

Mississippi Narratives
Prepared by
The Federal Writer's Project of
The Works Progress Administration
For the State of Mississippi
Charity Jones
Age 84
Friars Point, Mississippi
November 17, 1938

"My mother, Charoletter Williams, was a slave of Mr. Frank Williams of Deeson, Miss., Bolivar County. Frank Williams' father gave my mother and her family to Frank. My father and mother had been separated when they were sold to different owners. My mother's owner wouldn't sell my mother to my father's owner, and my father's owner wouldn't sell him to my mother's owner. So our family never did get together again since I was a child. My father died in slavery. Mr. Frank Williams got tired of farming, so he sold out to Major Tarry. The night when slavery was freed, all the negroes got together and laughed and sang and danced all night, rejoicing."

"After my mother had been with Major Tarry several months, she became very fond of the family as well as Major Tarry. After freedom was declared, my mother continued to work for the Tarrys the rest of her life.

There were nine children in our family and I am the only one left. Dey named me Charity, 'kase dey said 'Charity begins at home' an' I reckon I sho' stay at home mos' of de time."

"Marse John Page had a big fine house an' it was white as snow an' big shade trees in de yard. De kitchen was a log house set 'way back in de yard, an' de cook had ter tote de grub frum de

kitchen ter de Big House. Dere was a shed dat re'ched frum de Big House ter de kitchen ter keep de rain off'n us an' de grub. Dey had no stove an' cooked on a big fire place. Dey baked cakes in a three legged oven wid a fire under it an' a fire on de top. Dey roasted 'taters in de ashes, an' every Sunday dey baked bread an' biscuits in a big brick oven in de yard. Dey built a fire in dat oven an' when it got hot dey pulled de fire out'n de oven an' den put big pans of biscuits an' bread in dere an' when dey come out dey tasted like cake."

"We had plen'y 'lasses an' honey ter eat, an' de white folks would see ter it dat all de niggers was well fed. All de log houses in de quarters had gardens an' den de white folks would deal out ter every nigger his share of grub ter take ter de house for ter eat de next week. De niggers never wor'ied 'bout sompin' ter eat."

"De oberseer would blow dat big 'konk' every mornin' at de break of day an' den de men had ter git ter de lot an' feed de mules an' hosses an' den dey would eat dey own breakfast an' git ter dat fiel'. De women had ter go jes like de man an' all de chilluns was car'ied ter de big yard whar old Granny stayed an' lef' wid her. She had a log house close ter de Big House an' she was too old ter do much work, so she had ter 'tend de chilluns whil'st dey mammies was in de fiel'."

"Jes 'fo de oberseer would blow dat 'konk' a big pan of milk an' bread was car'ied in de yard an' poured in de trough. It was a big trough made of a big log hollowed out an' had legs under it. We chilluns all had a wooden spoon an' we got 'roun' dat trough an' et dat bread an' milk. I kep' my wooden spoon for many years an' some of my grand chilluns throwed it 'way. My uncle made all de wooden spoons on dat place."

"We played in de yard wid de white an' nigger chilluns an' de leetle babies was put on granny's bed in de house, an' when we was bad, old granny would whup us an' sometimes Old Missus would git us. We was skeered of Old Missus, but she was good ter us. Old granny was named Teny. She was my own grandmammy an' she was brought down ter Liberty by a big fat man an' sol' on de block for \$1200. Mr. John Washington Page bought her an' when she got too old ter work she had ter look afte' de chilluns in de yard."

"Old Missus larn't me how ter card bats an' spin an' how ter weave cloth an' I could weave now iffen I had de loom. She larn't me how ter sew an' sweep an' I he'ped tote de grub frum de kitchen ter de Big House, an' sometimes I would slip a bite ter eat when I was totin' it back frum de house, dey allus had sich good stuff ter eat. My missus larn't me how ter read an' write. She larn't me every thing I know."

"My mammy had a log cabin not far frum de big house. It had a dirt chimbly an' a big fire place, an' dere was not much in dat house. De bed was made wid holes bored in de logs an' one post sot in de floor an' pieces of timber put in de holes an' laid 'cross ways an' den de bed was put on dat. We had a table an' some stools an' de clo'es was hung on de wall on pegs."

"Mammy worked in de fiel', but when dey had big comp'ny she had ter he'p de cook in de kitchen an' dey sho' did have good eatin's. De white folks had a heap of comp'ny an' when Christmas would come we had lots of fine eatin' --- dey baked cakes an' stocked dem in de big pantry an' pies, sich as pumpkin pies an' apple pies."

"At dat time we had dances in de quarters. Old Jo would play de fiddle an' some of us would cut de pigeon wing an' I could dance better'n de white folks kin now. I was a chile but dey 'lowed me ter dance."

"Old Missus would cut apples an' peaches every year an' put dem on a scaffold in de yard ter dry an' put me an' some other chulluns ter mind de flies off'n dem an' we better not let a fly light on 'em. Old Marster would kill beef cattle an' put dat meat on a scaffold an' build a smoke under it an' dry it, an' dat dried meat was good, an' when dey kilt hogs dey would kill 'bout 20 at a time, an' we had meat all de year roun'. Dey had apple trees an' peach trees an' plums, an' we had cows an' plen'y milk. We was never hongry."

"We didn' have no church but went wid de white folks an' dey only went 'bout once a month. All de slaves sot over on one side of de house while de white men sot in de middle of de house. Men an' women didn' set together in de meetin' house dem days. De Sundays we didn' go ter church we worked de garden or went fishin' or huntin', but none of de slaves couldn' leave de place

widout a piece of paper to show de patrol. He had dogs an' would run any nigger widout a pass frum his marster."

"When I was a chile I could hear dem talkin' 'bout Mr. Jefferson Davis an' how he was gwineter whup de Yankees, an' how de white folks was gwineter win dat war. Old Marster didn' go ter de war but sont his two boys, an' Old Missus she jes cried an' cried when dey lef' ter j'in de regiment. Now, long afte' dey was gone dey got news dat young Marse Leonard was shot, an' right den dey sont my uncle ter dat army ter nuss young Marster. But Marster died an' 'fo my uncle could leave de battle fiel' a bullet done hit him side of de head, an' kilt him an' he never come home."

"When we heard de Yankees was comin', dey had de carriage an' hosses hid in de swamp an' de silver an' money buried an' when de Yankees did come dey tuk all our grub in de smoke house an' pantry. Dey tuk de blankets an' quilts but dey didn' hurt nobody an' none of de niggers j'ined 'em."

"One day de oberseer, he blowed dat 'konk' an' called all de niggers ter de house an' Old Marster tol' us how we was free, an' Old Missus cried an' Marster said iffen we would stay wid him an' finish de crop, he'd share it wid all of us; an' all de slaves stayed wid him an' he treated us kind.

Mammy stayed dere 'bout four years an' den she lef'."

"I tuk up wid a black nigger man an' followed him ter town 'kase he tol' me dere was more money in de town dan in de country. But when I got ter town I found I had ter work jes like I was in de country. We worked mighty hard an' sometime we didn' have 'nough ter eat. Den afte' while dat nigger lef' me for a nigger gal; den I had ter make my own livin'."

"Somewhar 'bout 1882 I mar'ied Sam Jones an' we stayed together 51 years when he died 'bout two er three years ago. No, we had no weddin', we jes went ter de Judge an' tol' him we wanted ter git mar'ied an' he mar'ied us."

"I has seven chilluns. Two of dem lib on de farm here in Amite County an' two lib in Pike

County on farms an' de others lib up north. I lib here wid my darter an' her husband. I kin 'tend de chulluns an' churn an' piece quilts, but not able ter do much."

"I am a Baptist an' got my membership in old Salem Church. I was baptized in de crick not far frum de church. Dere was a big crowd of us baptized at de same time an' mos' of de women shouted, an' I did too I was so happy. I'se been happy every since."

"When I was a chile dey kep' me skeered ter death by tellin' me de ha'nts was goin' ter git me, an' I believed it, but afte' I got grown up I larn't dere was no ha'nts. I won't go ter de grave yard afte' dark for one time I was passin' de graveyard afte' night wid my husband an' he seed sompin' white wid wings floppin' up an' down an' it was comin' right to us, an' I said 'O, Lorsy, please save me,' an' Sam said, 'Run an' save yourse'f,' an' I done jes whut Sam tol' me ter do, but Sam beat me home, an' when I got dere I jes fell down on de steps an' hollowed an' hollowed, 'Save me O, Lord.' Since den I never have been ter de grave yard afte' dark. Dere was a old mill house not far frum de Big House an' we chulluns, bofe white an' black, would slip off an' go up in de loft for ter play, an' granny tol' us 'Raw head an' bloody bones' would git us iffen we didn' stay 'way frum dat place, an' we was skeered to go back dere. But I never seed 'raw head an' bloody bones."

"When I was a big gal dey tol' me iffen I would git a piece of looking glass an' go ter de well on de fust day of May an' look over my lef' shoulder wid de glass jes so de sun would shine in dat well, I would see de man I was goin' ter marry. I did it an' I sho did see Sam Jones jes as plain as daylight."

"When any of us niggers got sick old Granny doctored us. She would give us red oak bark tea for runnin' off at de bowels an' for young girls when dey re'ch a certain age, an' she made peach tree leaf poltice ter take out inflammation on de sides an' pain in de back, an' she mix grease an' soap an' put it on boils, an' dat hurt. When all de babies was borned old granny was right dere ter take de baby. She was a midwife."

"We niggers have worked mighty hard since we was sot free an' made mighty leetle money."

You'se white folks worry 'bout makin' money an' havin' everything fine, but we niggers was larn't in slab'ry times not to worry an' we don't. We never had much an' we never 'zackly 'spected much. Jes so we lib today, dat is all we keer 'bout, but you can't sleep iffен you got no bread in de house for tomorrow. Dat is what slab'ry larn't us."

"De fust money I made was hoein' corn. I worked a whole week for my dinner an' \$2.00, an' I got a pair of shoes wid dat money. Afte' I went ter town, I washed an' done every kind of work an' got mighty leetle pay for it. Well, I don't work much now. I can't stay here much longer an' den I'se gwineter go ter a place whar I kin sho' 'nough res' an' res' for good."

Interviewer: Unknown

Transcribed by Ann Allen Geoghegan

Mississippi Narratives

Prepared by

The Federal Writer's Project of
The Works Progress Administration
For the State of Mississippi