

Interviewer: Mrs. Holmes
Transcribed by Ann Allen Geoghegan
Mississippi Narratives
Prepared by
The Federal Writer's Project of
The Works Progress Administration
For the State of Mississippi
Filmore Ramsey

"Yes, Mrs. Holmes, I am an old slave. I was born before the War. My Mistress was Miss Mary Stewart. She was the daughter of Mr. Mat Ramsey and Miss Julia Ramsey. She married Mr. Dick Stewart.

My mammy was named Mandy, she was a bright yellow woman. Mr. Mat Ramsey bought her in Louisville Kentucky and brought her to Mississippi. My daddy was named Jack Ramsey. He had seven head of children. Yes, they are all dead cept my sister Katy Sterling, and the last I heard of her she was living in Ruston, Louisiana.

I was born in 1851, and when I first saw the light Mr. Mat Ramsey gave me to his daughter, Miss Mary, and Miss Mary raised me right in the house with the white folks. She was good to me. I had every thing to eat that the white folks had. I had good clothes, but I never had a pair of pants til I was about ten years old. I always wore long tail shirts, made of home spun cloth. That was good cloth, it never wore out. My pants was made of home spun cloth too.

Miss Mary was an educated woman. She went to school at Woodland. She sure was smart. She taught me to read, write and spell and to recite speeches. Before you go I want to say a speech for you that she used to make me say for big company when they came to the big house.

Yes, she used to whip me when I was bad. When I was a boy I was bad about going to other white folks houses and bringing home things that was not mine. She would have the Overseer whip me and then make me go back and carry it home.

The Over-seer was named, Mr. John Brooks. One time some one stole a sheep, and the Over-seer went to all the negroes houses and smelt to cooking pots to find out who got the sheep. They found it at the home of Davey. Mr. Brooks tied his feet and hands to a stake and sure did lay the lash on him. Miss Mary had to go and make him quit, when she thought he had been punished

enough. Miss Mary was mighty good to her slaves, but she wanted them to do right and when they did not do right she had them whipped.

Mr. Ramsey owned two big plantations. One in Mississippi and one in East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana. His plantation near Centerville was a cotton plantation. But a merchant was about to fail in New Orleans and he owed Mr. Mat Ramsey and Mr Ramsey had to take a plantation about five miles from Baton Rouge and Miss Mary and her husband Mr. Dick, went down there to the sugar plantation.

We was down there when the War broke out. Mr. Dick went to Baton Rouge and raised a company called Point Coupee Battery. While he was stationed at Baton Rouge, every week Miss Mary would put me on a horse and send me to Baton Rouge to carry a basket of good things to eat. O, that basket had a lot of good things in it. Sometimes Mr. Dick would keep me in Camp several days to wait on him.

When the Yankees got to Baton Rouge, nearly all of Miss Mary's young men slaves ran away and went and joined the Yankees.

Before the War was over, the levee broke and covered Miss Mary's sugar plantation, and she took us all and everything she had and brought us back to Mississippi to the Batchelor plantation not far from Centerville.

When the War was over Miss Mary told us we was free and could stay with them and work or go some where else. Some of the slaves stayed and some went other places. I stayed with Miss Mary til she died.

She had a kernel cancer on her breast, and before the War Mr Dick took her to New Orleans and had it cut off, but it came back and killed her in 1876. I was standing at the foot of the bed when she died. She was blessed white folks. I love her memory.

No, I never saw a ghost. I dont believe in ghosts. Miss Mary taught me there was no such things as ghosts. Yes, I plant my garden on the moon, and I wont look at the new moon through brush, that would bring me bad luck. When you see a heap of black birds flying low, that means the weather is going to be bad. When I leave home and have to go back, I make a cross and spit in it to keep from bringing me bad luck.

Yes, the White Caps rode about here a lot, but they never bothered me. They did run a lot of negroes off their places, but not me. You see it was like this. The Jews owned a heap of this land, and put negroes on it to work and when the years was out the negroes owed the Jews everything they made. The white folks said the negroes stole from them.

They had the White Caps to ride at night and whip the negroes and make them leave the Jews farm and go work for them. But they never got me.

I never saw the Klu Klux I heard they were riding about but they never came my way.

I bought this place in 1897. Me and my old woman work hard and paid for it. Now we are old and can hardly work at all, and can't pay the taxes. They haven't put us out yet, but I am going to stay here as long as they let me. I am 86 years old and my wife is 75. No, all my children are dead, just me and my old woman here.

Now before you go, let me recite for you the speech I used to say for the white folks.

On Linden, where the sun was low, All bloodless lay the untrodden snow

And dark as winter was the flow Of Iser, rolling rapidly.

(I omit six verses. Mrs. H.)

Few, few shall part where many meet,

The snow shall be their winding sheet,

And every turf beneath their feet

Shall be a soldier's sepulchre." By Thomas Campbell.

Interviewer's note: I tried to write this as near as the old darkey told me. He is old and his hair is white, but his mind is clear and he enjoyed telling me things about his Miss Mary. He lives about two miles south of Liberty, Mississippi. On what is called the Liberty and Clinton Road. Filmore Ramsey is his name.

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