

WPA Slave Narratives  
Maryland  
Events: Things Seen and Heard Tell Of  
John Sepich, ed.

Aunt Lucy Brooks, and son Lafayette MD-1

"I remebers when the soldiers came. I think they were Yankee soldiers. De never hurt anybody but they took what they could find to eat and they made us cook for them. I remebers that me and some other lil gals had a play house, but when they came nigh I got skeered. I just ducked through a hole in the fence and ran out in the field. One of the soldiers seed me and he hollers 'look at that rat run'."

James V. Deane MD-3

"There was only one slave ever sold from the plantation, she was my aunt. The mistress slapped her one day, she struck her back. She was sold and taken south. We never saw or heard of her afterwards.

"When we wanted to meet at night we had an old conk, we blew that. We all would meet on the bank of the Potomac River and sing across the river to the slaves in Virginia, and they would sing back to us.

Mrs. M. S. Fayman MD-4

"When I was about 5 years old I was sent to a private School in Baton Rouge, conducted by French sisters, where I stayed until I was kidnapped in 1860. At that time I did not know how to speak English; French was the language spoken in my household and by the people in the parish.

"Baton Rouge, situated on the Mississippi, was a river port and stopping place for all large river boats, especially between New Orleans and large towns and cities north. We children were taken out by the sisters after school and on Saturdays and holidays to walk. One of the places we went was the wharf. One day in June and on a Saturday a large boat was at the wharf going north on the Mississippi River. We children were there. Somehow, I was separated from the other children. I was taken up bodily by a white man, carried on the boat, put in a cabin and kept there until we got to Louisville, Kentucky, where I was taken off.

"After I arrived in Louisville I was taken to a farm near Frankfort and installed there virturally a slave until 1864, when I escaped through the kindness of a delightful Episcopalian woman from Cincinnati, Ohio. As I could not speak English, my chores were to act as a tutor and companion for the children of Pierce Buckran Haynes, a well known slave trader and plantation owner in Kentucky. Haynes wanted his children to speak French and it was my duty to teach them. I was the private companion of 3 girls and one small boy, each day I had to talk French and write

French for them. They became very proficient in French and I in the rudiments of the English language.

"I slept in the children's quarters with the Haynes' children, ate and played with them. I had all the privileges of the household accorded me with the exception of one, I never was taken off nor permitted to leave the plantation. While on the plantation I wore good clothes, similar to those of the white children. Haynes was a merciless brutal tyrant with his slaves, punishing them severely and cruelly both by the lash and in the jail on the plantation.

#### Caroline Hammond MD-7

"Mr. Davidson was very good to his slaves, treating them with every consideration that he could, with the exception of freeing them; but Mrs. Davidson was hard on all the slaves, whenever she had the opportunity, driving them at full speed when working, giving different food of a coarser grade and not much of it. She was the daughter of one of the Revells of the county, a family whose reputation was known all over Maryland for their brutality with their slaves.

"Mother with the consent of Mr. Davidson, married George Berry, a free colored man of Annapolis with the proviso that he was to purchase mother within three years after marriage for \$750 dollars and if any children were born they were to go with her. My father was a carpenter by trade, his services were much in demand. This gave him an opportunity to save money. Father often told me that he could save more than half of his income. He had plenty of work, doing repair and building, both for the white people and free colored people. Father paid Mr. Davidson for mother on the partial payment plan. He had paid up all but \$40 on mother's account, when by accident Mr. Davidson was shot while ducking on the South River by one of the duck hunters, dying instantly.

"Mrs. Davidson assumed full control of the farm and the slaves. When father wanted to pay off the balance due, \$40.00, Mrs. Davidson refused to accept it, thus mother and I were to remain in slavery. Being a free man father had the privilege to go where he wanted to, provided he was endorsed by a white man who was known to the people and sheriffs, constables and officials of public conveyances. By bribery of the sheriff of Anne Arundel County father was given a passage to Baltimore for mother and me. On arriving in Baltimore, mother, father and I went to a white family on Ross Street--now Druid Hill Ave., where we were sheltered by the occupants, who were ardent supporters of the Underground Railroad.

"A reward of \$50.00 each was offered for my father, mother and me, one by Mrs. Davidson and the other by the Sheriff of Anne Arundel County. At this time the Hookstown Road was one of the main turnpikes into Baltimore. A Mr. Coleman whose brother-in-law lived in Pennsylvania, used a large covered wagon to transport merchandise from Baltimore to different villages along the turnpike to Hanover, Pa., where he lived. Mother and father and I were concealed in a large wagon drawn, by six horses. On our way to Pennsylvania, we never alighted on the ground in any community or close to any settlement, fearful of being apprehended by people who were always looking for rewards.

Page Harris MD-8

"Mrs. Stafford came from Prince William County, Virginia, a county on the west side of the Potomac River in Virginia. Mr. and Mrs. Stafford had a large rowboat that they used on the Potomac as a fishing and oyster boat as well as a transportation boat across the Potomac River to Quantico, a small town in Prince William County, Va., and up Quantico Creek in the same county.

"I have been told by my parents and also by Joshua Stafford, the oldest son of Mr. Stafford, that one Sunday morning on the date as related in the story previously Mrs. Stafford and her 3 children were being rowed across the Potomac River to attend a Baptist church in Virginia of which she was a member. Suddenly a wind and a thunder storm arose causing the boat to capsize. My father was fishing from a log raft in the river, immediately went to their rescue. The wind blew the raft towards the centre of the stream and in line with the boat. He was able without assistance to save the whole family, diving into the river to rescue Mrs. Stafford after she had gone down. He pulled her on the raft and it was blown ashore with all aboard, but several miles down the stream. Everybody thought that the Staffords had been drowned as the boat floated to the shore, bottom upwards.

"As a reward Mr. Stafford took my father to the court house at La Plata, the county seat of Charles County, signed papers for the emancipation of him, my mother, and me, besides giving him money to help him to take his family to Philadelphia.

"Old Pete the mechanic was working on farm near La Plata, he decided to run away as he had done on several previous occasions. He was known by some as the herb doctor and healer. He would not be punished on any condition nor would he work unless he was paid something. It was said that he would save money and give it to people who wanted to run away. He was charged with aiding a girl to flee. He was to be whipped by the sheriff of Charles County for aiding the girl to run away. He heard of it, left the night before he was to be whipped, he went to the swamp in the cove or about 5 miles from where his master lived. He eluded the dogs for several weeks, escaped, got to Boston and no one to this day has any idea how he did it; but he did.

Rev. Silas Jackson MD-10

"I have heard it said that Tom Ashbie's father went to one of the cabins late at night, the slaves were having a secret prayer meeting. He heard one slave ask God to change the heart of his master and deliver him from slavery so that he may enjoy freedom. Before the next day the man disappeared, no one ever seeing him again; but after that down in the swamp at certain times of the moon, you could hear the man who prayed in the cabin praying. When old man Ashbie died, just before he died he told the white Baptist minister, that he had killed Zeek for praying and that he was going to hell.

Christmas day Mr. Ashbie would call all the slaves together, give them presents, money, after which they spent the day as they liked. On New Year's day we all were scared, that was the time for selling, buying and trading slaves. We did not know who was to go or come.

James Calhart James MD-11

"My father's name was Franklin Pearce Randolph of Virginia, a descendant of the Randolphs of Virginia who migrated to South Carolina and located near Fort Sumter, the fort that was surrendered to the Confederates in 1851 or the beginning of the Civil War. My mother's name was Lottie Virginia James, daughter of an Indian and a slave woman, born on the Rapidan River in Virginia about 1823 or 24, I do not know which; she was a woman of fine features and very light in complexion with beautiful, long black hair. She was purchased by her master and taken to South Carolina when about 15 years old. She was the private maid of Mrs. Randolph until she died and then continued as housekeeper for her master, while there and in that capacity I was born on the Randolph's plantation August 23, 1846. I was a half brother to the children of the Randolphs, four in number. After I was born mother and I lived in the servants' quarters of the big house enjoying many pleasures that the other slaves did not: eating and sleeping in the big house, playing and associating with my half-brothers and sisters.

"My master was my father; he was kind to me but hard on the field hands who worked in the rice fields. My mistress died before I was born. There were 3 girls and one boy, they treated me fairly good--at first or when I was small or until they realised their father was my father, then they hated me. We lived in a large white frame house containing about 15 rooms with every luxury of that day, my father being very rich. "My master was my father; he was kind to me but hard on the field hands who worked in the rice fields. My mistress died before I was born. There were 3 girls and one boy, they treated me fairly good--at first or when I was small or until they realised their father was my father, then they hated me. We lived in a large white frame house containing about 15 rooms with every luxury of that day, my father being very rich.

Mary Moriah Anne Susanna James MD-12

"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.

"During the war one day some Union soldiers came to the farm looking for Rebels. There were a number of them in the woods near the landing; they had come across the river in boats. At night while the Union soldiers were at the landing, they were fired on by the Rebels. The Union soldiers went after them, killed ten, caught I think six and some were drowned in the river. Among the six was the overseer, and from that night people have heard shooting and seen soldiers. One night many years after the Civil War, while visiting a friend who now lives within 500 feet from the landing where the fighting took place, there appeared some soldiers carrying a man out of the woods whom I recognized as being the overseer. He had been seen hundreds of times by other people. White people will tell you the same thing. I will tell you for sure this is true.

### Phillip Johnson MD-13

Yes sah, Doctah White was good to his slaves. Yes sah, he had many slaves. I dunno how many. My Missis took me away from de bottom when I was a little boy, 'cause de overseer he was so cruel to me. Yes sah he was mean. I promised him a killin if ever I got big enough.

"Yes sah, them Confederates done more things around here than the Yankees did. I remember once during the war they came to town. It was Sunday morning an I was sittin in the gallery of the ole brick Methodist church. One of them came to de door and he pointed his pistol right at that preacher's head. The gallery had an outside stairs then. I ran to de door to go down de stairs but there was another un there pointing his gun and they say don't nobody leave dis building. The others they was a cleanin up all the hosses and wagons round the church. The one who was guarding de stairs, he kept a lookin to see if dey was done cleaning up de hosses, and when he wasn't watching I slip half way down de stairs, an when he turn his back I jump down and run. When he looks he jus laugh.

### Perry Lewis MD-16

I have heard that patrollers were on Kent Island and the colored people would go out in the country on the roads, create a disturbance to attract the patrollers' attention. They would tie ropes and grape vines across the roads, so when the patrollers would come to the scene of the disturbance on horseback and at full tilt, they would be throwing those who would come in contact with the rope or vine off the horse; sometimes badly injuring the riders. This would create hatred between the slaves, the free people, the patrollers and other white people who were concerned.

### Richard Macks MD-17

"In Bryantown there were several stores, two or three taverns or inns which were well known in their days for their hospitality to their guests and arrangements to house slaves. There were two inns both of which had long sheds, strongly built with cells downstairs for men and a large room above for women. At night the slave traders would bring their charges to the inns, pay for their meals, which were served on a long table in the shed, then afterwards, they were locked up for the night.

"The slave traders would buy young and able farm men and well-developed young girls with fine physiques to barter and sell. They would bring them to the taverns where there would be the buyers and traders, display them and offer them for sale. At one of these gatherings a colored girl, a mulatto of fine stature and good looks, was put on sale. She was of high spirits and determined disposition. At night she was taken by the trader to his room to satisfy his bestial nature. She could not be coerced or forced by him [TR: 'by him' lined out] so she was attacked by him. In the struggle she grabbed a knife and with it, she sterilized[HW:?] him and from the result of injury he died the next day. She was charged with murder. Gen. Butler, hearing of it, sent troops to Charles County to protect her, they brought her to Baltimore, later she was taken to Washington where she was set free. She married a Government employe, reared a family of 3 children, one is a doctor practicing medicine in Baltimore and the other a retired school teacher, you know him well if I were to tell you who the doctor is. This attack was the result of being goodlooking,

for which many a poor girl in Charles County paid the price. There are several cases I could mention, but they are distasteful to me.

"One time a slave ran away and was seen by a colored man, who was hunting, sitting on a log eating some food late in the night. He had a corn knife with him. When his master attempted to hit him with a whip, he retaliated with the knife, splitting the man's breast open, from which he died. The slave escaped and was never captured. The white cappers or patrollers in all of the counties of Southern Maryland scoured the swamps, rivers and fields without success.

#### Dennis Simms MD-19

"Sometimes Negro slave runaways who were apprehended by the patrollers, who kept a constant watch for escaped slaves, besides being flogged, would be branded with a hot iron on the cheek with the letter 'R'." Simms claimed he knew two slaves so branded.

Simms asserted that even as late as 1856 the Constitution of Maryland enacted that a Negro convicted of murder should have his right hand cut off, should be hanged in the usual manner, the head severed from the body, divided into four quarters and set up in the most public places of the county where the act was committed. He said that the slaves pretty well knew about this barbarous Maryland law, and that he even heard of dismemberments for atrocious crimes of Negroes in Maryland.

#### Jim Taylor MD-20

"I think a man by the name of Robinson who was in the coal business at Havre de Grace engaged Mr. Davis to tow several barges of soft coal to St. Michaels. It was on July 4th when we arrived at Havre de Grace. Being a holiday, we had to wait until the 5th, before we could start towards St. Michaels.

"Mr. Tuttle, the captain of the tug, did not sleep on the boat that night, but went to a cock fight. The colored men decided to escape and go to Pennsylvania. (I was a small boy). They ran the tug across the bay to Elk Creek, and upon arriving there they beached the tug on the north side, followed a stream that Harriett Tubman had told them about. After traveling about seven miles, they approached a house situated on a large farm which was occupied by one of the deputy sheriffs of the county. The sheriff told them they were under arrest. One of the escaping man seized the sheriff from the rear, after he was thrown they tied him, then they continued on a road towards Pennsylvania. They reached Pennsylvania about dawn. After they had gone some distance in Pennsylvania three men with guns overtook them; but five men and one woman of Pennsylvania with guns and clubs stopped them. In the meantime the sheriff and two of his deputies come up. The sheriff said he had to hold them for the authorities of the county. They were taken by the sheriff from the three men, carried about 15 miles further in Pennsylvania and then were told to go to Chester where they would be safe.

"Mr. Davis came to Chester with Mr. Tuttle to claim the escaping slaves. They were badly beaten, Mr. Tuttle receiving a fractured skull. There were several white men in Chester who were very much interested in colored people, they gave us money to go to Philadelphia. After arriving in Philadelphia, we went to Allen's mission, a colored church that helped escaping slaves.

"Parson" Rezin Williams MD-22

There was a standing reward for the capture of a runaway. The Indians who caught a runaway slave received a "match coat." The master gave the slave usually ten to ninety-nine lashes for running off. What slaves feared most was what they called the "nine ninety-nine" or 99 lashes with a rawhide whip, and sometimes they were unmercifully flogged until unconscious. Some cruel masters believed Negroes had no souls.

"In winter oxhide shoes were worn, much too large, and the soles contained several layers of paper. We called them 'program' shoes, because the paper used for stuffing, consisted of discarded programs. Williams, though himself not a slave by virtue of the fact that his grandmother was an Indian, was considered a good judge of healthy slaves, those who would prove profitable to their owners, so he often accompanied slave purchasers to the Baltimore slave markets.

He told of having been taken by a certain slave master to the Baltimore wharf, boarded a boat and after the slave dealer and the captain negotiated a deal, he, Williams, not realizing that he was being used as a decoy, led a group of some thirty or forty blacks, men, women and children, through a dark and dirty tunnel for a distance of several blocks to a slave market pen, where they were placed on the auction block.

He was told to sort of pacify the black women who set up a wail when they were separated from their husbands and children. It was a pitiful sight to see them, half naked, some whipped into submission, cast into slave pens surrounded by iron bars.