

## **Title: Mississippi Slave Narratives from the WPA Records**

### **Submitter: MSGenWeb Slave Narrative Project**

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### **Hamp Kennedy age 78**

Foreword: Uncle Hamp Kennedy, a farmer, 78 years old, weighs a bout 135 pounds, and is about 5 feet 9 inches high. His head is bald with a little gray fuzz over his ears and growing low toward the nape of his neck. He does not wear spectacles nor smoke a pipe. His face is clean shaven. Physically active, he does not use a crutch or cane and his hearing, eyesight, and mind appear alert. The old Negro cannot read or write, but he has a remarkable memory. He seems very happy in his little cabin where he and his wife live alone, and his eyes beam with interest when he remembers and discusses slavery times. "I was jes a little nigger when de War broke out - 'bout fo' years ol', my white folks say. I had a sister an' three brudders. My mammy an' pappy was Mary Kennedy an' Lon Kennedy. My mammy was Mary Denham befo' she mar'ded. I was born an' raised at Mahned, Mississippi. Old Miss Bill Griffin was my missus. "De Yankees sho' come to our house - yes air, dey did. De fust time dey kotched our hogs an' out off de bind part an' take hit wid 'em. De front part dey lef' in de fiel'. Dey carries corn in de saddle bags an' throwed hit out to de chickens. Den when de chickens come up to eat dey kotched 'em by de head an' wring hit off an' take all de chickens wid 'em. "Our white folks buried all dey silver in de grom' an' hid dey hosses in de deep gullies near de plantation. Kven dey clo'ce an' meat dey hide, an' de soljers didn' find nothin' 'cepin' de horsees, an' dey lef' dey tired ones an' tuk our fresh ones wid 'em. Dey burned de fiel's an' orchards so our white folks couldn' he'p feed our soljers none. "One time I 'member when Aunt Charity an' Winnie McInnis, two niggers on our plantation, tried to swim some of our hosses cross de riber to

save 'em frum de soljers an' dey rode 'cross in a little boat. Well, when de hosses got in de middle of de water, up comes a 'gator, grabs one hoss by de ear, an' we sin't neber seed him no mo'."When niggers run 'way frum de plantation dey was whupped, but dey had to go to de sheriff to be whupped. De sheriff, he would tie de nigger to a tree an' whup him till de blood run out. "'Bout de only recr'stion us niggers had in dem days was candy pullin's. We all met at one house an' tol' ghost stories, sung plantation songs, an' danced de clog while de candy was cookin'. Dem was de good old days. Dey don't do den things mo mo'. "When a nigger died, we had a wake an' dat was diffrunt too frum whut 'tis today. Dey neber lef' a dead nigger 'lone in de house, but all de neighbors was dere an' hepped. Dey turned de mittors to de wall 'cause dey say once a long time ago, a nigger died an' three days afte'wards his people looked in a mittor an' dere dey see de dead nigger plain as day in de mirror. "At de wake we clapped our han's an' kep' time wid our feet - Walking Egypt, dey calls hit - an' we chant an' hum all night 'till de nigger was funeralized. "If we heard a little old shiverin' owl we'd th'ow salt in de fire an' th'ow a broom 'cross de do' fer folks say dat 'twas a sign of bad luck, an' a charm had to be worked fa s' to keep sumpin' terrible frum happenin', an' if a big owl hollered, we was n't 'lowed to say one word."Fire was 'bout de hardes' thing fer us to keep. Dere wa'nt no matches in dem days, an' we toted fire frum one plantation to 'nother when hit burned out. We put live coals in pans or buckets an' toted it home. "Sometimes we put heavy waddin' in a old gun an' shot hit out into a brush heap an' then blowed the sparks 'til de fire blazed. Ever'body had flint rocks too, but few niggers could work 'em an' de ones dat could allus had dat job to do. "My gran'mammy come frum South Ca'lins an' libed fust at New Augusta, Mississippi. She used to pick big Catawba leaves an' roll her dough in 'em an' bake hit in a log heap, pilin' aches over hit. Some called hit ash cakes an' hit sho' was good. Nothin' lak hit dese days - no sir. "We had plen'y to eat - smoke sausage, beef, home made lard, an' - yes sir, possum when we wanted hit. "We didn' git any pay fer our work but we had plen'y to eat an' clo'es to wear. Our clo'es was coarse but good. Most of 'em was wove on de looms an' our socks an' stockings was knitted by de wimmin. De

white folks though, dey wear linen an' fine silk clo'es fer de big times. We made blankets - coverlets, too.

"We had 'bout 60 slaves on our place, an' if a nigger man on one plantation fall in love wid a slave girl on 'nother place, dey jus' come to her plantation an' jump ober de broom an' den dey is mar'ied. De slaves never had preachers lak dey do at weddin's dese days. If de girl didn't love de boy an' he jumped ober de broom an' she didn't, den dey wa'nt mar'ded. "Dere was no schools in dem days either, an' I can't read an' write today. Some of de white folks taught de younger niggers an' den dey tuk dey lessons an' studied at dey cabin of nights afte' dey had finished work. "We had prayer meetin's in each others houses durin' de week. One plantation owner built a little church on his place an' de niggers, dey go in de back do' an' sit in de back, an' white folks dey come in de front of de church an' sit. De Presbyterin chu'ch was de only one 'round dere an' dey sprinkled ever'body - jes poured water ober dey heads frum a glass an' don patted hit hit in (demonstrated). "'Twas funny - one time Joe an' Green, two niggers on our place, at dey supper an' run 'way et night an' afte' dey was kotched, dey tol' us dat when dey was passin' through de woods dat night a great big old gran'daddy owl flopped his wings an' Joe said 'we'd better turn back.' I allus heard hit was bad luck for to hear a owl floppin' lack dat, but Green said 'twant nothin', jes a old owl floppin', but he jes naturally flopped diffrent dat night, an' Green walked on 'bout 15 steps an' somebody shot him dead. Joe said he tu'ned back an' run home. "All our niggers had to have passes to leave de plantation an' when de pateroller kotched 'em wid out'n a pass, de nigger was whupped. Sometimes de plantation owner did hit an' sometimes de sheriff. Dey used a long leather strop cut at de ends. "We used snake root, hohound weed, life everlastin' weed, horse mint, an' sassafras as medicine. "When de War was right on us, grub was scarce an' sometimes little niggers only had clabber milk an' dey at it in de trough wid de pigs, an' sometimes dey only had pie crusts an' bread crusts at night when dey et on de cabin flo'. Dem was hard times afte' de War "'Nother time one nigger run 'way frum our plantation an' hid by day an' traveled by night so de nigger dogs wouldn't git him an' he hid in a hollow tree. Dere was three cubs down in dat tree an' hit was so slick inside an' so high 'til he

couldn't clim' out, an' afte' while de ole bear came back an' throw in half a hog. Den she go'way an' come ag'in an' throw in de other half. 'Bout a hour later, she came back an' crawl in back'ards herse'f. De nigger inside de tree kotched her by de tail an' pulled hissself out. Hit scared de bear so 'til she run in one direction an' de nigger in 'nother. But de nigger, he run in de direction of his marster's place an' said he'd neber run off again as long as he libed. "I can't 'member de old songs but does niggers today can't sing lak dat neither 'cause dey ain't libed back dere, an' dey can't feel hit lak us old folks. Dem was de good old days allright, an' dey was hard days too."

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Mississippi Narratives

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