

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

Precilla Gray TN-8

Mah fust mistress had three looms en we had ter mek clothes fer ev'ery one on de plan'ashun. I wuz taught ter weav', card, spin en 'nit en ter wuk in de fiel's. I wuz 'feared ob de terbacker wums at fust but Aunt Frankie went 'long by me en showed me how ter pull de wum's head off. Hab housed terbacker till 9 o'clock at nite. Our marster whupped us w'en we needed hit. I got meny a whuppin'.

Emma Grisham TN-10

"W'en de fightin' got so heavy mah white people got sum Irish peep'le ter live on de plantation, en dey went south, leavin' us wid de Irish peep'le."

Patsy Hyde TN-12

"One day ole Uncle Elick woke Marster Brown fum his atter-noon nap tellin' 'im dat de prettiest men dat I ever seed wuz passin' by on de road. He went ter de winder en said, "Good Gawd, hit's dem damn Yankees."

"De slaves would tek dere ole iron cookin' pots en turn dem upside down on de groun' neah dere cabins ter keep dere white folks fum hearin' w'at dey wuz sayin'." "Dey claimed dat hit showed dat Gawd wuz wid dem."

"I member w'en de stars fell. Hit wuz so dark en eberbody wuz skeered, en I member a comet dat looked lak a big red ball en had sump'in lak a tail on hit. Eber one wuz skeered en wuz 'feard hit would hit de groun' en burn de worl' up.

Ann Matthews TN-15

A TALE

One time de preacher wuz in de river fixin' ter baptize a man. Eve'ybody wuz singin' ole time 'ligion. A 'oman sung, "I don' lak dat thing 'hind you." Bout dat time de pahson en de udder man se'd an alligator. De parson sezs, "No-By-God I Don't Either." He turned de man loose en dey both run 'way.

Andrew Moss TN-17

"One ting dat's all wrong wid dis world today," according to Andrew Moss, aged negro, as he sits through the winter days before an open grate fire in his cabin, with his long, lean fingers clasped over his crossed knees, "is dat dey ain no 'prayer grounds'. Down in Georgia whar I was born,--dat was 'way back in 1852,--us colored folks had prayer grounds. My Mammy's was a ole twisted thick-rooted muscadine bush. She'd go in dar and pray for deliverance of de slaves. Some colored folks

cleaned out knee-spots in de cane breaks. Cane you know, grows high and thick, and colored folks could hide de'seves in dar, an nobody could see an pester em."

My Marster he never did marry. Lots of folks didnt, dey jes took up wid one another. Marster Hopper had five children by my grandmother. She was his house woman, dat's what he call 'er. An when he died he willed her and all dem chilluns a house, some land, and a little money. He'd of left em a heap more money and ud been one of the richest men in the country, ef'n de war hadn't broke out. When it was over he had a barrel full of 'Federate greenbacks. But t'want no count.

#### Mollie Moss TN-18

"Billy Cain worked me in de fields. An his wife Miss Nancy say she gwine stop it, 'cause I was so pretty she fraid somebody come steal me." Aunt Mollie buried her face in her apron and had a good laugh. "Dey said I was de pretties' girl anywhars about. Had teeth jes like pearls. Whoops! Look at em now. Ain got 'nuff left to chaw wid. You notices how light-complected I is? My own father was a full-blooded Cherokee Indian. De Yanks captured him an killed him."

"I was hoein in de field dat time Moss com 'long and see me and say he gwine marry me. An, jes like he tell you, we was married in less dan six months. We been livin togedder evy since and we gits along good.

Soldier see a chicken go under de house, he plop down and shoot, and den call me to crawl under de house and fetch it out."

"Talk 'bout your shootin jest for devilment. Lemme tell you 'bout old men John Wynn. He live down dar 'bout ten mile from whar Moss lived when he was a boy. I've heard em tell it many a time. Dey say John Wynn had 185 slaves. Evy time it come George Washington's birthday, Old Wynn he had a feast and invite all de slaves! He celebratin! he say. He seta a long table wid all kind good tings to eat. An he count de slaves, so's to be sure dey all come. An' den he'd take an pick out one and shoot him! Den he say, "Now youse all can go 'head an eat. Throw dat nigger 'side an we bury im in mornin'." And he walks off to de big house. No! He wasn't drunk. Jes de debil in 'im. Well, he shot ten, twelve, maybe thirty dat way. An den de white folks hanged 'im to a tree. Hanged im t'well he was good and dead, dey did."

#### Millie Simkins TN-22

Mah fust missis sold me kaze I wuz stubborn. She sent me ter de "slave yard" at Nashville. De yard wuz full ob slaves. I stayed dere two weeks 'fore marster Simpson bought me. I wuz sold 'way fum mah husband en I nebber se'd 'im 'gin. I had one chile which I tuk wid me.

De slave yard wuz on Cedar Street. A Mr. Chandler would bid de slaves off, but 'fore dey started biddin' you had ter tek all ob yo Clothes off en roll down de hill so dey could see dat you didn't hab no bones broken, er sores on yer. (I wouldin' tek mine off). Ef nobody bid on you, you wuz tuk ter de slave mart en sold. I wuz sold dere. A bunch ob dem wuz sent ter Mississippi en dey had dere ankles fas'end tergedder en dey had ter walk w'iles de tradahs rid.

Sum marsters fed dare slaves meat en sum wouldin' let dem hab a bite. One marster we useter 'yer 'bout would grease his slaves mouth on Sunday mawnin', en tell dem ef any body axed ef dey had meat ter say "yes, lots ob hit".

Joseph Leonidas Star TN-23

My mother was eleven years old when she was freed."

"When she was about fourteen and my father Henry Dunbar wanted to marry he had to first buy his freedom. In them times a slave couldn't marry a free'd person. So he bought his freedom from his Marster Lloyd Bullen, and a good friend of Andrew Johnson, the presi-dent. My father an' him was friends too. So he bought his freedom, for just a little of somethin' I disremember what, 'cause they didn't aim to make him buy his freedom high.

Dan Thomas TN-24

"I se'd dem sell a lot ob slaves in Mississippi, jes' lak hosses en hogs, one time w'en de Marster en Mistress made a trip down dere. Lots ob times dey made trips 'round de kuntry en dey allus tuk me 'long. I se'd sum cru'l Marsters dat hitched up dere slaves ter plows en made dem plow lak hosses en mules did."

Sylvia Watkins TN-25

Mah daddy could only see mah mammy Wednesday en Saturday nites, en ef'n he kum wid'out a pass de pat-rollers would whup 'im er run 'im 'til his tongue hung out. On dem nites we would sit up en look fer daddy en lots ob times he wuz out ob bref cose he had run so much.

Durin' slavery ef one marster had a big boy en 'nuther had a big gal da marsters made dem libe tergedder. Ef'n de 'oman didn't hab any chilluns, she wuz put on de block en sold en 'nuther 'oman bought. You see dey raised de chilluns ter mek money on jes lak we raise pigs ter sell.