

Florida Slave Narratives: Maxwell, Henry

Federal Writers' Project

1936

"Up from Slavery" might well be called this short biographical sketch of Henry Maxwell, who first saw the light of day on October 17, 1859 in Lownes County, Georgia. His mother Ann, was born in Virginia, and his father, Robert, was born in South Carolina. Captain Peters, Ann's owner, bought Robert Maxwell from Charles Howell as a husband for Ann. To this union were born seven children, two girls—Elizabeth and Rosetta—and five boys—Richard, Henry, Simms, Solomon and Sonnie. After the death of Captain Peters in 1863, Elizabeth and Richard were sold to the Gaines family. Rosetta and Robert (the father) were purchased from the Peters' estate by Isham Peters, Captain Peters' son, and Henry and Simms were bought by James Bamburg, husband of Izzy Peters, daughter of Captain Peters. (Solomon and Sonnie were born after slavery.)

Just a tot when the Civil War gave him and his people freedom, Maxwell's memories of bondage-days are vivid through the experiences related by older Negroes. He relates the story of the plantation owner who trained his dogs to hunt escaped slaves. He had a Negro youth hide in a tree some distance away, and then he turned the pack loose to follow him. One day he released the bloodhounds too soon, and they soon overtook the boy and tore him to pieces. When the youth's mother heard of the atrocity, she burst into tears which were only silenced by the threats of her owner to set the dogs on her. Maxwell also relates tales of the terrible beatings that the slaves received for being caught with a book or for trying to run away.

After the Civil War the Maxwell family was united for a short while, and later they drifted apart to go their various ways. Henry and his parents resided for a while longer in Lownes County, and in 1880 they came to Titusville, with the two younger children, Solomon and Sonnie. Here Henry secured work with a farmer for whom he worked for \$12 a month. In 1894 he purchased a small orange

grove and began to cultivate oranges. Today he owns over 30 acres of orange groves and controls nearly 200 more acres. He is said to be worth around \$250,000 and is Titusville's most influential and respected colored citizen. He is married but has no children.

Source:

Excerpt from "Henry Maxwell" The Federal Writers' Project. Titusville, Florida, 1936.

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