

**Mississippi Narratives**  
**Prepared by**  
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**Henry Warfield Age 90**

Henry Warfield who claims to be ninety years old says that "Negroes were used by the Confederates long before they were used by the Union forces. Even before the war they were used in all kinds of rough work and a large number of these fought by the side of their masters or made it possible for the master to fight."

Henry claims to have been at the battle of Fort Hill and he describes the times as being terrible. He says, "Yes, I was right dere when Grant cut dat ditch river canal right thru to one battleground and we couldn't do a thing about it."

Henry's mind is rather blank as to what happened on the actual day but he says, "There was lots of blood, plenty of noise, big fires, and crowds of strange faces that he had not seen before."

Henry says his "eatings were scarce in those days prior to July 4, 1862. We et mule meat, saltless pone bread, and drunk coffee made of oak and hickory bark without sugar. Often we et raw meat, hogs, calves, or anything that we could plunder and get and raw meat makes men mean. I have seen men after eating raw meat pick up little children and shove dem gin a tree and bust em into. We used to plunder and take things from men, but de Southern soldiers wouldn't harm a chicken belonging to a 'widow woman' but would often steal things and take to her.

"Times were harder then than now," said Henry, "but I was young and didn't mind. Hit was fun fur me then to go with my marster and get a whole lot of plunder fur de boys to eat.

"The people were not sad when the capture of the city took place as mothers who had sons still in the army know that the war continued their sons would either be wounded or slaughtered so they were glad to get over the worst day of all. The slaves were glad to have the guns cease firing as they didn't know yet what it meant to their freedom," said Henry.

Henry was born in Copley County and was the slave of a planter called Wilson, who brought him to Learned and sold him on the block when he was the age of twelve years old. Henry pictures himself standing on a large oak block and hearing the auctioneer cry, "What do I hear you bid fur this slave? A strong well built slave, clean white teeth, shoulders like a good ox, healthy, clean habits, a bargain, ladies and gentlemen. What do I hear, gentlemen? A fine slave going fur what, sixty dollars? Who will say seventy? Seventy-five." Going, going, gone, and Henry was sold.

Henry was bought by a small farmer named Matt Gray of Hinds County near Cherry Grove, and when he was taken to the home of his new master he preferred every kind of chore from cooking to pulling a plow in the fields. He says he has been hitched to wagons and plows like a mule and had to pull heavy loads. But he left the plow in the fields and went with his master to war at the age of sixteen. When he left, his mistress bade him stick to his master's side. At first they went to Atlanta, Georgia and then to Montgomery, Alabama, then finally back to Vicksburg, Mississippi and it was at this point that his master was wounded and Henry carries a scar on his left ankle where a shell grazed him standing by his master's side. It was to him that a broken master turned for help after the war and altho' he was free he did not fail him.

Henry says that on "Every plantation during slavery the Negroes had church on Sunday and it was fur this cause a Negro leader or Preacher came forward, each place had its own exhorter, as the law required a white man to be present at every Negro meeting, an overseer passed by every now and then and looked in to see what was being done. De people had religion in dem days. We uster speak wid unknown tongues and we practiced signs until light shown in darkness. De whole quarters would be so happy 'til us ud have to work hard de next day to feel right. No maam, I didn't go back to de plow any more after de war. I worked alright but my spirit was broken. When a man is a soldier he ain't fit fur nothing else."

Henry cannot read or write but he can figure and it would be hard to fool him on figures. He says he kept account of whut wages he and his wife made after the war. He didn't always get the money but at least he knew whut he owned and whut was owed to him. "I larned to count with pine-burrs. Every time I'd make a dollar I'd go put a pine-burr in a large hole and every time I'd spend one I'd take one out. I ain't got none left in de hole now. I got to takem em out faster dan I could put dem in."

"My marster was reasonably good to me cause I was young and didn't think so then, but I was never stripped and beaten and I got enough to eat, clothes to wear, and a Doctor and medicine when I was sick. When I got free I couldn't buy it.

The tales told in slavery time are unequaled. They told tales of animals and dey doings. One story goes like dis:

"Once upon a time ole Brer Guinea was sitting on the bridge wid his head tucked under his wing when along came old Brer Rabbit who said, 'Brer Guinea where is yo head?'

"Brer Guinea said, 'Oh! I left it home so my wife could pick de boogers out of it. You don't suppose I'se gwine stay home all day in order to git boogers picked out of my head.'"

"You mean to tell me you let your wife cut your head off and you ain't dead."

"You see me don't you," said Brer Guinea."

"So ole Brer Rabbit hopped on home and told his wife, 'Cut my head off and pick de boogers out of it while I go down and swap a few wid de boys.' His wife didn't want to do it but ole Brer Rabbit was allus mighty persistent so at last his wife tuk de ax, hauled off and cut his head off and dat was de last of ole Brer Rabbit."

"Once upon a time dere was an ole Negro woman dat hated fur de white folks to ax her where she'd been. So one morning she got up real early and went off before any white folks got up. When she was coming back she met a white woman who said, 'Aunty, where are you going?'"

"The old woman said, 'Laud, chile I ain't gwine nowhere. I'se done been where I was gwine.'" "Some folks is like dat. Dat is why some Negroes gits so quiet in front of white folks and den dere is a crowd dat talks too much. Dey is called running-off-at-de-mouth Negroes."

"Yes, just seventy-five years ago on this same Fourth of July the cry went up dat Grant is tuc Vicksburg but he sho God tuc a big piece of woods on a big hill and he show found mo dead men dan live ones and dey sho didn't find much to eat and he found plenty flies and bugs in de place. Hit was said dat de North and South hated each other so den dat a fly dat was on a Southern soldier ud wear gray in his back and dem on a Northern soldier ud wear blue (green) and one wouldn't light on de yother. Dem was pernacious times. I tell you'll don't know nothing."

Henry Warfield and his old wife live together at 2200 Grove Street, Vicksburg. He varies his tale according to his mood but I have tried to put it down just as he told it to me.

Interviewer: Unknown  
Transcribed by Ann Allen Geoghegan