

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

Edd Roby

Age 74 years, height 5' 6", weight 165 lbs., color yellowish brown, physical condition bad.

Depends entirely on himself for support; not able to do a days work.

"I was born in Attalla county somewhere close to Kosciusko July 2, 1863. My Pa was Jerry Roby an' Ma was Sarah. Had one brother, Leonard, an' one sister, Gabarella Johnson, who lives in Alton, Ill., an' I jus' don't know if brother Leonard still livin or not." "Our Marsa durin' slavery days was Ki Roby an' I's forgot what dey said ole Missus' name was. I was so small I don't 'member nothin' 'bout dem times myself." "Pa claimed he had a tolerable good time. To tell de truth my Pa was pretty heavy mixed (white and black). He was used fo' de' house boy. My Ma has told me at times she had a pretty tough time." "Pa said Mr. Roby owned six or seven families o' slaves an' I jus' don't know how much land he had."

"I's heard Pa talk 'bout de patrollers dat come 'round back den. Dey would get after him lots o' times. When slaves got off ole Marsas place without a pass dese patrollers would sho' get em an' whip em." "Our white Marsa didn't 'low his slaves to read an' 'rite. Went to de white folks church an' den wouldn't low 'em to pray. Would whip 'em when day catched niggers prayin' at home or anywhere else. Dey told me 'bout one old woman (Nigger) on de place dat prayed a heep but she allus put her head down in de pot when she went to pray so as de white folks couldn't hear her.

One day dis old woman was a prayin' in de pot an' got so full o' 'ligion 'till she got her head out dat pot an' was jus' a tellin' de news. Old Missus heard her an' went to see what was de matter. Missus, she got happy an' finally Marsa heard 'em an' went to see what de trouble was. Marsa, he got full o' 'ligion too an' dey all had a big time. After dat day dey said dey never did whip 'em fo' prayin' no more. Course dey wouldn't let 'em pray durin' work hours."

"Pa stayed with Mr. Roby two years after de war ended. Marsa didn't give 'em nothin' when dey left. Fact o' de business, Pa hadn't never been told he was a free man 'till de latter part o' de year. Dat year he jus' got what Marsa wanted to give him but de next year he traded wid him 'fore hand an' got half de crop." "De Yankees didn't come through by Marsa Roby's Pa an' Ma said. Dey heard of 'em in other places doin' lots o' dirt but not near us."

"My fust wife was Liza Miller an' my second wife was Nannie Mullen an' our only livin' child is Leonard Roby, now farming in Webster county near Dancy, Miss. My third wife is de one I's livin' wid now an' she was Ida Spencer. We's livin here wid Mr. Skelton an' I helps on de farm when I's able. He says course I ain't no regular hand, I's what he calls a half-time hand. I hasn't been able to make a regular hand fo' eight years. I has rheumatism an' high blood pressure. Fact is I jus' ain't no 'count." "I's been livin' 'bout in dis country fo' a long long time. Started workin' on de farm fo' myself 'bout time I become of age an' dats all I's ever done. Ain't never had no education but I's allus tried to live right. Fo' de Lords sake if dis' here govenrment ever goin a' help me any I sho' wish dey'd do it now." "Like I said befo', course I was born in 1863 an' don't have no recollection o' slavery days. All I know is what Pa an' Ma has told me 'bout de times dey had. Course Pa, bein' what dey called houseboy, coachman or driver, had a heep better time 'n most slaves did. From all 'counts tho' Ma went through de roughs tho'. See, Ma, she belonged to

de Hammonds, an' Pa, he belonged to Ki Roby, Ma was a regular field hand an' wasn't never treated so very good by her white folks." "Marsa Roby an' Marsa Hammond didn't neither one give Ma or Pa anythin' when they left 'em--not even nothin' fo' de work they done after de surrender." "When Ma an' Pa left their white masters after de surrender we moved from Attala over in Choctaw county, 'bout five miles north o' French Camp, close to what was den old Bankston. My earliest recollection is when we lived here. I's heard 'em tell 'bout de Yankees comin' through Bankston an' burnin' de town completely down. Know dey was a big cloth factory here in dem days an' I's seed de old chimney heep o' times where de factory used to be." "I's seed de White Caps pass in droves 40 an' 50 at a time. My God! it would scare us niggers to death. They'd ride up--tell us little niggers they wanted a bucket o' water--would have a rubber sack tied round their necks an' pour a whole bucket full in it. Us niggers, course, thought one man drunk a bucket o' water an' knowed dat was humanly impossible fo' a real man to do. We'd be scared half to death fo' a week."

"I lived in Choctaw county, round French Camp 'till 1897 when I moved over in Webster county an' stayed 'till 'bout 1912 when I come over here in Calhoun an' has been livin' 'round here ever since. I's never done nothin' in my life but farm. Never got no education an' thats all I ever knowed how to do."

"I makes my livin' now days by part time work (Dat is I works when I's able an' so does my wife) an' dats bout half-time. I gets \$2.00 a month from de State Relief Aid."

"I 'member some de colord folks back in Choctaw county goin' to school to Booker T.

Washington. He was 'bout my age, but I never did know much 'bout him myself."

"I just does 'member my grandma. I never will forget a story she used to tell me 'bout a certain old nigger woman what was owned by some white folks dat didn't low niggers to pray. Dis old nigger woman was down over de tubs washin' one day an' got so full o' ligion she started prayin'. Her Marsa come to find out de trouble an' threatened to whip her fo' disobeyin' his orders. She said: "You can whip me--you can kill dis body but you can't kill my soul." Marsa say: "You God damn fool you ain't got no sense no way." Her marsa made like he didn't believe in ligion but after dat day dis old nigger woman prayed when she wanted to an' wasn't nothin ever said bout it."

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