

# "DIDN'T HAVE MUCH CHANCE NO HOW"

Submitted by Marty Everse

Montevallo Historical Society  
historicmontevallo.org

Six years following the end of the Civil War, the U. S. government created the Southern Claims Commission, an agency set up to allow Union sympathizers who lived in the Southern states to apply for compensation for property losses due to the actions of Union troops. Edmund Moss, an enterprising slave of John Storrs, a Vermont native, lawyer, and budding industrialist, suffered greatly at the hands of Wilson's raiders in the early spring of 1865 in Montevallo and so he took advantage of the new law.

Moss' case was unique, so unique that the commissioner in charge of his case felt compelled to explain his situation because while working for Storrs, he accumulated enough money to buy his wife as well as a lot in Montevallo, all held in trust by his owner's wife.

*MEMORANDA BY SPECIAL COMMISSIONER.* Doubtless the law as to the holding of property by slaves is well understood by the commissioners, but as this is the first of the line in which I have taken testimony, mention that in Alabama, while they were generally allowed to hold personal property, real estate and slaves must be held for them by a trustee. A slave woman might be bought by her husband yet could not be manumitted, nor could the slave husband hold direct title, but deed was made to a trustee, or rather a bill of sale was made and during the slave husband's lifetime this sufficed.

In 1873, now a free man, Moss applied for the loss of 250 pounds of bacon, 7 sacks of flour, 75 pounds of flour in a barrel, 45 bushels of shelled corn, 1 ½ bushels of corn meal, 75 pounds of sugar, 10 pounds of coffee, 25 pounds of honey, 20 gallons of molasses, all at the hands of hungry Yankee troopers. In addition to all that, he also claimed expenses for the care, board and burying of a wounded Union soldier. In all, Edmund felt the government's obligation to him totaled \$226.25.

In his own words, here is his story.

My name is Edmund Moss and my wife is Susan Moss. She used to belong to Edmund King. I bought her for two hundred and fifty dollars about fifteen years before the war commenced. The bill of sale was made out to Judge Shortridge as my trustee and as he was in danger of becoming insolvent I had it changed to my old mistress Mrs. Storrs. I wanted my master to take it, but he advised me to have the title made over to his wife for her property couldn't be taken for his debts. My wife kept a sort of confectionary and candy shop at Montevallo.

I worked at the [Storrs] tan yard and for a good many years I hired my time and had my master's tan yard under control. I bought a town lot in Montevallo for \$125 when cheap and afterwards when the railroad came through sold it for nine hundred and seventy-five dollars and all I made over my time, was mine to keep.

I was present when these articles were taken and saw them taken except the sugar. I don't recollect whether I saw the sugar taken. The soldiers came up in the evening and took the greater part of my corn, and the next morning they came and took the balance of the corn and the fodder. They broke open the smoke house the second day. My wife at first sent over to an officer and he came and locked the door again,



Though no evidence existed of the tan yard where Edmund Moss worked by the time this postcard was printed in 1910, it does show the general location of where it stood. The city now owns the property.

but afterwards they tore a plank off the back and got in that way. The molasses was in the smoke house. The smoke house and dairy was adjoining and when they got into one they got into the other. The flour, seven sacks, was in the smoke house and also part of a barrel.

The corn was in sacks on my piazza. The corn meal was in the smoke house. The sugar was in the smoke house or dairy. Coffee in smoke house, and the honey.

The soldiers rode up and the last evening when they took my corn and fodder they took them in a wagon. They just come by droves and took off the flour, bacon, sugar, coffee, honey and molasses. They toted it off. The honey and molasses they put in jars and buckets. All of the articles were taken on one evening and the next day.

The first evening I went out to the camps. I didn't see them using any of my property but I suppose they used them. The first things they took were reasonable, and told me I would be sure to get pay for it, but the last ones were tolerable brash.

I only went to see officers one time, but after they had broke my smoke house I thought it wouldn't be of much use. You see a colored man didn't have much chance no how.

We kept a soldier (wounded) at our house five or six days and fed and took care of him, and when he died buried him. The soldiers buried him, but we found the burying clothes, clean sheets, two of them. I asked Doctor Cary and Doctor Wilson of Montevallo who attended him what I might charge and they told me twenty-seven dollars. That is why I fixed that amount. We made chicken soup, gruel, whatever the doctor said he should have and tended on him and fixed his wounds. He bled through a feather bed and almost spoiled it. He was wounded in the head and shoulders. The doctor knew my wife was a good nurse for sick people and the man was brought to our house by his directions.

Scribbled on the back of his claim papers by the special commissioner was this endorsement, "I haven't a particle of doubt about the equity of this old man's claim. His character for honesty is unquestioned in Shelby County."

Three years after filing his application, the Southern Claims Commission granted Edmund Moss \$147. He received nothing for his family's care of the wounded Union trooper.