

# **Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews with Former Slaves      Florida Narratives**

Work Projects Administration

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## **SLAVE NARRATIVES**

A Folk History of Slavery in the United States  
From Interviews with Former Slaves

TYPEWRITTEN RECORDS PREPARED BY  
THE FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT  
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VOLUME III  
FLORIDA NARRATIVES

Prepared by  
the Federal Writers' Project of  
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for the State of Florida

INFORMANTS

Anderson, Josephine  
Andrews, Samuel Simeon  
Austin, Bill

Berry, Frank  
Biddie, Mary Minus  
Boyd, Rev. Eli  
Boynton, Rivana  
Brooks, Matilda  
Bynes, Titus

Campbell, Patience  
Clayton, Florida  
Coates, Charles  
Coates, Irene  
Coker, Neil

Davis, Rev. Young Winston  
Dorsey, Douglas  
Douglass, Ambrose  
Duck, Mama  
Dukes, Willis

Everett, Sam and Louisa

Gaines, Duncan  
Gantling, Clayborn  
Gragston, Arnold  
Gresham, Harriett

Hall, Bolden

Hooks, Rebecca

Jackson, Rev. Squires

Kemp, John Henry (Prophet)  
Kinsey, Cindy

Lee, Randall  
Lycurgas, Edward

McCravy, Amanda  
Maxwell, Henry  
Mitchell, Christine  
Moore, Lindsey  
Mullen, Mack

Napoleon, Louis  
Nickerson, Margrett

Parish, Douglas  
Pretty, George

Scott, Anna  
Sherman, William  
Smalls, Samuel

Taswell, Salena  
Taylor, Dave  
Thomas, Acie  
Thomas, Shack  
Towns, Luke

Williams, Willis  
Wilson, Claude Augusta

#### COMBINED INTERVIEWS [TR: County names added]

##### DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA, EX-SLAVE STORIES

Charley Roberts  
Jennie Colder  
Banana Williams  
Frank Bates  
William Neighten  
Rivana Boynton [TR: Riviana in text]  
Salena Taswell

##### DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA, FOLKLORE

Annie Trip  
Millie Sampson  
Annie Gail  
Jessie Rowell  
Margaret White  
Priscilla Mitchell  
Fannie McCay  
Hattie Thomas  
David Lee

FOLK STUFF, FLORIDA

Jules A. Frost

Tampa, Florida

October 20, 1937

JOSEPHINE ANDERSON

HANTS

"I kaint tell nothin bout slavery times cept what I heared folks talk about. I was too young to remember much but I recleck seein my granma milk de cows an do de washin. Granpa was old, an dey let him do light work, mosly fish an hunt.

"I doan member nothin bout my daddy. He died when I was a baby. My stepfather was Stephen Anderson, an my mammy's name was Dorcas. He come fum Vajinny, but my mammy was borned an raised in Wilmington. My name was Josephine Anderson fore I married Willie Jones. I had two half-brothers youngern me, John Henry an Ed, an a half-sister, Elsie. De boys had to mind de calves an sheeps, an Elsie nursed de missus' baby. I done de cookin, mosly, an helped my mammy spin.

"I was ony five year old when dey brung me to Sanderson, in Baker County, Florida. My stepfather went to work for a turpentine man, makin barrels, an he work at dat job till he drop dead in de camp. I reckon he musta had heart disease.

"I doan recleck ever seein my mammy wear shoes. Even in de winter she go barefoot, an I reckon cold didn't hurt her feet no moran her hands an face. We all wore dresses made o' homespun. De thread was spun an de cloth wove right in our own home. My mamy an granmamy an me done it in spare time.

"My weddin dress was blue--blue for true. I thought it was de prettiest dress I ever see. We was married in de court-house, an dat be a mighty happy day for me. Mos folks dem days got married by layin a broom on de floor an jumpin over it. Dat seals de marriage, an at de same time brings em good luck.

"Ya see brooms keeps hants away. When mean folks dies, de old debbil sometimes doan want em down dere in da bad place, so he makes witches out of em, an sends em back. One thing bout witches, dey gotta count everthing fore dey can git acrosst it. You put a broom acrosst your door at night an old witches gotta count ever straw in dat broom fore she can come in.

"Some folks can jes nachly see hants bettern others. Teeny, my gal can. I reckon das cause she been borned wid a veil--you know, a caul, sumpum what be over some babies' faces when dey is borned. Folks borned wid a caul can see sperrits, an tell whas gonna happen fore it comes true.

"Use to worry Teeny right smart, seein sperrits day an night. My husban say he gonna cure her, so he taken a grain o' corn an put it in a bottle in Teeny's bedroom over night. Den he planted it in de yard, an driv plenty sticks roun da place. When it was growin good, he put leaf-mold roun de stalk, an watch it ever day, an tell us don't nobody touch de

stalk. It raise three big ears o' corn, an when dey was good roastin size he pick em off an cook em an tell Teeny eat ever grain offn all three cobs. He watch her while she done it, an she ain never been worried wid hants no more. She sees em jes the same, but dey doan bother her none.

"Fust time I ever knowed a hant to come into our quarters was when I was jes big nough to go out to parties. De game what we use to play was spin de plate. Ever time I think on dat game it gives me de shivers. One time there was a strange young man come to a party where I was. Said he name Richard Green, an he been takin keer o' horses for a rich man what was gonna buy a plantation in dat county. He look kinda slick an dressed-up--diffunt from de rest. All de gals begin to cast sheep's eyes at him, an hope he gonna choose dem when day start playin games.

"Pretty soon dey begin to play spin de plate an it come my turn fust thing. I spin it an call out 'Mister Green!' He jumps to de middle o' de ring to grab de plate an 'Bang'--bout four guns go off all at oncet, an Mister Green fall to de floor plum dead shot through de head.

"Fore we knowed who done it, de sheriff an some more men jump down from de loft, where dey bean hidin an tell us quit hollerin an doan be scairt. Dis man be a bad deeper--you know, one o' them outlaws what kills folks. He some kinda foreigner, an jes tryin make blieve he a niggah, so's they don't find him.

"Wall we didn't feel like playin no more games, an f'ever after dat you coundn't git no niggahs to pass dat house alone atter dark. Dey say da place was hanted, an if you look through de winder any dark night you could see a man in dere spinnin de plate.

"I sho didn't never look in, cause I done seen more hants already dan I ever wants to see agin. One night I was goin to my granny's house. It was jes comin dark, an when I got to de crick an start across on de foot-log, dere on de other end o' dat log was a man wid his haid cut off an layin plum over on his shoulder. He look at me, kinda pitiful, an don't say a word--but I closely never waited to see what he gonna talk about. I pure flew back home. I was so scairt I couldn't tell de folks what done happened till I set down an get my breath.

"Nother time, not so long ago, when I live down in Gary, I be walkin down de railroad track soon in de mornin an fore I knowed it, dere was a white man walkin long side o' me. I jes thought it were somebody, but I wadn't sho, so I turn off at de fust street to git way from dere. De nex mawnin I be boin[TR: goin?] to work at de same time. It were kinda foggy an dark, so I never seen nobody till I mighty nigh run into dis same man, an dere he goes, bout half a step ahead o' me, his two hands restin on his be-hind.

"I was so close up to him I could see him plain as I see you. He had fingernails dat long, all cleaned an polished. He was tull, an had on a derby hat, an stylish black clothes. When I walk slow he slow down, an when I stop, he stop, never oncet lookin roun. My feets make a noise on de cinders tween de rails, but he doan make a mite o' noise. Dat was de fust thing got me scairt, but I figger I better find out for sho ifen he be a sperrit; so I say, gook an loud: 'Looke here, Mister, I jez an old colored woman, an I knows my place, an I wisht you wouldn't walk wid me counta what folks might say.'

"He never looked roun no moren if I wan't there, an I cut my eyes roun to see if there is somebody I can holler to for help. When I looked back he was gone; gone, like dat, without makin a sound. Den I knowed he be a hant, an de nex day when I tell somebody bout it dey say he be de genman what got killed at de crossin a spell back, an other folks has seen him jus like I did. Dey say dey can hear babies cryin at de trestle right near dere, an ain't nobody yit ever found em.

"Dat ain de ony hant I ever seen. One day I go out to de smokehouse to git a mess o' taters. It was after sundown, but still purty light. When I gits dere de door be unlocked an a big man standin half inside. 'What you doin stealin our taters!' I hollers at him, an pow! He gone, jes like dat. Did I git back to dat house! We mighty glad to eat grits an cornbread dat night.

"When we livin at Titusville, I see my old mammy comin up de road jus as plain as day. I stan on de porch, fixin to run an meet her, when all of a sudden she be gone. I begin to cry an tell de folks I ain't gonna see my mammy agin. An sho nuff, I never did. She die at Sanderson, back in West Florida, fore I got to see her.

"Does I blieve in witches? S-a-a-y, I knows more bout em den to jes 'blieve'--I been rid by em. Right here in dis house. You ain never been rid by a witch? Well, you mighty lucky. Dey come in de night, ginnerly soon after you drop off to sleep. Dey put a bridle on your head, an a bit in your mouth, an a saddle on your back. Den dey take off their skin an hang it up on de wall. Den dey git on you an some nights dey like to ride you to death. You try to holler but you kaint, counta the iron bit in your mouth, an you feel like somebody holdin you down. Den dey ride you back home an into your bed. When you hit de bed you jump an grab de kivers, an de witch be gone, like dat. But you know you been rid mighty hard, cause you all wet wid sweat, an you feel plum tired out.

"Some folks say you jus been dreamin, counta de blood stop circulatin in yaur back. Shucks! Dey ain never been rid by a witch, or dey ain sayin dat.

"Old witch docter, he want ten dollers for a piece of string, what he say some kinda charm words over. Tells me to make a image o' dat old witch outa dough, an tie dat string roun its neck; den when I bake it in de oven, it swell up an de magic string shet off her breath. I didn't have no ten dollar, so he say ifen I git up five dollar he make me a hand--you know, what collored folks cals a jack. Dat be a charm what will keep de witches away. I knows how to make em, but day doan do no good thout de magic words, an I doan know dem. You take a little pinch o' dried snake skin an some graveyard dirt, an some red pepper an a lock o' your hair wrapped roun some black rooster feathers. Den you spit whiskey on em an wrap em in red flannel an sew if into a ball bout dat big. Den you hang it under your right armpit, an ever week you give it a drink o' whiskey, to keep it strong an powful.

"Dat keep de witches fum ridin you; but nary one o' dese charms work wid dis old witch. I got a purty good idee who she is, an she got a charm powfuller dan both of dem. But she kaint git acrosst flaxseed, not till she count ever seed. You doan blieve dat? Huh! I reckon I knows--I done tried it out. I gits me a lil bag o' pure fresh flaxseed, an I sprinkle it all roun de bed; den I put some on top of da mattress, an under de sheet. Den I goes to bed an sleeps like a baby, an dat old witch doan

bother me no more.

"Ony onctet. Soon's I wake up, I light me a lamp an look on de floor an dere, side o' my bed was my dress, layin right over dat flaxseed, so's she could walk over on de dress, big as life. I snatch up de dress an throw it an de bed; den I go to sleep, an I ain \_never\_ been bothered no more.

"Some folks reads de Bible backwards to keep witches fum ridin em, but dat doan do me no good, cause I kaint read. But flaxseed work so good I doan be studyin night-ridin witches no more."

FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT  
American Guide, (Negro Writers' Unit)

Rachel A. Austin, Field Worker

John A. Simms, Editor

Jacksonville, Florida

October 27, 1936

#### SAMUEL SIMEON ANDREWS

For almost 30 years Edward Waters College, an African Methodist Episcopal School, located on the north side of Kings Road in the western section of Jacksonville, has employed as watchman, Samuel Simeon Andrews (affectionately called "Parson"), a former slave of A.J. Lane of Georgia, Lewis Ripley of Beaufort, South Carolina, Ed Tillman of Dallas, Texas, and John Troy of Union Springs, Alabama.

"Parson" was born November 18, 1850 in Macon, Georgia, at a place called Tatum Square, where slaves were held, housed and sold. "Speculators" (persons who traveled from place to place with slaves for sale) had housed 84 slaves there--many of whom were pregnant women. Besides "Parson," two other slave-children, Ed Jones who now lives in Sparta, Georgia, and George Bailey were born in Tatum Square that night. The morning after their births, a woman was sent from the nearby A.J. Lane plantation to take care of the three mothers; this nurse proved to be "Parson's" grandmother. His mother told him afterwards that the meeting of mother and daughter was very jubilant, but silent and pathetic, because neither could with safety show her pleasure in finding the other. At the auction which was held a few days later, his mother, Rachel, and her two sons, Solomon Augustus and her infant who was later to be known as "Parson," were purchased by A.J. Lane who had previously bought "Parson's" father, Willis, from a man named Dolphus of Albany, Georgia; thus were husband and wife re-united. They were taken to Lane's plantation three miles out of Sparta, Georgia, in Hancock County. Mr. Lane owned 85 slaves and was known to be very kind and considerate.

"Parson" lived on the Lane plantation until he was eight years old, when he was sold to Lewis Ripley of Beaufort, South Carolina, with whom he lived for two years; he was then sold to Ed Tillman of Dallas, Texas; he stayed on the Tillman plantation for about a year and until he was purchased by John Troy of Union Springs, Alabama--the richest slave-holder in Union Springs, Alabama; he remained with him until Emancipation. He recalls that during one of these sales about \$800.00

was paid for him.

He describes A.J. Lane as being a kind slave-holder who fed his slaves well and whipped them but little. All of his other masters, he states, were nice to children, but lashed and whipped the grown-ups.

Mr. Lane's family was comprised of his wife, Fannie (who also was very kind to the slaves) five children, Harriett Ann, Jennie, Jeff, Frankie and Mae Roxie, a brother (whose name he does not recall) who owned a few slaves but was kind to those that he did own. Although very young during slavery, "Parson" remembers many plantation activities and customs, among which are the following: That the master's children and those of the slaves on the plantation played together; the farm crops consisted of corn, cotton, peas, wheat and oats; that the food for the slaves was cooked in pots which were hung over a fire; that the iron ovens used by the slaves had tops for baking; how during the Civil War, wheat, corn and dried potatoes were parched and used as substitutes for coffee; that his mother was given a peck of flour every two weeks; that a mixture of salt and sand was dug from the earthen floor of the smokehouse and water poured over it to get the salt drippings for seasoning; that most medicine consisted of boiled roots; when thread and cloth were dyed with the dye obtained from maple bark; when shoes were made on a wooden last and soles and uppers fastened together with maple pegs; when the white preachers preached "obey your masters"; that the first buggy that he saw was owned by his master, A.J. Lane; it had a seat at the rear with rest which was usually occupied by a man who was called the "waiter"; there was no top to the seat and the "waiter" was exposed to the weather. He recalls when wooden slats and tightened ropes were used for bed springs; also the patience of "Aunt Letha" an old woman slave who took care of the children in the neighborhood while their parents worked, and how they enjoyed watching "Uncle Umphrey" tan cow and pig hides.

"Parson" describes himself as being very frisky as a boy and states that he did but very little work and got but very few whippings. Twice he ran away to escape being whipped and hid in asparagus beds in Sparta, Georgia until nightfall; when he returned the master would not whip him because he was apprehensive that he might run away again and be stolen by poorer whites and thus cause trouble. The richer whites, he relates, were afraid of the poorer whites; if the latter were made angry they would round up the owners' sheep and turn them loose into their cotton fields and the sheep would eat the cotton, row by row.

He compares the relationship between the rich and poor whites during slavery with that of the white and Negro people of today.

With a face full of frowns, "Parson" tells of a white man persuading his mother to let him tie her to show that he was master, promising not to whip her, and she believed him. When he had placed her in a buck (hands tied on a stick so that the stick would turn her in any direction) he whipped her until the blood ran down her back.

With changed expression he told of an incident during the Civil War: Slaves, he explained had to have passes to go from one plantation to another and if one were found without a pass the "patrollers" would pick him up, return him to his master and receive pay for their service. The "patrollers" were guards for runaway slaves. One night they came to Aunt Rhoda's house where a crowd of slaves had gathered and were going to return them to their masters; Uncle Umphrey the tanner, quickly spaded up some hot ashes and pitched it on them; all of the slaves escaped

unharmed, while all of the "patrollers" were badly injured; no one ever told on Uncle Umphrey and when Aunt Rhoda was questioned by her master she stated that she knew nothing about it but told them that the "patrollers" had brought another "nigger" with them; her master took it for granted that she spoke the truth since none of the other Negroes were hurt. He remembers seeing this but does not remember how he, as a little boy, was prevented from telling about it.

Asked about his remembrance or knowledge of the slaves' belief in magic and spells he said: "I remember this and can just see the dogs running around now. My mother's brother, "Uncle Dick" and "Uncle July" swore they would not work longer for masters; so they ran away and lived in the woods. In winter they would put cotton seed in the fields to rot for fertilizer and lay in it for warmth. They would kill hogs and slip the meat to some slave to cook for food. When their owners looked for them, "Bob Amos" who raised "nigger hounds" (hounds raised solely to track Negro slaves) was summoned and the dogs located them and surrounded them in their hide-out; one went one way and one the other and escaped in the swamps; they would run until they came to a fence--each kept some "graveyard dust and a few lightwood splinters" with which they smoked their feet and jumped the fence and the dogs turned back and could track no further. Thus, they stayed in the woods until freedom, when they came out and worked for pay. Now, you know "Uncle Dick" just died a few years ago in Sparta, Georgia."

When the Civil War came he remembers hearing one night "Sherman is coming." It was said that Wheeler's Cavalry of the Confederates was always "running and fighting." Lane had moved the family to Macon, Georgia, and they lived on a place called "Dunlap's Hill." That night four preachers were preaching "Fellow soldiers, the enemy is just here to Bolden's Brook, sixteen miles away and you may be carried into judgment; prepare to meet your God." While they were preaching, bombs began to fly because Wheeler's Cavalry was only six miles away instead of 16 miles; women screamed and children ran. Wheeler kept wagons ahead of him so that when one was crippled the other would replace it. He says he imagines he hears the voice of Sherman now, saying: "Tell Wheeler to go on to South Carolina; we will mow it down with grape shot and plow it in with bombshell."

Emancipation came and with it great rejoicing. He recalls that Republicans were called "Radicals" just after the close of the Civil War.

Mr. Lane was able to save all of his meat, silver, and other valuables during the war by having a cave dug in the hog pasture; the hogs trampled over it daily.

"Parson" states that among the papers in his trunk he has a piece of money called "shin plasters" which was used during the Civil War.

The slaves were not allowed to attend schools of any kind; and school facilities immediately following Emancipation were very poor; when the first teacher, Miss Smith, a Yankee, came to Sparta, Georgia and began teaching Sunday School, all of the children were given testaments or catechisms which their parents were afraid for them to keep lest their masters whip them, but the teacher called on the parents and explained to them that they were as free as their former masters.

"Parson" states that when he was born, his master named him "Monk." His

grandfather, Willis Andrews, who was a free man of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, purchased the freedom of his wife Lizzie, but was never able to purchase their four children; his father, also named Willis, died a slave, was driven in an ox-cart to a hole that had been dug, put in it and covered up; his mother nor children could stop work to attend the funeral, but after the Emancipation, he and a brother returned, found "Uncle Bob" who helped bury him and located his grave. Soon after he had been given his freedom, "Parson" walked from Union Springs, Alabama where his last master had taken him--back to Macon, Georgia, and rejoined his mother, Rachel, his brothers, Samuel Augustus, San Francisco, Simon Peter, Lewis, Carter, Powell Wendell and sisters, Lizzie and Ann; they all dropped the name of their master, Lane, and took the name of their grandfather, Andrews.

"Parson" possesses an almost uncanny memory and attributes it to his inability to write things down and therefore being entirely dependent upon his memory. He had passed 30 years of age and had two children who could read and write before he could. His connection with Edward Waters College has given him a decided advantage for education and there are few things that he cannot discuss intelligently. He has come in contact with thousands of students and all of the ministers connected with the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the State of Florida and has attended all of the State and General Conferences of this Church for the past half century. He has lived to be 85 years of age and says he will live until he is 106. This he will do because he claims: "Your life is in your hand" and tells these narratives as proof:

"In 1886 when the present Atlantic Coast Line Railroad was called the S.F.W. and I was coming from Savannah to Florida, some tramps intent upon robbery had removed spikes from the bridge and just as the alarm was given and the train about to be thrown from the track, I raised the window and jumped to safety. I then walked back two miles to report it. More than 70 were killed who might have been saved had they jumped as I did. As a result, the S.F. and W. gave me a free pass for life with which I rode all over the United States and once into Canada." He proudly displays this pass and states that he would like to travel over the United States again but that the school keeps him too close.

"I had been very sick but took no medicine; my wife went out to visit Sister Nancy--shortly afterwards I heard what sounded like walking, and in my imagination saw death entering, push the door open and draw back to leap on me; I jumped through the window, my shirt hung, but I pulled it out. Mr. Hodges, a Baptist preacher was hoeing in his garden next door, looked at me and laughed. A woman yelled 'there goes Reverend Andrews, and death is on him.' I said 'no he isn't on me but he's down there.' Pretty soon news came that Reverend Hodges had dropped dead. Death had come for someone and would not leave without them. I was weak and he tried me first. Reverend Hodges wasn't looking, so he slipped up on him."

"Parson" came to Umatilla, Florida, in 1882 from Georgia with a Mr. Rogers brought him and six other men, their wives and children, to work on the railroad; he was made the section "boss" which job he held until a white man threatened to "dock" him because he was wearing a stiff shirt and "setting over a white man" when he should have a shovel. This was the opinion of a man in the vicinity, but another white friend, named Javis warned him and advised him not to leave Umatilla, but persuaded him to work for him cutting cord wood; although "Parson" had never seen wood corded, he accepted the job and was soon given a pass to

Macon, Georgia, to get other men; he brought 13 men back and soon became their "boss" and bought a house and decided to do a little hunting. When he left this job he did some hotel work, cooked and served as train porter. In 1892 he was ordained to preach and has preached and pastored regularly from that time up to two years ago.

He is of medium size and build and partially bald-headed; what little hair he has is very grey; he has keen eyes; his eyesight is very good; he has never had to wear glasses. He is as supple as one half his age; it is readily demonstrated as he runs, jumps and yells while attending the games of his favorite pastimes, baseball and football. Wherever the Edward Waters College football team goes, there "Parson" wants to go also. Whenever the crowd at a game hears the scream "Come on boys," everyone knows it is "Parson" Andrews.

"Parson" has had two wives, both of whom are dead, and is the father of eight children: Willis (deceased) Johnny, Sebron Reece of Martin, Tennessee, Annie Lee, of Macon, Georgia, Hattie of Jacksonville, Ella (deceased) Mary Lou Rivers of Macon, Georgia, and Augustus somewhere-at-sea.

"Parson" does not believe in taking medicine, but makes a liniment with which he rubs himself. He attributes his long life to his sense of "having quitting sense" and not allowing death to catch him unawares. He asserts that if he reaches the bedside of a kindred in time, he will keep him from dying by telling him: "Come on now, don't be crazy and die."

He states that he enjoyed his slavery life and since that time life has been very sweet. He knows and remembers most of the incidents connected with members of the several Conferences of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Florida and can tell you in what minutes you may find any of the important happenings of the past 30 or 40 years.

#### REFERENCE

1. Personal interview with Samuel Simeon Andrews in the dormitory of Edward Waters college Kings Road, Jacksonville, Florida

FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT  
American Guide, (Negro Writers' Unit)

Martin Richardson, Field Worker  
Greenwood, Florida  
March 18, 1937

#### BILL AUSTIN

Bill Austin--he says his name is NOT Williams--is an ex-slave who gained his freedom because his mistress found it more advantageous to free him than to watch him.

Austin lives near Greenwood, Jackson County, Florida, on a small farm that he and his children operate. He says that he does not know his age,

does not remember ever having heard it. But he must be pretty old, he says, "cause I was a right smart size when Mistuh Smith went off to fight." He thinks he may be over a hundred--and he looks it--but he is not sure.

Austin was born between Greene and Hancock Counties, on the Oconee River, in Georgia. He uses the names of the counties interchangeably; he cannot be definite as to just which one was his birthplace. "The line between 'em was right there by us," he says.

His father was Jack; for want of a surname of his own he took that of his father and called himself Jack Smith. During a temporary shortage of funds on his master's part, Jack and Bill's mother was sold to a planter in the northern part of the state. It was not until long after his emancipation that Bill ever saw either of them again.

Bill's father Jack was regarded as a fairly good carpenter, mason and bricklayer; at times his master would let him do small jobs of repairing of building for neighboring planters. These jobs sometimes netted him hams, bits of cornmeal, cloth for dresses for his wife and children, and other small gifts; these he either used for his small family or bartered with the other slaves. Sometimes he sold them to the slaves for money; cash was not altogether unknown among the slaves on the Smith place.

Austin gives an interesting description of his master, Thomas Smith. He says that "sumptimes he was real rich and all of us had a good time. The wuk wasn't hard then, cause if we had big crops he would borrow some he'p from the other white folks. He used to give us meat every day, and plenty of other things. One time he bought all of us shoes, and on Sunday night would let us go to wherever the preacher was holdin' meeting. He used to give my papa money sumptimes, too.

"But they used to whisper that he would gamble a lot. We used to see a whole lot of men come up to the house sumptimes and stay up most of the night. Sumptimes they would stay three or four days. And once in a while after one of these big doings Mistuh Smith would look worried, and we wouldn't get no meat and vary little of anything else for a long time. He would be crabby and beat us for any little thing. He used to tell my papa that he wouldn't have a d--- cent until he made some crops."

A few years before he left to enter the war the slave owner came into possession of a store near his plantation. This store was in Greensboro. Either because the business paid or because of another of his economic 'bad spells', ownership of his plantation passed to a man named Kimball and most of the slaves, with the exception of Bill Austin and one or two women--either transferred with the plantation or sold. Bill was kept to do errands and general work around the store.

Bill learned much about the operation of the store, with the result that when Mr. Smith left with the Southern Army he left his wife and Bill to continue its operation. By this time there used to be frequent stories whispered among the slaves in the neighborhood--and who came with their masters into the country store--of how this or that slave ran away, and with the white man-power of the section engaged in war, remained at large for long periods or escaped altogether.

These stories always interested Austin, with the result that one morning he was absent when Mrs. Smith opened the store. He remained away 'eight

or nine days, I guess', before a friend of the Smiths found him near Macon and threatened that he would 'half kill him' if he didn't return immediately.

Either the threat--or the fact that in Macon there were no readily available foodstuffs to be eaten all day as in the store--caused Austin to return. He was roundly berated by his mistress, but finally forgiven by the worried woman who needed his help around the store more than she needed the contrite promises and effusive declarations that he would 'behave alright for the rest of his life.'

And he did behave; for several whole months. But by this time he was 'a great big boy', and he had caught sight of a young woman who took his fancy on his trip to Macon. She was free herself; her father had bought her freedom with that of her mother a few years before, and did odd jobs for the white people in the city for a livelihood. Bill had thoughts of going back to Macon, marrying her, and bringing her back 'to work for Missus with me.' He asked permission to go, and was refused on the grounds that his help was too badly needed at the store. Shortly afterward he had again disappeared.

'Missus', however, knew too much of his plans by this time, and it was no difficult task to have him apprehended in Macon. Bill may not have had such great objections to the apprehension, either, he says, because by this time he had learned that the young woman in Macon had no slightest intention to give up her freedom to join him at Greensboro.

A relative of Mrs. Smith gave Austin a sound beating on his return; for a time it had the desired effect, and he stayed at the store and gave no further trouble. Mrs. Smith, however, thought of a surer plan of keeping him in Greensboro; she called him and told him he might have his freedom. Bill never attempted to again leave the place--although he did not receive a cent for his work--until his master had died, the store passed into the hands of one of Mr. Smith's sons, and the emancipation of all the slaves was a matter of eight or ten years' history!

When he finally left Greene and Hancock Counties--about fifty-five years ago, Austin settled in Jackson County. He married and began the raising of a family. At present he has nineteen living children, more grandchildren than he can accurately tell, and is living with his third wife, a woman in her thirties.

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2. Interview with subject, near Greenwood, Florida, (Rural Route 2, Sneads)

FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT  
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FRANK BERRY

Frank Berry, living at 1614 west Twenty-Second street, Jacksonville, Florida, claims to be a grandson of Osceola, last fighting chief of the Seminole tribe. Born in 1858 of a mother who was part of the human chattel belonging to one of the Hearnses of Alachua County in Florida, he served variously during his life as a State and Federal Government contractor, United States Marshal (1881), Registration Inspector (1879).

Being only eight years of age when the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, he remembers little of his life as a slave. The master was kind in an impersonal way but made no provision for his freedmen as did many other Southerners--usually in the form of land grants--although he gave them their freedom as soon as the proclamation was issued. Berry learned from his elders that their master was a noted duelist and owned several fine pistols some of which have very bloody histories.

It was during the hectic days that followed the Civil War that Berry served in the afore-mentioned offices. He held his marshalship under a Judge King of Jacksonville, Florida. As State and Federal Government Contractor he built many public structures, a few of which are still in use, among them the jetties at Mayport, Florida which he helped to build and a jail at High Springs, Florida.

It was during the war between the Indians and settlers that Berry's grandmother, serving as a nurse at Tampa Bay was captured by the Indians and carried away to become the squaw of their chief; she was later re-captured by her owners. This was a common procedure, according to Berry's statements. Indians often captured slaves, particularly the women, or aided in their escape and almost always intermarried with them. The red men were credited with inciting many uprisings and wholesale escapes among the slaves.

Country frolics (dances) were quite often attended by Indians, whose main reason for going was to obtain whiskey, for which they had a very strong fondness. Berry describes an intoxicated Indian as a "tornado mad man" and recalls a hair raising incident that ended in tragedy for the offender.

A group of Indians were attending one of these frolics at Fort Myers and everything went well until one of the number became intoxicated, terrorizing the Negroes with bullying, and fighting anyone with whom he could "pick" a quarrel. "Big Charlie" an uncle of the narrator was present and when the red man challenged him to a fight made a quick end of him by breaking his neck at one blow.

For two years he was hounded by revengeful Indians, who had an uncanny way of ferreting out his whereabouts no matter where he went. Often he sighted them while working in the fields and would be forced to flee to some other place. This continued with many hairbreadth escapes, until he was forced to move several states away.

Berry recalls the old days of black aristocracy when Negroes held high political offices in the state of Florida, when Negro tradesmen and professionals competed successfully and unmolested with the whites. Many

fortunes were made by men who are now little more than beggars. To this group belongs the man who in spite of reduced circumstances manages still to make one think of top hats and state affairs. Although small of stature and almost disabled by rheumatism, he has the fiery dignity and straight back that we associate with men who have ruled others. At the same time he might also be characterized as a sweet old person, with all the tender reminiscences of the old days and the and childish prejudices against all things new. As might be expected, he lives in the past and always is delighted whenever he is asked to tell about the only life that he has ever really lived. Together with his aged wife he lives with his children and is known to local relief agencies who supplement the very small income he now derives from what is left of what was at one time a considerable fortune.

## REFERENCE

Personal interview with subject, Frank Berry, 1614 West Twenty-Second Street, Jacksonville, Florida

## FLORIDA FOLKLORE SLAVE CUSTOMS AND ANECDOTES

### MARY MINUS BIDDIE

Mary Minus Biddie, age one hundred five was born in Pensacola, Florida, 1833, and raised in Columbia County. She is married, and has several children. For her age she is exceptionally active, being able to wash and do her house work. With optimism she looks forward to many more years of life. Her health is excellent.

Having spent thirty-two years of her life as a slave she relates vividly some of her experiences.

Her master Lancaster Jamison was a very kind man and never mistreated his slaves. He was a man of mediocre means, and instead of having a large plantation as was usual in those days, he ran a boarding house, the revenue therefrom furnishing him substance for a livelihood. He had a small farm from which fresh produce was obtained to supply the needs of his lodgers. Mary's family were his only slaves. The family consisted of her mother, father, brother and a sister. The children called the old master "Fa" and their father "Pappy." The master never resented this appellation, and took it in good humor. Many travelers stopped at his boarding house; Mary's mother did the cooking, her father "tended" the farm, and Mary, her brother and sister, did chores about the place. There was a large one-room house built in the yard in which the family lived. Her father had a separate garden in which he raised his produce, also a smokehouse where the family meats were kept. Meats were smoked in order to preserve them.

During the day Mary's father was kept so busy attending his master's farm that there was no time for him to attend to a little farm that he was allowed to have. He overcame this handicap, however, by setting up huge scaffolds in the field which he burned and from the flames that this fire emitted he could see well enough to do what was necessary to

his farm.

The master's first wife was a very kind woman; at her death Mary's master moved from Pensacola to Columbia County.

Mary was very active with the plow, she could handle it with the agility of a man. This prowess gained her the title of "plow girl."

#### COOKING.

Stoves were unknown and cooking was done in a fireplace that was built of clay, a large iron rod was built in across the opening of the fireplace on which were hung pots that had special handles that fitted about the rod holding them in place over the blazing fire as the food cooking was done in a moveable oven which was placed in the fireplace over hot coals or corn cobs. Potatoes were roasted in ashes. Oft' times Mary's father would sit in front of the fireplace until a late hour in the night and on arising in the morning the children would find in a corner a number of roasted potatoes which their father had thoughtfully roasted and which the children readily consumed.

#### LIGHTING SYSTEM.

Matches were unknown; a flint rock and a file provided the fire. This occurred by striking a file against a flint rock which threw off sparks that fell into a wad of dry cotton used for the purpose. This cotton, as a rule, readily caught fire. This was fire and all the fire needed to start any blaze.

#### WEAVING.

The white folk wove the cloth on regular looms which were made into dresses for the slaves. For various colors of cloth the thread was dyed. The dye was made by digging up red shank and wild indigo roots which were boiled. The substance obtained being some of the best dye to be found.

#### BEVERAGES & FOOD.

Bread was made from flour and wheat. The meat used was pork, beef, mutton and goat. For preservation it was smoked and kept in the smokehouse. Coffee was used as a beverage and when this ran out as oft' times happened, parched peanuts were used for the purpose.

Mary and family arose before daybreak and prepared breakfast for the master and his family, after which they ate in the same dining room. When this was over the dishes were washed by Mary, her brother and sister. The children then played about until meals were served again.

#### WASHING and SOAP.

Washing was done in home-made wooden tubs, and boiling in iron pots similar to those of today. Soap was made from fat and lye.

## AMUSEMENTS.

The only amusement to be had was a big candy pulling, or hog killing and chicken cooking. The slaves from the surrounding plantations were allowed to come together on these occasions. A big time was had.

## CHURCH.

The slaves went to the "white folks" church on Sundays. They were seated in the rear of the church. The white minister would arise and exhort the slaves to 'mind your masters, you owe them your respect.' An old Christian slave who perceived things differently could sometimes be heard to mumble, "Yeah, wese jest as good as deys is only deys white and we's black, huh." She dare not let the whites hear this. At times meetin's were held in a slave cabin where some "inspired" slave led the services.

In the course of years Mr. Jamison married again. His second wife was a veritable terror. She was always ready and anxious to whip a slave for the least misdemeanor. The master told Mary and her mother that before he would take the chance of them running away on account of her meanness he would leave her. As soon as he would leave the house this was a signal for his wife to start on a slave. One day, with a kettle of hot water in her hand, she chased Mary, who ran to another plantation and hid there until the good master returned. She then poured out her troubles to him. He was very indignant and remonstrated with his wife for being so cruel. She met her fate in later years; her son-in-law becoming angry at some of her doings in regard to him shot her, which resulted in her death. Instead of mourning, everybody seemed to rejoice, for the menace to well being had been removed. Twice a year Mary's father and master went to Cedar Keys, Florida to get salt. Ocean water was obtained and boiled, salt resulting. They always returned with about three barrels of salt.

The greatest event in the life of a slave was about to occur, and the most sorrowful in the life of a master, FREEDOM was at hand. A Negro was seen coming in the distance, mounted upon a mule, approaching Mr. Jamison who stood upon the porch. He told him of the liberation of the slaves. Mr. Jamison had never before been heard to curse, but this was one day that he let go a torrent of words that are unworthy to appear in print. He then broke down and cried like a slave who was being lashed by his cruel master. He called Mary's mother and father, Phyliss and Sandy, "I ain't got no more to do with you, you are free," he said, "if you want to stay with me you may and I'll give you one-third of what you raise." They decided to stay. When the crop was harvested the master did not do as he had promised. He gave them nothing. Mary slipped away, mounted the old mule "Mustang" and galloped away at a mules snail speed to Newnansville where she related what had happened to a Union captain. He gave her a letter to give to Mr. Jamison. In it he reminded him that if he didn't give Mary's family what he had promised he would be put in jail. Without hesitation the old master complied with these pungent orders.

After this incident Mary and her family left the good old boss to seek a new abode in other parts. This was the first time that the master had in any way displayed any kind of unfairness toward them, perhaps it was the reaction to having to liberate them.

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