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[Cynthia M. Coleman]

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Beliefs and Customs - Folkways

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Winnsboro , S. C. FAIRFIELD COUNTY
CYNTHIA M. COLEMAN
(white) RIDGEWAY, S. C. 91 YEARS

Mrs. Cynthia Miller Coleman lives with her daughter, Sarah Starnes, who is postmistress in the town of Ridgeway, S. C. She is, for one of her age, active, intelligent, and responsive to all inquiries about her life for the past eighty-five years.

"My father's people, the Millers, and my mother's people, the White's, were of Scotch-Irish descent. They came as settlers from Pennsylvania before the Revolutionary War. My father was Robert LeRoy Miller; my mother, Jane White Miller. In religion, my mother and father were strict-laced, blue-stockinged Presbyterians. I was born on their small plantation on Rocky Creek, Chester County, January 17, 1847.

"I learned to spell and read at home out of the blue-backed speller. It was a great text book for beginners. The first school I attended with other pupils was in 1855. Our teacher was a kind man, Mr. John Chisolm. The schoolhouse was the old Covenanter brick church. We had a long school day. We commenced early in the morning and ended just before sundown. We had an hour's intermission for dinner and recreation. The boys played town ball and shot marbles, and the few girls in the school looked on, enjoyed, and applauded the fine plays. Every Friday we had compositions and declamations from the pupils.

"Social amusements in the community consisted of pound parties at some neighbor's home during the winter nights, usually on Friday night.

The music was made by a Negro fiddler, Tom Archer. We danced the cotillion, the Virginia reel, and steal partners. Our community would not tolerate waltzes and round dancing of any kind.

"I remember the hoop skirt, I wore one. I put it on over my head, tied it behind, then put on my corset above this and laced it tight. My outside skirt came over the wire hoop and my bodice came down over the corset and fastened with a collar about my neck.

"Horseback riding was a great diversion for the girls of our day. We had long riding skirts and sidesaddles; also a hitching post and a get on block at the front gate to assist us in mounting on the horse.

"On the first Saturday in May, there was an annual picnic at Catawba Falls, now called Great Falls. The Catawba River at this point was full of shad every year at this time. After enjoying the picnic dinner and the day, we would return home with the back of the buggy or wagon body full of shad, which lasted the family and all the Negroes on the plantation through Sunday.

"My parents were not rich planters and slave owners. We only had six hundred acres of land and about thirty slaves. I don't remember ever seeing one of the slaves whipped. My mother taught them the Presbyterian catechism, which was printed especially for slaves. They were distributed among slave owners in 1840, my mother told me.

"In 1870 I married Walter Francis Marion Coleman, a boy in the neighborhood that I grew up with and loved all my life. The greatest grief of my life was when old A. S. Wallace, scalawag Congressman, sent troops to the neighborhood to catch him for being a Ku Klux, but he evaded them by escaping to Texas for a time. When he returned, we moved out to Blackstock and lived there until my husband's death.

"Just before the coming of baseball, the annual event at Blackstock was the horseback tournament, with lances, and the crowning of a Queen of Love and Beauty and her two maids of honor. There were three posts erected on a field in a straight line and from there posts were suspended rings on a cross piece. Each rider was costumed as some knight. At a fast gallop they would successively race down the field and strive to gain each ring suspended. Each knight made the attempt three times. The maximum of rings caught on his lance could be nine rings. The one taking the greatest number of rings would have the honor and right to name and crown the Queen of Love and Beauty of the tournament. As each knight would take his place at the standing point, the announcer would proclaim the name of the rider. I remember some of the representations: Knight of Avenel, James Fitz James, Knight of Snowden, Knight of the Leopard, and Knight of Ravenswood. The others I can't recall. It was an exciting, thrilling scene of color, and the plaudit of the populace was deafening if the ring was successively taken by the knight and ran down

his lance. I remember Mary Wylie was crowned at one time, Lydia Mobley at another, and my husband's sister, Minnie Coleman once.

"In the little village of Blackstock, at that time about one hundred inhabitants, there were six barrooms, one church, and two policemen. Everybody was poor, everybody had credit, everybody played cards, (I mean the men), and everybody was happy.

"Matches were a luxury. Fire was covered with ashes over night to save one match. The price of them was twenty-five cents per hundred. Soap was made of ashes and hog grease.

"I have been the mother of eleven children, six of whom are living; the grandmother of twelve children, all living; and the great-grandmother of four children, all living. The Yankees didn't reach us in the route through this part of the State.

"One of my grandsons is a graduate of West Point Military Academy. He is a captain in the cavalry stationed at Fort Oglethorpe. His name is Capt. Logan Carroll Berry. He is a son of my daughter, Julia, with whom you danced fifty years ago. She is out on the porch now waiting to speak to you."