons faithfully and was a good boy in school for he was much afraid of John Whiney, a good but strict teacher; who believed that nothing would make a child study more or behave better than a good whipping. Gabriel also knew that if he got a licking at school, he was sure to get a harder one when he got home. When he was fifteen years of age, and in the second grade he had to quit school and go to work.

He then went back to the rice fields and worked for about two years. Then leaving Santee he went to work chipping 2 boxes on a turpentine farm near McClellanville. His task was five thousand and seven hundred boxes a week, for which he was paid fifty cents a thousand. This was a small job for Gabriel. He completed his task in two and one half-days. This job lasted about four years.

About this time Gabriel married Hannah Bennet. They had eight children, four girls and four boys, but they lost three of the girls and one boy.

Hannah died twelve years after he married her. Gabriel stayed single for five years and then took another wife Margaret Reid. He had no children by this marriage.

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Gabriel decided to leave McClellanville and to go back to Santee where all of his relatives and his boyhood friends lived. He got a job working on the turpentine farm of Mr. Pittman. Soon after moving back, Margaret died.

It was some months after Margaret's death that Gabriel went on the only pleasure trip of his life. He spent a week with a friend in Hemingway. This man as far as he had ever been from home.

In 1932 he married for the third time a woman named Diana Ball.

They had a comfortable home, nicely furnished at Peafield, but it burned in 1933.

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“Gabe” tells about it in the following manner: “Diana been cooking breakfast and I been walk down in the field. I hear Diana holler, but I think she been holler at the chickens 'cause we have a stack of rice in the garden and them chickens was always in that rice. Then I look and see smoke. I start for the house as fast as I could go, but I couldn't even walk fast for one of my ribs been broke. When I got there I start hollering for I think Diana been in the house, but she been out in the yard. That house burn down to the ground and we ain't save nothing but the clothes we have on we back. I lose a forty dollar suit of clothes in that house. Then the stack of rice caught fire. I been throw sand on it, but that sand burn just like gasoline.”

Gabriel, his wife and one daughter then moved to their present home, on the Seven Mile Road. They have never been able to finish this house and to get the nice furniture they want, for Gabriel has not had a good, steady job in several years.

The house in which they live is a small four room one, built of rough lumber with a gable on each side of the front. The front yard in divided by a fence. On the left of this fence is

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a vegetable garden and on the right is the “front yard”. There is a walk bordered with lilies leading up to the front door.

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On each side of this walk are roses, snowdrops and bridal-wreathes. There are no steps to the front door, so you have to enter at the back. At the back is a small porch, then a hall running the length of the house. On the left of this hall is Gabriel's and Diana's bedroom. In it are two double beds, with clean sheets, pillow-cases, and comforts; a dresser and a trunk. The walls are papered with newspapers and pages from magazines. At the windows are faded, but clean cretonne curtains. On the right of the hall is the living-room. It is papered as the bedroom, except bright, pictured papers were used for it. This room is decorated with red Christmas rope and on the walls are two photographs, one of Shirley Temple and the other of Gabriel. The furniture consists of a dresser, used as a buffet with green pitcher and glasses on it, two tables, two chairs, a safe and a stove. The same kind of cretonne curtains are used in here. A door opens from this into the kitchen, which also serves as the diningroom. It is papered with newspapers. In this room is a stove, table and washstand. The washstand is a receptacle for groceries, pots and pans. From the kitchen is a door opening into Lucille's, Gabriel's daughter, room. It is furnished with a bed, chair and stove.

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In the winter 'Gabe' takes his bath in the house by the fire, using a Large wash-tub. Sometimes in the summer he goes down to the creek for a little swim. He swims very seldom now though, for he is getting too old.

Gabriel believes that people should have as many children as God sees fit to give them. He says that he doesn't think the size of his family had to do with his being poor.

As to morals, he says, “From a boy up to the present time I try as near as possible to do the right. Sometimes a person will talk wrong. But up 'till today I ain't never have white or

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black to point hand at me and say, "Gabriel you did tief so and so from me'. Nobody can say I ever done wrong by them".

He is very proud of his ancestors for he says that they were always good, clean, honest people, who attended church regularly.

Gabriel says, "I ain't never own a car and I ain't want one. If I had the money, I never would but a car, I would much rather have a good mule and wagon".

Gabriel asserts that things are very different now from the time when he was a young man. He says that he fared much better then. There use to be many turpentine farms in this county on which he could get a steady job chipping boxes.

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Whereas he use to make ten to twelve dollars a week, he now makes three, provided the weather is good. He works at Hampton Plantation, hewing out lumber by hand or helping to keep up the grounds, and of course it is impossible to do this type of work in bad weather. Those weeks in which he cannot work he has to get groceries and tobacco on credit and it is very hard then for him to catch up when he does work. However he and Diana manage somehow to live on his little income and to pay up the debts.

"Gabe" says that if he could have an income of ten dollars a week that he could repair his house, live comfortably and even save a little. But he is proud of his little farm, in spite of his small earnings, and is satisfied with his life. Although he knows nothing about mills and factories he is sure that he would not like to work in, one.

All of his children are married except Lucille. They have all built homes near Gabriel and anytime you go to see him, there are several of his twelve grandchildren around him.

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In case of sickness when a doctor must be reached at once, Gabriel's son has a car that would get them to Georgetown or McClellanville in a very short time. "Gabe" says that he has paid about four hundred dollars for doctor bills since he was married.

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Gabriel was able to pay all these bills for he had a steady job the earlier part of his life.

He begins his day quite early, about five o'clock. As soon as he gets up he goes out in the yard and feeds the chickens and does any other little odd job around the place, while Diana is cooking breakfast. For breakfast they have hominy, butts meat, bread and coffee. After breakfast he leaves for work. In the spring he plows his land and gets it ready for planting. At twelve o'clock, if he is working at home, he knocks off and comes to the house. He and Diana, (for Lucille is off working) have their dinner of rice, collards, or some other vegetable, meat and bread. As soon as the midday meal is over, he is back at work again. At five o'clock Gabriel knocks off and feeds his ox, for Diana has already fed the chickens and pigs.

The remainder of the evening he spends talking with his sons, grandchildren and any neighbors that may come by.

Gabriel plants corn, rice, peas and potatoes and this is what enables him to live on his small income.

"Gabe" and Diana eat whatever they have on hand, as they know nothing of a balanced diet. They always have rice for dinner, as they raise their own rice.

Near Gabriel's house is a dance hall, with a piccalo. He says! " I hear the music, but I ain't never been there for 8 that a place for the young courting couples and the old folks that go there just for drink and carouse and I ain't up for that. I is been a steward in the church for

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three years and it ain't look right for me to go to them places. To tell the truth I ain't care to go".

He is not critical of young people, however, he believes in them having a good time, just so they stay respectable along with it.

Gabriel considers an education very desirable and a great help in securing work. He sent all of his children to school and it was through no fault of his that not one ever graduated. They can all read, write and figure though.

He says that he registered in Charleston many years ago to vote, but never went back when voting time came. He is not interested in politics.

His greatest pleasure is hunting deer, turkeys and ducks with Dr. Rutledge, whom he has known since his boyhood days.