A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH
Of the Early Days of the Piney Woods School

By JOHN R. WEBSTER

CARL BEAL, an earnest young man who has chosen as his life's work the lifting of humanity into a higher sphere of life, who is now a student in a theological college, has sent me copies of the

Reader's Digest that, if in any way it

school, but he was going to teach

white people were not able to educate ourselves, let alone

the other

farmers, was getting in some

official to others to know more about the story. This -young Negro

famous

growth; and it has occurred to

Negro had no standing in society, schools, or courts of law.
The inferiority of the slave and the superiority of the

Master wouldn't give away to common justice. This was in the deep South, and the psychology of

the founder of Piney Woods School, Laurence C. Jones, had to work. This was in the deep South, and the psychology of

the people was that residual of imperialism and slavery. The inferiority of the slave and the superiority of the Master wouldn't give away to common justice. So the Negro had no standing in society, schools, or courts of law.

You can't talk about the Piney Woods School without talking about Laurence C. Jones, for they are part and parcel of each other. And when I look at the pictures of this vast establishment, it seems more human to me than physical, because there has been so much humanity, or human effort, put into it.

The very beginning of this school was one morning when this young Negro walked into my saw mill office and produced himself as Laurence C. Jones. Myself and the other office force were surprised that a colored man would introduce himself at all. Miss Nannie Simmons, the typist, and Albert Howell, the bookkeeper, perked up their ears to hear what our caller had to say. He went right into his subject. He spoke fast, compared with us Southern folks, and with well chosen words. He outlined his plan for starting a school for colored people, and said he wanted the consent of the white people of the community and wanted my view of the matter. I told him I could not advise him favorably, for we white people were not able to educate ourselves, let alone the Negro. Our schools were kept up by taxation. The Negroes were not taxed to pay taxes on, so we didn't think they were entitled to schools. I told him I thought it would be an up-hill piece of business to establish a tuition school as the Negroes would be never having known of any other kind.

My talk seemed to discourage him, but I could see that he wasn't completely knocked out. He bowed very politely as he told me good-by; thanked me, and asked if I would have been talking of school that was pleasing to the people and

promising, saying that he would be brief in his remarks like, "But did you notice his tie", "Gosh, couldn't he talk", "Where do you suppose he got his bows and smiles?"

JONES came back in a few days. And, as Miss Nannie put it, he was more profuse in his bows and scrapes. He came in apologizing, saying that he would be brief in his visit because he had sent him over this time to know if I had any encouragement to give him and he was really as Albert put it, stepping on it with firm tread. I didn't care to interrupt him. Fact was we were being highly entertained. Miss Nannie wore her whimsical smile and Albert's eyes just got bigger and bigger. Jones went on to say that, if he could ever get the school started, he had rich acquaintances in Iowa that he thought would make it a success. This was the dig at me.

Here I broke in to do a little talking myself. I said, "Young fellow, I think you are taking too much for granted. Even if Uncle Ed gave you that land, you would not have a school. You couldn't use a shed that the sheep and goats had been occupying, and what have white people could or would help would be of no benefit to you, for we are sadly behind in education for ourselves, and as I told you before we are not paying out much of anything to educate the Negro.

"But I shall not throw anything in your way. So far as I am concerned, you may proceed with your plans; but if, you want to know now how white people stand and talk about this school and the details of its early

Piney Woods School. This was in the deep South, and the psychology of

the psychology of

the people was that residual of imperialism and slavery. The inferiority of the slave and the superiority of the Master wouldn't give away to common justice. So the Negro had no standing in society, schools, or courts of law.

You can't talk about the Piney Woods School without talking about Laurence C. Jones, for they are part and parcel of each other. And when I look at the pictures of this vast establishment, it seems more human to me than physical, because there has been so much humanity, or human effort, put into it.

The very beginning of this school was one morning when this young Negro walked into my saw mill office and produced himself as Laurence C. Jones. Myself and the other office force were surprised that a colored man would introduce himself at all. Miss Nannie Simmons, the typist, and Albert Howell, the bookkeeper, perked up their ears to hear what our caller had to say. He went right into his subject. He spoke fast, compared with us Southern folks, and with well chosen words. He outlined his plan for starting a school for colored people, and said he wanted the consent of the white people of the community and wanted my view of the matter. I told him I could not advise him favorably, for we white people were not able to educate ourselves, let alone the Negro. Our schools were kept up by taxation. The Negroes were not taxed to pay taxes on, so we didn't think they were entitled to schools. I told him I thought it would be an up-hill piece of business to establish a tuition school as the Negroes would be never having known of any other kind.

My talk seemed to discourage him, but I could see that he wasn't completely knocked out. He bowed very politely as he told me good-by; thanked me, and asked if I would have been talking of school that was pleasing to the people and

promising, saying that he would be brief in his remarks like, "But did you notice his tie", "Gosh, couldn't he talk", "Where do you suppose he got his bows and smiles?"

JONES came back in a few days. And, as Miss Nannie put it, he was more profuse in his bows and scrapes. He came in apologizing, saying that he would be brief in his visit because he had sent him over this time to know if I had any encouragement to give him and he was really as Albert put it, stepping on it with firm tread. I didn't care to interrupt him. Fact was we were being highly entertained. Miss Nannie wore her whimsical smile and Albert's eyes just got bigger and bigger. Jones went on to say that, if he could ever get the school started, he had rich acquaintances in Iowa that he thought would make it a success. This was the dig at me.

Here I broke in to do a little talking myself. I said, "Young fellow, I think you are taking too much for granted. Even if Uncle Ed gave you that land, you would not have a school. You couldn't use a shed that the sheep and goats had been occupying, and what have white people could or would help would be of no benefit to you, for we are sadly behind in education for ourselves, and as I told you before we are not paying out much of anything to educate the Negro.

"But I shall not throw anything in your way. So far as I am concerned, you may proceed with your plans; but if, you want to know now how white people stand and talk about this school and the details of its early

Now, remembering those days, I can see how Jones and Uncle Ed Taylor used my paws to rake their chestnuts with. At that time, nearly every man in the country, including merchants and farmers, was getting in some way money out of the saw mill. Naturally, I would have some influence in the community. Besides, I wasn't one of "them furiners", some of whom were drifting in. I was a native products type of employer. Niggers were still in the same terms; most of them, boys I had been raised with. When Jones went out to interview these farmers round about, he would always say, "I have been talking to Mr. Webster and he said so far as he was concerned it was all right, so I have come to get your consent also". He would go on to relate his project. He would stress the point that this was not to be a book larnin' school, but he was going to teach how to work on the farm, and to build fences, gates, water gaps, sharpen plows, work with cows and hogs, etc. This was the type of school that was pleasing to the people and Jones was capitalizing on our human weakness to want to know more about the Negro.

Now it was the chief conversation in the community. As these fellows would come into the store to get their mail, you would hear them say, "Well, what do you think of that nigger school?" Well, I don't know. Did that nigger come to see you too? Yes. What do you think about it? Well, I think it's a good thing. He says he ain't gwine to teach 'em so much book larnin', but he wants to larn 'em to do more