



THE ENSLAVED FAMILY

Selections from the WPA interviews of
formerly enslaved African Americans, 1936-1938

Over 2300 former slaves were interviewed during the Great Depression of the 1930s by members of the Federal Writers' Project, a New Deal agency in the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

Note: Selections from the narratives are presented as transcribed. Black interviewees often referred to themselves with terms that in some uses are considered offensive. Some white interviewers, despite project guidelines for transcribing the narratives, used stereotypical patterns of representing black speech. See "A Note on the Language of the Narratives" at lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snlang.html and "Guidelines for Interviewers" at nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/wpanarrsuggestions.pdf.

I was born March 23, 1850 in Kentucky, somewhere near Louisville. I am goin' on 88 years right now (1937). I was brought to Missouri when I was six months old, along with my mama, who was a slave owned by a man named Shaw. . . .

. . . We left my papa in Kentucky, 'cause he was allotted to another man. My papa never knew where my mama went, an' my mama never knew where papa went. . . They never wanted mama to know, 'cause they knowed she would never marry so long she knew where he was. Our master wanted her to marry again and raise more children to be slaves. They never wanted mama to know where papa was, an' she never did. . .

Mama said she would never marry again to have children . . . so she married my step-father, Tattle Barber, 'cause he was sick an' could never be a father. He was so sick he couldn't work, so me and mama had to work hard.

SARAH GRAVES, enslaved in Missouri ■



"They never wanted mama to know where papa was, an' she never did."
SARAH GRAVES, ca. 1937

I don't know where I was born and I don't know when. I know I am eighty-two or eighty-three years old. The white folks that raised me told me how old I was. I never saw my father and my mother in my life. I don't know nothin'. I'm just an old green man. I don't know none of my kin people — father, mother, uncles, cousins, nothin'. When I found myself the white people had me.

SILAS DOTHRUM, enslaved in Arkansas ■

I was born in Lithonia, Georgia, at the foot of Little Rock Mountain, close to Stone Mountain, Georgia. I been sold in my life twice to my knowing. I was sold away from my dear old mammy at three years old but I can remember it. I remembers it! It lack selling a calf from the cow. Exactly, but we are human beings and ought to be better than do sich. I was too little to remember my price.

HARRIETT HILL, enslaved in Georgia ■

My name is John W. Fields and I'm eighty-nine (89) years old. I was born March 27, 1848 in Owensburg, Ky. That's 115 miles below Louisville, Ky. There was 11 other children besides myself in my family.

When I was six years old, all of us children were taken from my parents, because my master died and his estate had to be settled. We slaves were divided by this method. Three disinterested persons were

chosen to come to the plantation and together they wrote the names of the different heirs on a few slips of paper. These slips were put in a hat and passed among us slaves. Each one took a slip and the name on the slip was the new owner. I happened to draw the name of a relative of my master who was a widow.

I can't describe the heartbreak and horror of that separation. I was only six years old and it was the last time I ever saw my mother for longer than one night. Twelve children taken from my mother in one day. Five sisters and two brothers went to Charleston, Virginia, one brother and one sister went to Lexington, Ky., one sister went to Hartford, Ky., and one brother and myself stayed in Owensburg, Ky. My mother was later allowed to visit among us children for one week ob each year, so she could only remain a short time at each place.

JOHN W. FIELDS, enslaved in Kentucky ■

If'n you wants to know what unhappiness means, . . . jess'n you stand on the Slave Block and hear the Auctioneer's voice selling you away from the folks you love.

JOHN RUDD, enslaved in Kentucky ■

I really doan know who my first marster wus, case I has been sold an' hired so much since den. I reckon dat I was borned in New Hanover er Beaufort County an' I was sold fust time in my mammy's arms. . . .

I doan 'member anything 'bout maw 'cept dat dey called her Sal an' dat she died years an' years ago. I reckon dat I once had a pappy, but I ain't neber seed him.

CHANEY SPELL, enslaved in North Carolina ■

I was born in North Carolina, Franklin County, near Raleigh. My father's name really I don't know. Folks said my master was my daddy. That's what they told me. Of course, I don't know myself. But then white folks did anything they wanted to in slavery times.

THOMAS RUFFIN, enslaved in North Carolina ■

Where was I born? I knows that 'zactly, 'cause my mammy tells me that a thousand times. I was born down on the old Souba place, in South Carolina, 'bout ten mile from New Berry. My mammy belonged to the Souba family, but it's a fact one of the Souba boys was my pappy and so the Soubas sells my mammy to Bob and Dan Lewis and they brung us to Texas 'long with a big bunch of other slaves.

PREELY COLEMAN, enslaved in South Carolina and Texas ■

Huff wouldn't sell my father and my people wouldn't sell my mother. They lived about a mile or so apart. They didn't marry in them days.

The niggers didn't, that is. Father would just come every Saturday night to see my mother. His cabin was about three miles from her's. We moved from Lauderdale County to Scott County, Mississippi, and that separated mama and papa. They never did meet again. Of course, I mean it was the white people that moved, but they carried mama and us with them. Papa and mama never did meet again before freedom, and they didn't meet afterwards.

HENRY WALDON, enslaved in Mississippi ■

My mother, Martha Goodson, 'longed to Marse Bob Goodman when she was born, but my paw come from Tennessee and Marse Bob heired him from some of his kinfolks what died over there. . . .



"I can't describe the heartbreak and horror of that separation."
JOHN W. FIELDS, 1937



"[I]t's a fact one of the Souba boys was my pappy and so the Soubas sells my mammy to Bob and Dan Lewis and they brung us to Texas . . ."
PREELY COLEMAN, ca. 1937

Old Marse never 'lowed none of his nigger families separated. He 'lowed he thought it right and fittin' that folks stay together, though I heard tell of some that didn't think so.

ANDREW GOODMAN, enslaved in Alabama and Texas ■

I was born close to Como and Sardis, Mississippi. My master and mistress was Sam Shans and Miss Cornelia Shans. I was born a slave. They owned mama and Master Rube Sanders owned pa. Neither owner wouldn't sell but they agreed to let ma and pa marry. They had a white preacher and they married out in the yard and had a big table full of weddin' supper, and the white folks et in the house. They had a big supper too. Ma said they had a big crowd. The preacher read the ceremony. Miss Cornelia give her a white dress and white shoes and Miss Cloe Wilburn give her a veil. Miss Cloe was some connection of Rube Sanders.

They had seven children. I'm the oldest — three of us living.

After 'mancipation pa went to see about marrying ma over agen and they told him that marriage would stand long as ever he lived.

MALINDY MAXWELL, enslaved in Mississippi ■

He would let us go a-courtin' on the other plantations near anytime we liked, if we were good, and if we found somebody we wanted to marry, and she was on a plantation that b'longed to one of his kin folks or a friend, he would swap a slave so that the husband and wife could be together. Sometimes, when he couldn't do this, he would let a slave work all day on his plantation, and live with his wife at night on her plantation. Some of the other owners was always talking about his spoilin' us.

ARNOLD GRAGSTON, enslaved in Kentucky ■

There was another woman my master owned. Her husband belonged to another white man. My father also belonged to another white man. Both of them would come and stay with their wives at night and go back to work with their masters during the day. My mother had her kin folks who lived down in the country and my mother used to go out and visit them. I had a grandmother way out in the country. My mother used to take me and go out and stay a day or so. She would arrange with mistress and master and go down Saturday and she would take me along and leave her other children with this other woman. Sunday night she would make it back. Somtimes she wouldn't come back until Monday.

ROBERT LOFTON, enslaved in Georgia ■

My mama, she Black Creek Indian and none of dem white folks wants her. When massa buys my daddy and us chillen we had done been sold 'way from her and we cry and she cry, and den she follow us to our plantation and cry and beg our massa let her stay. He say, "She ain't no good but put her in de house and let her do some patchin' and mendin'." Mama, she cry and say, "Thank God, Thank God! I's git to be with my husban' and li'l chillen." She make de good spinner and weaver and old missy she say she couldn't do without her, 'cause she spin cotton cloth for summer and woolen cloth for winter.

LOU WILLIAMS, enslaved in Maryland ■

My old Mistress bought my grandmother and Old Mistress' sister bought my grandma's sister. These white women agreed that they would never go off so far that the two slave women couldn't see each other. They allus kept this promise. . . .

My mother told me that he [a neighboring slaveholder] owned a woman who was the mother of several chillun and when her babies would get about a year or two of age he'd sell them and it would break her heart. She never got to keep them. When her fourth baby was born and was about two months old she just studied all the time about how



"Mama, she cry and say, 'Thank God, Thank God! I's git to be with my husban' and li'l chillen.'"

LOU WILLIAMS, ca. 1937

she would have to give it up and one day she said, “I just decided I’m not going to let old Master sell this baby; he just ain’t going to do it.” She got up and give it something out of a bottle and purty soon it was dead. ’Course didn’t nobody tell on her or he’d of beat her nearly to death.

LOU SMITH, enslaved in South Carolina and Arkansas ■

I nevah see my mammy. She put me in a hick’ry basket when I on’y a day and a half old, with nuthin’ on but mah belly band an’ di’per. Took me down in de cotton patch an’ sot de basket on a stump in de bilin sun. Didn’t want me, ’cause I be black. All de otha youngins o’ hers be bright.

Gran’mammy done tol’ me, many a time, how she heah me bawlin’ an’ go an’ git me, an’ fotch me to mammy’s house; but my own mammy, she say, tu’n me down cold.

“Dat you, Mammy” she say, sweet as pie, when gran’mammy knock on de do’.

“Don’t you *nevah* call me ‘Mammy’ no mo’,” gran’mammy tol’ ’er. “Any woman what’d leave a po’ li’l mite lak dat to perish to death ain’t fitten t’ be no dotter o’ mine.”

So gran’mammy tuk me to raise, an’ I ain’t nevah wanted no mammy but her.

WOMAN IDENTIFIED ONLY AS “MAMA DUCK,” enslaved in Virginia ■

My father’s name was Caleb Harris James, and my mother’s name was Mary Moriah. Both of them were owned by Silas Thornton Randorph, a distant relative of Patrick Henry. . . I had three sisters and two brothers. Two of my sisters were sold to a slave dealer from Georgia, one died in 1870. One brother ran away and the other joined the Union Army; he died in the Soldiers’ Home in Washington in 1932 at the age of 84.

. . . Each family would have rooms according to the size of the family. There were 8 such houses, 6 for families and one for the girls and the other for the boys. . . .

I have a faint recollection of my grandparents. My grandfather was sold to a man in South Carolina, to work in the rice field. Grandmother drowned herself in the river when she heard that grand-pap was going away. I was told that grandpap was sold because he got religious and prayed that God would set him and grandma free.

MARY JAMES, enslaved in Virginia ■

I belonged to Mr. John William Walton in slavery time. My missus wuz named Miss Martha.

My father wuz named Frank Walton. My mother wuz named Flora Walton. Grandma wuz 104 years when she died. She died down at de old plantation. My brothers were named Johnnie and Lang. My sisters were Adeline, Violet, Mary, Sarah, Ellen and Annie. . . .

Our marster would not sell his slaves. He give dem to his children when they married off do’.

HANNAH CRASSON, enslaved in North Carolina ■

My mother was named Melinda Manley, the slave of Governor Manley of North Carolina, and my father was named Arnold Foreman, slave of Bob and John Foreman, two young masters. . . I had three sisters and two brothers and none of dem was my whole brothers and sisters. I stayed in the Big House all the time, but my sisters and brothers was gived to the master’s sons and daughters whey dey got married and dey was told to send back for some more when dem died. I didn’t never stay with my mammy [during] slavery. I stayed in the Big House. I slept under the dining room table with three other darkies. The flo’ was well carpeted. Don’t remembah my grandmammy and grandpappy, but my master was they master.

BETTY CHESSIER, enslaved in North Carolina ■



I was born in Grand Bluff, in Mississippi, on Old Man Carlton's plantation, and I was stole from my folks when I was a li'l gal and never seed them no more. Us kids played in the big road there in Mississippi, and one day me and 'nother gal is playin' up and down the road and three white men come 'long in a wagon. They grabs us up and puts us in the wagon and covers us with quilts. I hollers and yells and one the men say, "Shet up, you nigger, or I'll kill you." I told him, "Kill me if you wants to — you stole me from my folks."

Them men took us to New Orleans to the big slave market . . . I never knowed what they done with the other gal, but they sold me to Marse Bill Tumlin, what run a big livery stable in Jefferson [Texas], and I 'longed to him till surrender.

FRANCIS BLACK, enslaved in Mississippi and Texas ■

I seen chillun sold off and de mammy not sold, and sometimes de mammy sold and a little baby kept on de place and give to another woman to raise. Dem white folks didn't care nothing 'bout how de slaves grieved when dey tore up a family.

KATIE ROWE, enslaved in Arkansas ■

[When] I was 'bout six or seven years ole, I reckon hit 'twas, Mr. Garret . . . bought ten of us chillun . . . Wa'n't none of dem ten chillun no kin to me, and he never bought my mammy, so I had to leave her behine.

I recollect Mammy said to old Julie, "Take keer my baby chile (dat was me) and iffen I never sees her no mo' raise her for God." Den she fell off de waggin where us was all settin' and roll over on de groun' jes' acryin'. But us was eatin' candy what dey done give us for to keep us quite, and I didn't have sense 'nuff for to know what ailed Mammy, but I knows now and I never seed her no mo' in dis life. When I heerd [about] her atter S'render she done dead and buried. Her name was Rachel Powell. My pappy's name I don't know ca'se he done been sole to somewhars else when I was too little to recollect. But my mammy was de mother of twenty-two chillun and she had twins in her lap when us driv' off. My gran'mammy said when I lef' "Pray, Laura, and be er good gal, and mine bofe white and black. Ev'body will lack you and iffen you never see me no mo' pray to meet me in heaven." Den she cried. Her name was Rose Powell.

Us all started den for Mr. Garrett's plantation down yonder in de bend, ten chillun and two ole uns, and two white men, and us was travellin' solid a month. Fuss thing Ole Marsa say was "Now be good ter dese motherless chillun." Den he went to war, and de overseers forgot all 'bout dey promise. When Ole Marsa come back he done got his arm shot off, but he let bofe dem overseers go, ca'se dey done whupped dat ole 'oman what come wid us to deaf. She brought her two little boys, Colvin and 'Lias, but Joe, dey pappy, didn't come — he was sole 'fo Lias was bawn. Joe never seed 'Lias.

I sets cross de road here from dat church over yonder and can't go 'ca'se I'm cripple' and blin', but I heers um singin':

A motherless chile sees a hard time
 Oh, Lord, he'p her on de road.
 Er sister will do de bes' she kin
 Dis is a hard world, Lord, fer a motherless chile.

LAURA CLARK, enslaved in North Carolina ■



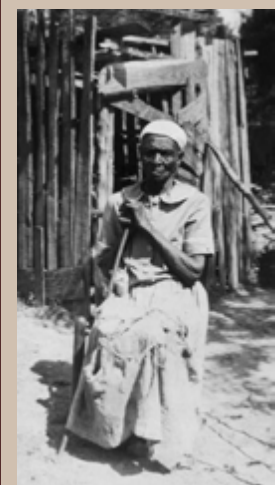
"I was stole from my folks when I was a li'l gal and never seed them no more."

FRANCIS BLACK, ca. 1937



"Dem white folks didn't care nothing 'bout how de slaves grieved when dey tore up a family."

KATIE ROWE, 1937



"I recollect Mammy said to old Julie 'Take keer my baby chile (dat was me) and iffen I never sees her no mo' raise her for God.'"

LAURA CLARK, ca. 1937

I was growed up when de war come an' I was a mother befo' it closed. Babies was snatched from dere mother's breas' an' sold to speculators. Chilluns was separated from sisters an' brothers an' never saw each other ag'in.

'Course dey cry; you think dey not cry when dey was sold lak cattle? I could tell you 'bout it all day, but even den you couldn't guess de awfulness of it.

DELIA GARLIC, enslaved in Georgia and Louisiana ■

I gits to thinkin' now how Wash Hodges sold off maw's chillun. He'd sell 'em and have the folks come for 'em when my maw was in the fields. When she'd come back, she'd raise a ruckus. Then many the time I seed her plopp right down to a settin' and cry 'bout it. But she 'lowed they warn't nothin' could be done, 'cause it's the slavery law. She said, "O, Lawd, let me see the end of it 'fore I die, and I'll quit my cussin' and fightin' and rarin'." My maw say she's part Indian and that 'countable for her ways.

One day they truckled us all down in a covered wagon and started out with the fam'ly and my maw and step-paw and five of us chillun. I know I's past twelve year old. We come a long way and passed through a free State. Some places we druv for miles in the woods 'stead of the big road, and when we come to folks they hid us down in the bed of the wagon.

We passed through a li'l place and my maw say to look, and I seed a man gwine up some steps, totin' a bucket of water. She say, "Lulu, that man's your paw." I ain't never think she's as consid'ble of my step-paw as of my paw, and she give me to think as much. My step-paw never did like me, but he was a fool for his own young'uns, 'cause at the end of the war when they sot the niggers free, he tramped over half the country, gatherin' up them young'uns they done sold 'way.

LULU WILSON, enslaved in Kentucky ■

I was bo'n on Captain Wall's place in Richmond, Virgini'. Pappy's name was Charlie and mammy's name was Ca'line. I had six sisters and two brothers and all de sisters is dead. I haven't heard from my brothers since Master turn us loose, a year after de war. . . Pappy was a fightin' man and he run off and got a job in a gold mine in Virgini'.

After pappy ran away, mammy died and den one day de overseer herded up a big bunch of us niggers and driv us to Barnum's Tradin' Ta'd down in Mississippi. . .

We was sold to Jim Ingram, of Carthage. He bought a big gang of slaves and refugeed part of 'em to Louisiana and part to Texas. We come to Texas in ox wagons. While we was on the way, camped at Keachie, Louisiana, a man come ridin' into camp and someone say to me, "Wash, dar's your pappy." I didn' believe it 'cause pappy was workin' in a gold mine in Virgini'. Some of de men told pappy his chillen is in camp and he come and fin' me and my brothers. Den he jine Master Ingram's slaves so he can be with his chillen. . .

. . . Master Ingram had 350 slaves when de war was over but he didn' turn us loose till a year after surrender. He telled us dat de gov'ment goin' to give us 40 acres of land and a pair of mules, but we didn't git nothin'. After Master Ingram turn us loose, pappy bought a place at De Berry, Texas, and I live with him till after I was grown.

WASH INGRAM, enslaved in Virginia and Texas ■



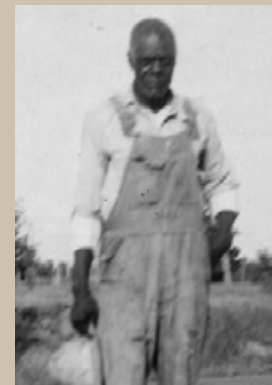
"I could tell you 'bout it all day, but even den you couldn't guess de awfulness of it."

DELIA GARLIC, ca. 1937



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LULU WILSON, ca. 1937



"Den he jine Master Ingram's slaves so he can be with his chillen."

WASH INGRAM, ca. 1937

Joe Kye was my pappy's name what he was born under back in Garrison County, Virginia, and I took that name when I was freed, but I don't know whether he took it or not because he was sold off by old Master Stover when I was a child. I never have seen him since. . . .

My mammy was named Jennie and I don't think I had any brothers or sisters, but they was a whole lot of children at the quarters that I played and lived with. I didn't live with mammy because she worked all the time, and us children all stayed in one house.

GEORGE KYE, enslaved in Arkansas ■

I don't know for sho' jes' when I'm birthed, but my sister allus say I'm one year and six months older'n her and she say she's birthed 'bout 1857. . . .

My mammy and pappy was name Meine, Car'line and Charles Meine. De slaves used to take de massa's name and sometimes when dey sold dey drop de old name and take de new massa's name. Dat how come it so hard to keep up with dem.

ELLA WASHINGTON, enslaved in Louisiana and Texas ■

Her name [mother] Cynthia Thomas and daddy's name Isaac Thomas. But after freedom he goes back to Florida and find out he people and git he real name, and dat am Beckett.

HARRISON BECKETT, enslaved in Texas ■

How did they marry? They say they jump the broomstick together! . . . The way they married, the man ask his master then ask her master. If they agree, it be all right. One of 'em would 'nounce it 'fore all the rest of the folks up at the house and some times they have ale and cake. If the man want a girl and ther be another man on that place wanted a wife the masters would swop the women mostly. Then one announce they married. That what they call a double weddin'. Some got passes go see their wife and family 'bout every Sunday and some other times like Fourth er July.

SOLOMON LAMBERT, enslaved in Arkansas ■

Mama, she work up in de big house, doin' cookin'and washin'. Old massa go buy a cullud man name Uncle Charley Fenner. He a good old cullud man. Massa brung him to de quarters and say, "Renee, here you husband," and den he turn to Uncle and say, "Charley, dis you woman." Den dey consider marry. Dat de way dey marry den, by de massa's word.

JACOB BRANCH, enslaved in Louisiana and Texas ■

Ole Missus and Young Missus told the little slave children that the stork brought the white babies to their mothers but that the slave children were all hatched out from buzzards eggs and we believed it was true.

KATIE SUTTON, state(s) in which enslaved unidentified ■

I done seen Mack Williams kill folks an' I done seen 'im have folks killed. One day he tol' me dat if my wife had been good lookin', I never would sleep wid her again 'cause he'd kill me an' take her an' raise chilluns off'n her. Dey uster take women away fum dere husbands an' put wid some other man to breed jes' like dey would do cattle. Dey always kept a man penned up an' dey used 'im like a stud hoss.

WILLIAM WARD, enslaved in Georgia ■

Marse Jim called me and Sam ter him and ordered Sam to pull off his shirt — that was all the McClain niggers wore — and he said to me: Nor, "do you think you can stand this big nigger?" He had that old bull whip flung acrost his shoulder, and Lawd, that man could hit so hard! So I jes said "yassur, I guess so," and tried to hide my face so I couldn't see Sam's nakedness, but he made me look at him anyhow.

Well, he told us what we must git busy and do in his presence, and we had to do it. After that we were considered man and wife. Me and Sam was a healthy pair and had fine, big babies, so I never had another man forced on me, thank God. Sam was kind to me and I learnt to love him.

LOUISA EVERETT, enslaved in Virginia ■

Marse Zack never bred no slaves, but us heard o' sech afar off. He let his darkies marry when dey wanted to. He was a good man and he allus 'lowed de slaves to marry as dey pleased, 'cause he lowed dat God never intent fer no souls to be bred as if dey was cattle, and he never practice no sech.

ZACK HERNDON, enslaved in South Carolina ■

I don't know where I been born. Nobody never did tell me. But my mammy and pappy git me after de War and I know den whose child I is. De men at de Creek Agency help 'em git me, I reckon, maybe.

LUCINDA DAVIS, enslaved in Oklahoma ■

The way that father found out his kin [after the Civil War] was this: One day a creek was named and he told the white man, "I was born close to that creek and played there in the white sand and water when I was a little boy." The white man asked his name, said he knew the creek well too. Father told him he never was named till he was sold and they named him Sam — Sam Barnett. He was sold to Barnett in Memphis. But his dear own mother called him "Candy." The white man found out about his people for him and they found out his own dear mother died that same year he was taken from South Carolina from grief. He heard from some of his people from that time on till he died.

HETTIE MITCHELL, enslaved in Tennessee ■

[My owner] died when I was eight years old [1858] and I was put on the block to be sold . . . I was bought by a Negro speculator by the name of Henry Long who lived not far from Hurdles Mill in Person County. I was not allowed to tell my mother and father goodbye. I was bought and sold three times in one day.

My father's time was hired out and as he knew a trade he had, by working overtime, saved up a considerable amount of money. After the speculator, Henry Long, bought me, mother went to father and pled with him to buy me from him and let the white folks hire me out. No slave could own a slave. Father got the consent and help of his owners to buy me and they asked Long to put me on the block again. Long did so and named his price but when he learned who had bid me off he backed down. Later in the day he put me on the block and named another price much higher than the price formerly set. He was asked by the white folks to name his price for his bargain and he did so. I was again put on the auction block and father bought me in, putting up the cash.

Long then flew into a rage and cursed my father saying, "You damn black son of a bitch, you think you are white do you? Now just to show you are black, I will not let you have your son at any price." Father knew it was all off, mother was frantic but there was nothing they could do about it. They had to stand and see the speculator put me on his horse behind him and ride away without allowing either of them to tell me goodbye. I figure I was sold three times in one day, as the price asked was offered in each instance. Mother was told under threat of a whopping not to make any outcry when I was carried away.

He took me to his home, but on the way he stopped for refreshments at a plantation, and while he was eating and drinking, he put me into a room where two white women were spinning flax. I was given a seat across the room from where they were working. After I had sat there awhile wondering where I was going and thinking about mother and home, I went to one of the women and asked, "Missus, when will I see my mother again?" She replied "I don't know, child, go and sit down." I went back to my seat and as I did so both the women stopped spinning for a moment, looked at each other, and one of them remarked, "Almighty God, this slavery business is a horrible thing. Chances are this boy will never see his mother again." This remark nearly killed me, as I began to fully realize my situation. Long, the Negro trader, soon came back, put me on his horse and finished the trip to his home. He kept me at his home awhile and



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LUCINDA DAVIS, ca. 1937

then traded me to a man named William Moore, who lived in Person County. Moore at this time was planning to move to Kentucky which he soon did, taking me with him.

My mother found out by the “Grapevine telegraph” that I was going to be carried to Kentucky. She got permission and came to see me before they carried me off. When she started home I was allowed to go part of the way with her but they sent two Negro girls with us to insure my return. We were allowed to talk privately, but while we were doing so, the two girls stood a short distance away and watched as the marster told them when they left that if I escaped they would be whipped every day until I was caught. When the time of parting came and I had to turn back, I burst out crying loud. I was so weak from sorrow I could not walk, and the two girls who were with me took me by each arm and led me along half carrying me.

This man Moore carried me and several other slaves to Kentucky. . . .

[About three years after the end of the Civil War (1865), Glenn moved to Illinois.]

. . . I was kindly treated and soon began to save money, but all through the years there was a thought that haunted me in my dreams and in my waking hours, and this thought was of my mother, whom I had not seen or heard of in many years.

Finally one cold morning in early December I made a vow that I was going to North Carolina and see my mother if she was still living. I had plenty of money for the trip. I left Illinois bound for North Carolina on December 15th and in a few days I was at my mother’s home. I tried to fool them. There were two men with me and they called me by a fictitious name, but when I shook my mother’s hand I held it a little too long and she suspicioned something. Still, she held herself until she was more sure. When she got a chance she came to me and said “Ain’t you my child? Tell me ain’t you my child whom I left on the road near Mr. Moore’s before the war?” I broke down and began to cry. Mother nor father did not know me, but mother suspicioned I was her child. Father had a few days previously remarked that he did not want to die without seeing his son once more. I could not find language to express my feelings. I did not know before I came home whether my parents were dead or alive.

This Christmas I spent in the county and state of my birth and childhood, with mother, father and freedom, was the happiest period of my entire life, because those who were torn apart in bondage and sorrow several years previous were now united in freedom and happiness.

ROBERT GLENN, enslaved in North Carolina and Kentucky ■

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