

The Davis's House
[The sharecropper]
[At The Bob Walker Place]
Rt 1, Blackville, S. C.
[A Replica]



It was a shell of a house and definitely that of the tenant type. Worn, neglected, and deserted by the land owner [Bob Walker] . Made from unfinished green, knotty pine lumber, never been painted and when seasoned left cracks between the outside boards and walls to the extent that a pencil could be shoved through without any difficulty.

The house was many years old, weather beaten, and completely unimproved and uninhabitable for human occupancy, but never-the-less, the house was that of a typical sharecroppers home. As you look around you see holes and cracks, stopped with rags and with squares of cardboard and newspaper plastered to the walls, with a thick paste made of flour and water by my mother to keep out the dust and winter chill. The rear wall of the fire place was bursted through letting in a large hole of daylight, and the clay brick chimney with several brick missing, always leaning slightly away from the old house and would remain so until the day we made the transition from this old home place, to our new brick home, for which I will speak of later.

The foundation would rest on six blocks of wood, approximately thirty inches high, one for each corner and two in the center, high enough for the swine ending their forging from the depleted fields to walk under in the

winter time for warmth and comfort without difficulty.

The roof was made of rusty corrugated tin and wood shingles and no guarantee against the summer down pours and cold winter rain. Beneath the house lay mounds of dirt from mama, sweeping the floor, sand and dirt falling through the cracks between the boards in the floor, forming straight lines of dirt and dust, creating dust bowls which is the subtle funnels of doodle-bugs [ant lion] whose teasing with a broom-straw was one of the entertainments of kneeling childhood, with mouth close to his depression chanting, ["Doodle-bud, Doodle-bug, Where are you, come on up where I can see you. Doodle-bug, Doodle bug where are you, if you come up I won't bother you"] which was a little white lie, when they would come up, we would put them in a glass jar, after having our fill playing with them we would put them back on the dirt to see which one would bore himself back into the mound first. ["Now that's entertainment, no television, personal computers, I-pods, electric trains, bicycle, scooters or swimming pools.]

The windows attached to the house was made of solid wood boards hung with huge rusty hinges. the house consisted of three rooms, kitchen, living-room bedroom combination, and the children's bed room.

The front porch was the social and resting place, and was usually kept nearly clear of junk. The floor gave-in very noticeably, with sounds of warnings under the legs of a rickety rocker or any chair with an adult with weight sits in, the floor is caved in, in a number of places, yet in general it is still safe. On the porch was Papa's unsteady pine bottom rocker and other straight chairs with their often broken seats which was cushioned with news papers, soiled material that was once part of an old bed cover or discarded clothing making sitting a little more comfortable. There were three steps down from the porch made of two by twelve knotty pine, the third step when stepped on touched the ground, These steps were at the middle of the porch, they led, when entering the porch into the open front door and straight through the living room, kitchen and through the back kitchen door.

All tenant or sharecroppers houses in certain respects is of outward frame in appearance and all meets an average of being a two room shack of horizontal boards or planks, a door at center front and center rear with square shuttered [no glass] windows, a chimney of brick and clay, the house

is, save for the roof, an almost a perfect cube.

The two- room is more often than not, becomes a three-room, after being added, the third being a lean-to becoming the kitchen and eating area. The house is most often made of weathered uneven, unfinished rough horizontal clapboards and with one or two shuttered windows in the kitchen .

The two doors are at center front and rear and usually a roofed front porch running the entire width of the house.

All the tenant and sharecroppers houses have pretty strongly in common these characteristics; Wood unpainted and weathered or once whitewashed and raised off the ground so that earth and daylight are clear under the whole house. Hard bare dirt yard, most with no shade or trees nearby.

Such houses can be mistaken for nothing else except, occasionally, the home of the weakest and poorest sort of small tenant farmer or sharecropper.

The Bob Walker Place was such a place, below the average but with my father's ingenuity, improvising and determination with improvements, our house became the average home, that of a hard working, and energetic sharecropper, knowing that within him-self the situation at hand was only temporary and better things was yet to come, and so they did!.

Since my father was very disappointed and disillusioned in his past endeavors and efforts to move forward to obtain a better life for himself and his family he decided to try his hand at sharecropping having neither the funds nor the means to purchase or rent a parcel of land to farm himself,



and keep all the profits . So let me explain a little about sharecropping.

Sharecropping is a form of farming which a family work a parcel of land which they do not own in return for a fraction of the crops yield, or production.

As part of the custom, the land owner keeps the books and handles all the sales and disposition of all products. The land owner had a great advantage over the farmers that could not read or write and often taken advantage of that opportunity. The landowner returns

to the sharecropper only what is left over of his share of the profits after deducting all debt owed the landowner furnished to him during the year. Usually the landowner furnished the sharecropper, the land, house, equipment, animals, seed and $\frac{1}{2}$ fertilizer. The sharecropper furnished the labor and $\frac{1}{2}$ of the fertilizer, for $\frac{1}{2}$ of the crops yield or $\frac{4}{5}$ th of the crops yield depending on the circumstances and the agreement between the landowner and the sharecropper. [example, the landowner furnish all the fertilizer]

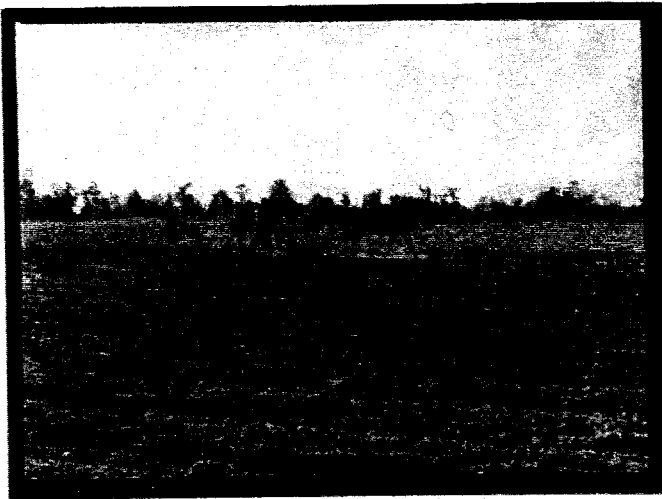
The sharecropper is always at the mercy of the landowners who weighed their harvest at the end of the planting season and they kept account of all purchases made at the landowners country store, and the little money they borrowed during the farming season for Saturday night spending. It was often the rule, after a year of hard and strenuous labor, they found themselves with very little, and often in debt at the end of the year.

Sharecroppers who felt they were cheated had little recourse, the law always favored the rich landowner and the only consolation the sharecropper had was to discuss their disappointment amongst themselves and to move with another landowner, those who did often found themselves in the same situation and no better off than what they had left behind.

It is not often at the end of a season, that a sharecropper clears enough profit to tide him through the winter months, in fact he can almost count on it. During the winter months, usually between the months of November through February between harvest time in the fall and at the beginning of the planting season in the early spring, he will have no money and can expect none, even worse during the summertime, after laying-by, [meaning, working in the fields is over, until harvesting time in the fall] he will have no income. He can be sure several months out of the year he is more likely or not to have absolutely nothing whatsoever and during these months he must take care of himself and family. He must find other means of supporting his family by finding other work and by farming out members of his family to do

menial or domestic chores for the upper class and the rich in the nearby countryside and the small country towns. The above is a small telescopic view of the sharecropper.

I am very fortunate to have the remarkable remembrance at this time



recollecting memories of my childhood growing up in my adolescent years.

I was about two and a half [2 1/2] years of age when we moved back to Blackville, S.C. from Stilson Ga. on Black Creek Where I was born in Bulloch County on January 14, 1921. During a conversation with my older brother, Kenney, we left Stillwell Ga. by train in March of 1923 to arrive in Balckville, S.C. and be in place and settled in the old sharecropper's house about five miles east of Blackville on Mr. Bob Walker's place nestled in the corner and the borderline of Bamberg and Barnwell Counties, in time to plant the thirty acre seasonal crops, mostly cotton, corn and sugarcane with two scrawny old mules named

Pete and Red. I can imagine the anxiety and frustration my father was enduring. The land had to be prepared, tilled and the crop planted during the first week in May. He knew a vigorously growing crop usually starts fruiting earlier, matures earlier and may have a better yield potential, if planted at the right time.

When the cotton is 3 or 4 weeks old, the rows of closely spaced plants are chopped out with hoes, leaving them divided into small clumps separated by hoe-width spaces.

This work must be done within a certain period of time and every member of the family and children old enough helps out. My older brothers Kenney, Carisle and Blend [Joe] was old enough to help mama and papa on the farm, Haskell Jr, [H.D. myself [Swift] and our sister, Christee Lee were not. Mama would take us along to the field and she would place us on a



pallet at the beginning of a cotton row under the shade of a sassafras bush, or another type of umbrella shade, and in her calm and soft voice ordered us to stay put and we knew she would return only in a dire necessity.

However, we had a way for her to overcome that necessity. When we were in desperate need of her presents we would put our little sneaking and evil minds together, making use of the closest ant hill, would place a few ants on our baby sisters body whereby she would cry out so loud mama would come running. And believe me, that young-un could hollow.

Well as time passed, we too joined the family, in working in the fields. Shingles, a piece of a thin oblong piece of wood laid in overlapping rows to cover houses were in demand and papa thought he could do better by making shingles and

extra hands to help out blacks by the name of

My mother and father generated strength and ones imagination, continuously in the means necessary to without any animosity after preparing



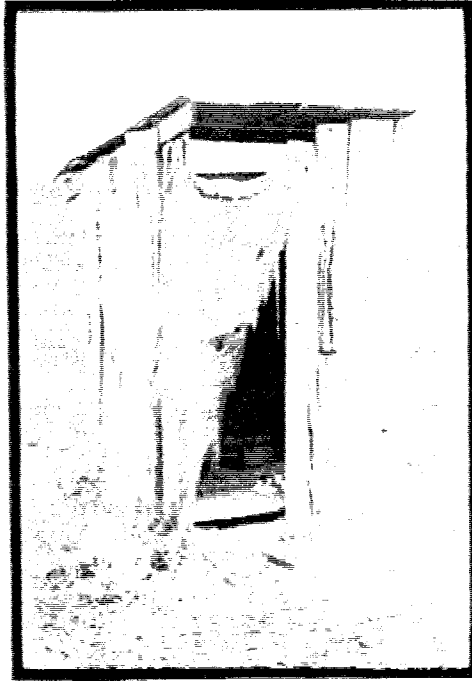
therefore, added two in the fields, two Murray and Salmon, us for many years. had a gene that energy beyond any they toiled fields and by any other provide for the family or complaints. Mama breakfast she would

Wood shingles

head for the fields and return in time to prepare the next meal for the family and extra help..finding the extra time in between to do other chores commensurate to the every day life and living on the farm, was a chore within itself. Usually mama would set aside one day for woman's work, Monday's if all possible. This is one day that the children not yet old enough to work in the fields, become duty bound to help mama in any capacity deemed necessary. [To- day it would certainly be considered child cruelty.] This was one day the children had no thought of their own, only the thought of work at hand.

Mama kept two galvanized wash tubs hanging on two nails on the side of the smokehouse and nearby was a 30 gallon wash pot, and the nearest water source was the pitcher pump standing next to the lot [corral] where we kept the animals, about twenty five yards away, to wash you need plenty of water,

lots of water. Mama would hand H.D. and myself the two gallon water buckets and we those water pump. When we water, we head water in and another and pot about two gather the wood, wash pot to heat mama had set the ground near the again, with pump to fill the now mama has placed on the Now the water in Mama, always first, because she



Privy

new exactly what to do with buckets, head for the pumped the buckets full of for the wash pot, pour the make another trip, and another, until we get the thirds full, then we would and build a fire around the the water. Mean-while two galvanized tubs on the wash pot, and here we go buckets in hand back to the tubs for cold water rinse, by the clothes from the house ground to separate them. the pot should be hot. washed the white clothes wanted to wash them in

clean water. Detergent? No way, she used the lye soap that she had made, shaving off some into the pot. Now she would take the clothes stick, where she kept, also hanging on a nail on the side of the smokehouse, punching the clothes down in the water, stirring, mixing the water, with the lye soap. The stirring motion is repeated several times over and over, during the wash. This also, help dissolve the shavings of the lye soap main while we kids are constantly running errands fetching wood and keeping the fire burning around the wash pot.

When mama is sure the clothes are clean, she takes the clothes stick, and lift the clothes out of the pot and put them in one of the tubs of cold water rinse. While they are being soaked, she gets the slightly soiled colored clothes and put them in the wash pot, saving the heavily dirty clothes for last.

Now she goes back to the white clothes she have in the rinse water and stir them around some to get the soap out and then move them to the second rinse water for the final rinse. She would repeat this with the slightly soiled colored clothes and when she got to the work clothes, she would find that some of the dirt and grime would not come out during the boiling. After she would move them to the first rinse water she would get her scrub board with

two legs and place it into the first, and pull up the soiled scrub board and rub them soap, [No spray and wash against the scrub board, then may have to repeat this before getting the clothes out to dry, nearby is a clothes smokehouse stretching out a pole situated near the privy, the center for support. The



tub of rinse water, legs clothes on the ridges of the down with a cake of lye here] scrubbing vigorously rinse to see if clean, she process several times clean. Then hanging them line attached to the approximately fifty feet to with a long stick placed in clothes are carefully placed

Wash pot

on this line for drying. For certain Sunday clothing, before they are completely dry and still damp, she would take these inside for ironing, whereby we kids would already have a fire burning in the fire place and have the old heavy irons [Smoothing iron] already hot and ready for ironing. These was made of solid cast iron and came in different weights, you would select the weight to use according to the type of material you wanted to iron. The heavy iron was used on over-all's only when going to church. Work clothes was almost never ironed.

In the winter time mama would set the tubs up in the kitchen on the eating table and we kids would fetch the water from the pump and she would set pots on the wood stove to heat, then pour the hot water into the tubs and wash everything by hand, using the scrub board. She would try to pick a day when it wasn't freezing, otherwise, we would build a fire around the pump to thaw and she would wash a few clothes necessary, and hang them in the house to dry. Ironing in the winter she would set the irons on top of the wood burning stove until they got hot, she could use the iron very little before cooling off, then she would have to reheat it. She always had two irons of the same weight, one could be heating while using the other. The handle was made of the same cast iron and would get almost as hot as the iron and she would use some type of padding to keep from getting burned. She would always set the ironing board up near the wood stove and do the ironing while cooking the next meal, this way she would save time by cooking and ironing at the same time. The essence of saving time on the farm is most essential. [There is no electricity, no electric washing machines with