

Margrett Nickerson: Ex-Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project 1936-1938

In her own vernacular, Margrett Nickerson was "born to William A. Carr, on his plantation near Jackson, Leon County, many years ago."

When questioned concerning her life on this plantation, she continues: "Now honey, it's been so long ago, I don' 'meber ev'ything, but I will tell you whut I kin as near right as possible; I kin 'member five uf Marse Carr's chillun; Florida, Susan, 'Lijah, Willie and Tom; cose Carr never 'lowed us to have a piece of paper in our hands."

"Mr. Kilgo was de fust overseer I 'member; I was big enough to tote meat an' stuff frum de smokehouse to de kitchen and to tote water in and git wood for granny to cook de dinner and fur de sucklers who nu'sed de babies, an' I carried dinners back to de hands."

"On dis plantation dere was 'bout a hunnerd head; cookin' was done in de fireplace in iron pots and de meals was plenty of pea, greens, cornbread burnt co'n for coffee - often de marster bought some coffee fur us; we got water frum de open well. Jes 'fore de big fun fiahed dey fotched my pa frum de bay whar he was makin' salt; he had heard dem say 'de Yankees is coming and wuz so glad."

"Dere wuz rice, cotton, co'n, tater fields to be tended to and cowhides to be tanned, thread to be spinned, and thread was made into ropes for plow lines."

"Ole Marse Carr fed us, but he did not care what an' whar, jes so you made dat money and when yo' made five and six bales o' cotton, said: 'Yo' an don' nuthin'."

"When de big fun fiahed on a Sattidy me and Cabe and Minnie Howard wuz settin' up co'n fur de plowers to come 'long and put dirt to 'em; Carr read de free papers to us on Sunday and de co'n and cotton had to be tended to - he tole us he wuz goin' to gi' us de net

proceeds (here she shuckles), what turned out to be de co'n and cotton stalks. Den he asked dem what would stay wid him to step off on de right and dem dat wuz leavin' to step off on de left."

"My pa made soap frum ashes when cleaning new ground - he took a hopper to put de ashes in, made a little stoll side de house put de ashes in and po' red water on it to drip; at night after gittin' off frum work he'd put in de grease and make de soap - I made it sometime and I made it now, myself."

"My step-pa useter make shoes frum cowhides fur de farm han's on de plantation and fur eve'body on de plantation 'cept ole Marse and his fambly; dey's wuz diffunt, fine."

"My grandma wuz Pheobie Austin - my mother wuz name Rachel Jackson and my pa wus name Edmund Jackson; my mother and uncle Robert and Joe wus stol' frum Virginia and fetched here. I don' know no niggers dat 'listed in de war; I don' 'member much 'bout de war only when de started talkin 'bout drillin' men fur de war, Joe Sanders was a lieutenant. Marse Carr's sons, Tom and Willie went to de war."

"We didn' had no doctors, only de grannies; we mos'ly used hippecat (ipecac) fur medicine."

"As I said, Kilgo wus de fust overseer I ricollec', then Sanders was nex' and Joe Sanders after him; John C. Haywood came in after Sanders and when de big fun fiahed old man Brookington wus dere. I never saw a nigger sold, but dey carried dem frum our house and I never see 'em no mo'."

"We had church wid de white preachers and dey tole us to mind our masters and missus and we would be saved; if not, dey said we wouldn'. Dey never tole us nothin' 'bout Jesus. On Sunday after workin' hard all de week dey would lay down to sleep and be so tired; soon ez yo' git sleep, de overseer would come an' wake you up an' make you go to church."

"When de big gun fiahed old man Carr had six sacks uf confederate

money whut he wuz carryin wid him to Athens, Georgia an' all de time if any uf us gals whar he wuz an' ax him 'Marse please gi us some money' (here she raises her voice to a high, pitiful tone) he says 'I aint got a cent' and right den he would have a chis so full it would take a whol' passle uv slaves to move it. He had plenty corn, taters, pum'kins, hogs, cows ev'ything, but he didn' gi us nothin but strong pain close and plenty to eat; we slept in ole common beds and my pa made up little cribs and put hay in dem fur de chillun."

"Now ef you wanted to keep in wid Marster Carr don' drap you shoes in de field and leave 'em- he'd beat you; you mus' tote you' shoes frum one field to de tother, didn' a dog ud be bettern you. He'd say 'You gun-haided devil, drappin' you' shoes an eve'thin' over de field'."

"Now jes lis'en, I wanna tell you all I kin, but I wants to tell it right; wait now, I don' wanna make no mistakes and I don' wanna lie on nobody- I ain' mad now an I know taint no use to lie, I takin' my time. I done prayed an' got all de malice out o' my heart and I ain' gonna tell no lie fer um and I ain' gonna tell no lie on um. I ain' never seed no slaves sold by Marster Carr, he wuz allus tellin' me he wuz gonna sell me but he never did- he sold my pa's fust wife though."

"Dere wuz Uncle George Bull, he could read and write and, chile, de white folks didn't lak no nigger whut could read and write. Carr's wife Miss Jane useter teach us Sunday School but she did not 'low us to tech a book wid us hands. So dey useter jes take uncle George Bull and beat him fur nothin; dey would beat him and take him to de lake and put him on a log and shev him in de lake, but he always swimmied out. When dey didn' do dat dey would beat him tel de blood run outen him and den trow him back in de ditch in de field and kivver him up wid dirt, head and years and den stick a stick up at his head. I wuz a water toter and had stood and seen um do him dat way more'n once and I stood and looked at um tel dey went 'way to de other rows and den I grabbed de dirt ofen him and he'd bresh de dirt off and say 'tank yo', git his hoe and go back to work. Dey beat him lak dat and he didn' do a thin' to git dat sort of treatment."

"I had a sister name Lytie Holly who didn' stand back on non' uv em; when dey'd git behin' her, she'd git behin' dem; she was det stubbo'n and when dey would beat her she wouldn' holler and jes take it and go on. I got some whuppin's wid strops but I wanter tell you why I am cripple today:

"I had to tote tater vines on my haid, me and Fred'rick and de han's would be callin fur em all over de field, but you know honey, de two us us could' git to all uvum at once, so Joe Sanders would hurry us up by beatin' us with strops and sticks and run us all over de tater ridge; he cripple us both up and den we couldn' git to all uv em. At night my pa would try to fix me up cose I had to go back to work nex' day. I never walk straight frum dat day to dis and I have to set here in dis chair now, but I don' feel mad none now. I feel good and wants to go to he'ven- I ain't gonna tel no lie on white nor black cose taint no use."

"Some uv de slaves run away, lots uv um. Some would be cot and when dey ketched em dey put bells on em; fust dey would put an iron ban' 'round dey neck and anunder one 'round de waist and rivet um together down de back; de bell would hang on de ban' round de neck so dat it would ring when de slaves walked and den dey wouldn' git 'way. Some uv dem wore dese bells three and four mont'n and when dey time wuz up dey would take em off 'em. Jake Overstreet, George Bull, John Green, Ruben Golder, Jim Bradley and a ho' uv others wore dem bells. Dis is whut I know, not whut somebody else say. I seen dis myself. En missus, when de big gun fiahed, de runerway slaves comed out de woods from all directions. We wuz in de field when it fiahed, but I 'member dey quz all very glad."

"After de war, we worked but we got pay fur it."

"Ole man Pierce and others would call some kin' of perlitical (political) meetin' but I could never understan' whut dey wuz talkin' 'bout. We didn' had no kin' uv schools and all I knows but dem is dat I sent my chilluns in Leon and Gadsden Counties."

"I had lots uv sisters and brothers but I can't 'member de names of none by Lytie, Mary, Patsy and Ella; my brothers, is Edmond and Cornelius Jackson. Cornelius is livin' now somewhere I think but I don' never see him."

"When de big gun fiahed I was a young missy totin' cotton to de scales at de ginhouse; ef de ginhouse wuz close by, you had to tote de cotton to it, but ef it quz fur 'way wagins ud come to de fields and weigh it up and take it to de ginhouse. I was still livin' near Lake Jackson and we went to Abram Bailey's place near Tallahassee. Carr turned us out without nuthin and Bailey gi'd us his hammoc' and we went dere for a home. Fust we cut down saplin's fur we didn' had no house, and took de tops uv pines and put on de top; den we put dirt on top uv dese saplin's and step' under dem. When de rain would come, it would wash all de dirt right down in our face and we'd hafter buil' us a house all over ag'in. We didn' had no body to buil' a house fur us, cose pa was gone and ma jes had us gals and we cut de saplin's fer de man who would buil' de house fer us. We live on Bailey's place a long time and fin'lly buil' us a log cabin and den we went frum dis cabin to Gadsden County to a place name Concord and dere I stay tel I come here 'fore de fiah."

"I had twelve chillun but right now missus, I can only 'member dese names: Robert, 'Lijah, Edward, Cornelius, Littie, Rachel and Sophie."

"I was converted in Leon County and after freedom I joined de Methodist church and my membership is now in Mount Zion A.M.E. Church in Jacksonville, Florida."

"My fust husban was Nelson Walker and de las' one was name Dave Nickerson. I don' think I was 20 years old when de big gun fiahed, but I was more' 17- I reckon I wuz a little older den Flossie May (a niece who is 17 years of age) is now."

Mrs. Nickerson, according to her information must be about 89 or 90 years of age, sees without glasses having never used them; she does not read or write but speaks in a convincing manner. She has most of her teeth and a splendid appetite. She spends her time

sitting in a wheel-chair sewing on quilts. She has several quilts that she has pieced, some from very small scraps which she has cut without the use of any particular pattern.

She has a full head of beautiful snowy white hair and has the use of her limbs, except her legs, and is able to do most things for herself.

She lives with her daughter at 1600 Myrtle Avenue, Jacksonville, Florida.

Source:

American Life Histories from the Library of Congress
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>

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