

Mississippi Narratives
Prepared by
The Federal Writer's Project of
The Works Progress Administration
For the State of Mississippi
Adaline Montgomery Age 78

Foreword: Adaline Montgomery lives in the old negro mill section, northeast part of Lyman, Miss. Her house was once a good 4-room negro cabin. She says she bought it from the mill company, but has now lost it through non-payment of taxes. As she is practically helpless, she always tries to get some negro family to live with her. She is a large woman, 5 ft. 6 in. tall, weighs about 180 lbs. She is very badly afflicted with rheumatism, knees badly swollen, so at times she can hardly walk. Her skin is very light, and she has long white hair with little kink. How she subsists, she will tell herself.

My name is Adaline Montgomery. To my count, I will be 78 yrs. old in August. Boy - to a great grandson - bring me that Bible out'n the house. (We were sitting on the porch)

She extracted a slip which said, August 12th, 1859. -- I got my age from my white folks, my mother's white folks.

I was bawn in Alabama, a little place called Buena Vista. My father's name? -- Here she smiled in a cryptic manner, turned her head and hesitated. I helped her out. He must have been a white man? --- He was, his name was George Nettles. He didn' own my mother, her marster was George Rackard, he was the one that bought her. George Nettles was a young man that lived on the next place to my mother's boss. He allus give me close an' shoes. I lived with his people some atter freedom, they had to kick me away from them.

My mother's husban' was stole from her - I came atterwards. My mother never did have but two chillun, one dark, one bright, that was me. Her other chile, he was much older than I was.

My mother didn' live in no Quarters, her marster didn'

have but two slaves, one man-servant an' her, she was the woman servant. She stayed in a little house to herself right in the yard. But she didn' get to work about the house much. She had to go out an' work jes' like a man, cut logs an' split rails. She never did earn no money, nothin but hard work, that's what she tole me.

I 'members being put down to a big platter of bread an' milk an' eatin' jes' like a little pig. I also 'members that my mother could cook the bes' rabbits yo' ever put in yo' mouth, an' possums an' coons.

I allus had good close. My old grandmother on your side gave 'em to me.

I was in my 18th or 19th year when I married. Both white an' black giv' me a weddin. They giv' me cakes an' little gifts. I borrid a white dress from a cullud lady in Mobile to be married in - she sent it to Buena Vista to me. They said it would bring me good luck to wear somethin' borrid. A cullud preacher, Paul Owens, married us.

My first man was Frank Montgomery. I has allus carried his name - this here las' husban' didn' stay with me long enough to change my name. I lived with Frank Montgomery a long time, long enough to have 9 head of chillun. He lef' 'count of some trouble, an' I ain' heered from him since. (In the meantime the family had left Alabama and come to the great sawmill industry of south Mississippi.)

I got jes' one chile livin' now. She lives in that house back of me, an' her name is Ellen Reynolds. That gal here on the porch is her daughter an' she has 4 chillun. That little gal ironin' there is Ellen's grandchile, my great grandchile, an' she is the smartest little gal ever you seen. How old is you, honey? Eight years, an' she can clean up a kitchen better'n mos' cullud women. Ef you had her to work for you, you would drive all the cullud womens off.

My mother's mistis, Miss Caroline Rackard had some chillun, but I disremembers about them. I don' 'member her house at all, but I does 'member Mis' Car'line's father's house, it was part hewed logs. They used to carry a lot of us little chilluns there an' feed us. They had a big dirt oven an' baked corn meal light bread in it.

I don't know, but I think I was allus a kin' of pet chile. They would see me first, it seemed like. Atter Freedom, I went to school to my marster's father, ole man Mike Rackard. All the chillun was cullud, but at first, we was taught by white teachers - there was no cullud folks with learnin' to teach us then. What makes me think I was a pet chile, Marse Rickard would open his dinner bucket, an' giv me part of his lunch every day. I learned to read an' to write both in them days. My aunty on your side taught me to write. She would set copies of cap'tal letters for me when I was nussin' her chillun.

I can 'member my white grandmother tying little red ribbons on my hair, I had nice long hair, an' carryin' me to church. At firs' we went to the white folks' church, an' then later, us cullud folks had our own church. The firs' church I jined was a Baptis' church, but my husban' was a Methodis', so I thought if we stayed together, I ought to jine his church. My white aunty read the Bible to me every night an' made me ten' Sunday School.

I 'members one song we used to sing, I was raised on it. Here she sang in a sweet voice, but was uncertain of her words. The nearest she could recall the words, prompted by a granddaughter was

"To the Sunday school rejoice we will go,

A place where all are happy here below.

Away, away, we learn to seek our home above.

Away, away to the moments of labor

Up with Him to the House of School

Oh, to Him be praise to the Lawd of Sabbath,

An' seek our Home above."

--Incoherent as this stanza is, it is just as the old woman sang it, an' with much skill she adapted her tune to fit the words. --

No, I don' believes in no hoodoos or ghostes. I don' believe in anything you can't put in yo' stummick. If I could hoodoo you, I ud get that pretty dress you has on.

How does I live? I gets \$3.80 a month Old Age 'Sistance. Yo' know I can't live on that. I'm not able to work no more, as long as I was able to work, I was allus cookin' or washin' an' ironin' for white folks. But now I can't work, some of the good white folks brings me vegetables, an' I sells 'em out to other cullud folks for them, an' makes me a little percent. That helps me a little, jes' a little, but still I hasn't enough to eat. I hasn't seen a piece of meat, in I don' know when, an' it seems like the older I gets, the more I craves meat. (While I was there, some one sent in a large bucket of butter beans to sell on commission. These were disposed of in a few minutes.)

I has these few things in my house, lef' from when I was younger, an' my man was with me. I has no sheets or pillow cases any more an' I never did get none from the Relief, but I takes what I gets an' is thankful for it. The Relief has given me a few clothes, some underwear. I thanks God for what I gets, they don' have to give it to us. I'm not comin' now, I'm a goin'.

-- As I rose to go, I handed her a quarter. Her eyes filled with tears. "Now, I can get a piece of meat." "Son", to the same small boy, "take this quarter, an' go' to the big store, an' get yo' granny a piece of meat." "May the Lawd bless you, lady."

Second Interview.

I'll tell you why I speaks better English than some of the other cullud folks. I have a right to, because the woman who raised me - my white folks would c'rect me along with their own children. Many a time has my ears been pulled for speakin' flat in front of the white children. Sometimes I make a mistake an' say chillun for children. My memory is short now - but I can talk real nice when I stop to think. When I spoke wrong, I used to stop an' c'rect myself.

I lived in Monroe county, Ala, until all my chillun was born. Me an' my man, Frank Montgomery, farmed when we first married. He stayed with me a long time, but lef' me when my chillun was little. He got into some kin' of trouble, I jes' don't know 'xactly what it was, an' I ain' seen him since he went off.

I stayed on in Alabama till all my chillun was grown. I cooked for a white family that put out about 200 acres of crop, an' had a big store, too. I was a good cook in them days, but I can't see to cook now, or stan' on my feet, they is so swollen with rheumatism. I never did think in them days, I would come to what I is now, almost starvin'!

I came to Mississippi in 1907, an' lived at Wiggins the first three years. Then I moved here to Lyman, when the Ingram-Day Co. had the mill. I was offered \$5 a week to cook in a home then, but I needed more, I had two daughters with me, that was sick.

So I run the cullud boarding house, an' done real well. I never did have no trouble in my boardin' house - but sometimes people would jump me. But I made enough money to take my daughter to New Orleans to be operated on. I has always had to do for myself, sence I been here, an' you know it is hard for a poor widder woman to fight her way. She has a lot to put up with. Now my gal that's left is mighty low sick, she has died away two times the past week.

Going back to slave times, my recollect is no good anymore, but I can remember the Yankees comin' through. Us chillun was skeered to death of 'em when we heard the horses feet go pit-pat, pit-pat, pit-pat, such big horses, an' all the men had on hats alike an' close alike. I hid behin' a tree an' peeped out. I never did see no Kluklux, but I heered of 'em. They used to tell me when I was little that if I didn' be good an' go on to bed, they was goin' to give me to the Kluklux.

I heered that tale of some of the slaves thinkin they was goin' to get 40 acres an' a mule. Some of 'em thought it was so, but I never heered of any of 'em gettin it, nor of their marsters givin' 'em anything.

As for these young niggahs, I jes' can't tell you what I thinks of 'em. It is so bad that I can't tell you. Of course, they has schoolin' now, but that's all I can say.

I don't know many of the cullud folks in Lyman now. I don' visit an you has to visit to know folks.

An' I don't go to church for I ain' sufficient. My legs is too bad to walk an' I don't have fitten close or shoes, an' nothin' to wear on my head. No, I'm not a Catholic - I tole you I was a Methodis', but I never did believe in goin' to church without a hat on.

They sent me two dresses from the Relief last week, but I do wish I could get some sheets an' pillow slips, you know I likes to go clean. But if you see the lady an' ax her about it, don' say I was dissatisfied or grumblin', for I is thankful for what I gets. The white folks is good to me, an' the Lord, He don' forget me.

Interviewer: Mrs. C. E. Wells

Transcribed by Ann Allen Geoghegan

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