

## The American Slave: Unwritten History of Slavery Vol. 18

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### I WAS A BOY SLAVE

I was small in the time of slavery. I remember when the slaves was being used as slaves, and I remember that in the time of slavery colored people didn't have no churches of their own; they had to go to the white people's church when they were through, and usually they had to use the white folks' preachers.

I remember when they were drilling for war. Every Friday they would march down to Flat Rock, and they would wear grey suits and tall plumes in their caps. I remember when the padderollers would come at night and would go around the country to other houses to see if they could find slaves away from home; and if they did find them, without a pass, they'd whip them. I remember, too, that some of the masters would chastize their servants till they would run away and hide around till they'd catch them. I've known my mother to help them the best she could; they would stay in the thick woods and come in at night, and mother would give them something to eat. When the slaves would die, they would make a square box, usually plain poplar wood, and sometimes they would stain it, but mostly not; they would put them in that and place it on an ox cart and bury them. That's the way we rode to church too, when we did ride to church. We had an old ox cart and oxen, and we would pile up in it and drive the oxen. But we wasn't allowed to go to church or anywhere else without a pass. They'd have prayer meetings at times at home, but they had to get permission, and if they didn't I've known them to have to turn down a pot to keep the sound in. No'm, I have never known them to get caught while the pot was turned down at my home; but I have heard of them getting caught. They would run them out and whip them, and send them home and then report to the master what they had done. Of course the master approved of that. There was one family near us, though, named Wright, and he would let them go without a pass, so his servants was called "free Negroes." He wouldn't give them a pass and didn't 'low 'em to be whipped at all. If they got caught out, and there was any whipping done, it would be to the colored where they went, because the padderollers wouldn't bother them.

The white ministers would baptize them when they 'fessed religion; the colored ministers wasn't allowed to do so. They didn't know enough to carry out the service. The first colored minister I knowed was Jack Maney; and Cal Overall was one of the first colored ministers too. They were both Methodists. Jack Maney lived here; he belonged to Newt Maney's grandfather. The first church I was ever in was Overall's church. It was an old shed, and the seats was made out of rails. We would get old slabs and rails and things, and have seats of them. I remember seeing my master when he whipped one of the women and tied her down across a log till she fainted away. Something she didn't do; that's what he claimed; seems to me she resisted like, and pouted. I remember his son lived on the place and got married into another family and murdered one of the servants. It was not his servant, because it came by his wife. His name was Brown, and he had a wife at my place, and he came there every night to see her; so he came that night and didn't get back as early as he thought he ought to. Brown was a strong man and this white man that was the son of my master attempted to whip him; so Brown threw him and ran to the woods. He pursued him, and found him sleep on a sand bar out in the river; so he killed him in his sleep and threw him in the river. I know he did it because he told my master, and he sent them to the river to fish for him. They brought him from the river home on a handbar. No, it wasn't a wheelbarrow. They didn't have then, it was a handbar (described it, but investigator didn't get it very well.) They never did anything about it except burry him. I did hear that his wife's father taken that out of her part that was coming to her.

I was born out at a place about eight miles from here. My father belonged to the Maney's here, and my mother belonged to Jones out there, and I stayed with my mother. He'd (his father) come home every Saturday night and be back here early Monday morning. He worked on the farm; just a regular farm hand. This man, he had about ten slaves, I reckon; about five men and five or six women. He had a blacksmith on his place, and a wood workman, and a leading hand – I guess it was about ten grown people and their families, but sometimes the men and women would be

married but their husbands and wives didn't live on my place, just like my father and mother, but of course there was children growing up.

My boss had one free woman on his place. She bought herself and she was free. No, I don't know how she bought herself, but I think she got someone to buy her. Her name was Millie, and she was free, but the old boss owned her son, and he was set free too; but she died before freedom. I think some white person paid for her. She had a little lot on the place, and she had a spring that was called "Aunt Millie's spring," and it goes by that name yet. Yes, Aunt Millie's son was said to be his son (master). She never married that I know of. I know she lived alone and she was what we called a widow woman, because she lived alone. She had just that one child, and he was real bright. I have heard the old folks say that he favored him (master) and that his actions was just like his. She had a home off from the house, and she (Aunt Millie) lived alone. The other servants lived in the yard in little cabins stuck round in the yard. Some had wives on other places, but they had a shed to sleep in. Sometimes they could go on Wednesday nights to see their wives, but it was understood on Saturday night that he could stay till Monday morning, and they would feed them while they was there. If they went on Wednesday they had to come back the next morning. My mother worked in the field. All of the women worked in the field except two; that was the cook and the house woman. The women had to work in the field and spin four outs before they went to bed. That was a yank (he explained in detail just how a yank was made; defined broach, spindle, etc., but details recorded by investigator are not accurate enough to record). They made a cut then they could go to bed. They had a loomist that would weave. She'd work the broaches off and make a shuttle, then the broach would lay down in there so as not to ruin the thread and scotch it. There was little fine places like broomstraws, and they would run the shuttle through them. Then they'd use – I can't think of the name of it, but it was something that they'd run up there to beat the thread through, and that would make the actual cloth. They would cut out that cloth into garments, and we wore them. Boys until they got up large enough to work wore little slips. We called them shirts; they'd sew it up like a sack and cut a hole in the neck for your head to go through, and you wore that till you were ten or twelve years old. There was not much difference in the dress of girls and boys. The women wore theirs straight too, and they called them sacks. It was just cloth sewed up wide enough to step, and they would gather it up at the waist, and put a kind of body to it and fasten the body on, and the sleeves in. Sometimes it would fit and sometimes it wouldn't.

He had ten or twelve slaves to my knowledge. He wasn't as hard on us as some that owned slaves generally. He did his own whipping, and he didn't have no overseers at all. He would get up early in the morning and get on his horse. A man had to be in front of him to let the fence down and put it up again, or to open the gate and close it when he had to go through. He just tended to the horse and followed him around all day, and he would fix up the fences and things like that when they needed it. He had a regular man for that, so that when he left home on his horse, he wouldn't get down till he got back home.

No, we had what we called good times, but they were not real good times. He allowed his hands to go to church, but they had to get a pass from him. It was not often we had church; the church was on some man's farm, and the colored could go some afternoon. They didn't have services like we do now. They had circuits, and they just had meetings once in a while. Sometimes some minister would preach to the white in the morning and in the afternoon to the colored. They was mostly Methodists around here. The Baptists were not much known then. The Methodists always had the lead. The colored was not much on denomination. They just preached the Bible as well as they knew. Bob Barnes was one of them. His master's living right here now, running a store not far from the ice plant. He talked to us about his servant. Bob, who was a great minister. He would read it to him, and he would preach it to the slaves. Andrew Jett was a kind of old-timer too. The War come up when he was aspiring to the ministry. They didn't have no light to read by; they had to slip old planks and things in the house in the summer, and they would light that and sit down and read from the light of the fire – those that learned to read a little. I remember when the women would have Lamps made at the shops. They was made out of iron; they would beat it and shape it into a lamp, and get some grease and put in it. It would come to a point and they would have a rag extending from that point, and that would make a blaze. They had another piece of iron that would extend up into a ring, and they would stick it into the lamp and sit and sew by that. The white folks had candles; they would fill the tins full of hot tallow and when it would get cool they would catch hold of a stick they had in it and pull them out. It was soft beef tallow they used then. They had something they put in the tallow to make it kind of firmer. I think it was alum.

I remember when they began to fight. I had two young masters that went to the War. I remember when they packed up and said goodbye. The old Whigs was opposers to freedom, and you know the leader of them was Jeff Davis. They broke the Union; that's why they had the war.

The hands usually stayed on the place (during the War) and after freedom was declared they had to pay them. I never saw a battle, but they fought all around here in Murfreesboro. My people left

home and came to the army camp. We came next morning and the pickets stopped us till marster come up. We left home at night, and we were all packed up, and whoever was willing could go back to the farm, and the others went on in and lived around in the camps till freedom was declared. In the camps they was teaching them about their citizenship. I remember well when the people had to marry over. They all come together, and the magistrate would meet them and marry them. I remember my mother and father went and got married, but some slaves wouldn't do it. I don't know (age), my old boss said they lost the Bible in the time of War. They had one for the colored and one for the white, and it was the colored one that got lost, so our ages was guessed at by the white chillen's ages. I guess I was ten or twelve years old when the War come up. I was a boy around the house. I remember they had brushes to keep the flies off with, and the real wealthy white people had theirs made out of peafowl feathers, and it was a mighty pretty sight to see them stuck on a stick and waving back and forth. I had to use that to keep the flies off the table, and my old marster would take a nap after dinner every day, and I'd have to keep the flies off of him. Sometimes I would go to sleep myself and drop the brush on him, and he would take it and hit me on the head with the other end. I had to run the stock and hogs and do things like that. I know after the men went to the War we little ones of my size had to go to the field and work and chop. Some of the men was carried off to war, and all during the War they couldn't buy or sell any slaves, but they could hold them they had till freedom. Yes, slaves knew (freedom was coming) but the slaveholders said it would never be – they told us that so much that it was a joy to the slaves when it come – they hardly expected it. She (mother) had four children at that time. None of them was sold on our place, but some places they did; they would take them to the slave block, and sometimes they would sell the woman and keep the child.

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