

Mississippi Narratives
Prepared by
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Aunt Jane Morgan age 106

Foreword: Aunt Jane Morgan, 106 years old, is believed to be the oldest ex-slave in south Mississippi. Aunt Jane resides about 12 miles from Hattiesburg on the old rifle range road near the Sheeplow community. Attired in skirts that sweep the ground, a little black tattered shawl, and extra-sized easy walkers, the gray, be-whiskered negress sits calmly beneath a great oak in front of her little log cabin, and smoking her pipe, tells stories of slavery times. When questioned which period of time she prefers, the ante-bellum days or the present, she quickly says "the old days." Aunt Jane lived in Jasper county, near old Paulding, on a plantation owned by the McNairs during the Civil War. She says that her mammy was Tina Morgan and her pappy, George Morgan.

"I kin remember hearing dem Yankees comin' down de road yit. Dey hosses sounded like thunder, and de head man, he allus blowed on a fife and de hosses prance and keep time, dey did. Us chilluns all run an' jump in de ol' well an' pull de wooden kivver down over us when de soljers came. My young missus, she jes sit an' cry an' cry, while de Yankees make us niggers cook everything on de place for dem to eat. I was jes 15 den, an' my missus git so scared at nights, I always slept at her feet. Den, when day light come, I kep' de chilluns in de chimney corner.

"My young missus, she jes finished school when de war broke out, and she come home an' mar'ied young marster, den he have to go to de war, and leave us niggers to take care of young missus. She was good to us niggers, but sometimes slaves do run away. When dey did, dey always managed to run through de pig pen or put red pepper in dey shoes so de nigger dogs couldn't follow dem.

"When de speculators come, dey take all de niggers on de place what don't have heirs, and buy 'em. But us family we stay together, an' I worked in de house and taken care of de chilluns. Aunt Susanne, she cooked an' washed de dishes.

"I used to go to de smoke house go' to git smoke sausage, caze hit was my favorite meat, and young missus sometimes see me, and come out and call, 'Jane you in that sausage ag'in?" an' I says, 'Yes mam, I jes got a little bit.' "We had lard cracklings, beef, and plenty to eat and wear in dem days too.

"Some times we hopped in de fields too, and when we did, three of us chilluns allus rode home on a big ol' grayhoss. Den we would tote water in long necked gourds clear to de house, but we didn't mind dat, caze we knowed dat corn pone an' collards would be waitin' fer us when we was through.

"Ag'in young missus would take us to de baptizin' at de river, and we chilluns would ride behind in de buggy. An' some time, we would go to a funeral. In dem days, dey jes had plain homemade boarded-up coffins, specially fer de niggers what died - and allus jes a dirt grave. Dats why I guess de slave graves is so hard to find today, caze dey 'bout all washed way.

"Our men folks had straw hats fer de summer. We made dese from palmetto leaves what grows in de swamps. Afte' de leaves are picked we dipped 'em in hot water. Den de chilluns, dey strip 'em, an' de wimmin plait 'em an' make de hats. We had homemade shoes too, in dem days. De leather was tanned on our place, and dem shoes sho' last's longer dan dese do today. We all was always so proud to git new shoes. We had woolen undershirts dat was wove on de looms and woolen jackets what we dyed wid laurel leaves to make dem yellow.

We carded our hair caze we never had no combs, but de cards dey worked better. We used de cards to card wool wid also, and we jes wet our hair and den card hit. De cards dey had wooden handles and strong steel wire teeth.

Once de Ku Kluxes cum to our place and take two of our niggers off. We never knowed dey had done nothin' but we sho never seen dem niggers no more - no sir we aint.

We used to help at de spinning too but we didn't do de main work. Our missus could spin bout 5 or 6 yards a day.

We made medicine out of May apple roots and coprus we burnt and made pills fer liver tonics. All our medicine in dem days we made from roots and weeds.

"Ah don't know - Ah likes hit now and ah liked hit den - but ah sho cant forgit slavery times. Ah don seen three wars and I'm gwine to see de next one too I is."

Interviewer's note: Aunt Jane Morgan, although 106 years old, is able to get about with the aid of a stick. The old negress is about 5 feet 4 inches in height and weighs about 105 pounds. She has a short kinky mop of white hair like wool and an uneven growth of gray whiskers about half an inch long standing out on her wrinkled chin. Around her head she wears a white bandage - more for ornamental purposes or force of habit, while a little black tattered shawl can always be seen about her shoulders. Aunt Jane also wears extra-sized easy walkers and long ground-sweeping skirts. She is never seen without pipe and knows good tobacco when she gets it. Most of her time is spent sitting in a little old home made chair with a skin covered bottom out in front of her log cabin with a dirt and stick chimney and under a great oak tree. Aunt Jane likes to remind you that she has lived through three wars and that if her white folks had not been good to her she would not be living today. A little half fed yellow hound dog walks up and down the yard or chases the chickens out of the tater patch nearby. Last week she went fishing in the creek and fell in - "but hit never even give me a cold," she remarked. Aunt Jane's vision is remarkable, and while being interviewed called the writer's attention to a tall object among a pine growth fully a mile away. With only a few teeth her articulation is bad. She has a keen sense of hearing and her memory is exceptionally good. Aunt Jane seems to be in perfect health. Although she does no work other than keeping her one room cabin she contends that she is going to live to see that other war.