

Interviewer: Mrs. Holmes
Transcribed by: Ann Allen Geoghegan

Mississippi Narratives
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Rev. James W. Washington

"My names is James W. Washington. I is a Minister of de Holy Writ. I founded dis Flowery Mount Baptist Church en pastored it fur twenty years. I preached all ober de country."

"I was born, so I was tole, in July 1854, en was a big strapping lad when freed. My mammy was named Martha Felder. She belong'd to Dr. Charles Felder, en he had a big fine house on de road frum Liberty to Magnolia. Bout 12 miles west uf Magnolia. Dat was a big fine house but is burnt down now. It cost bout \$10,000 mebbly more. Dr. Felder had lots and lots uf slaves. I doan kno' how many

"My mammy hed 12 chilluns --- Harriet --- Matilda --- George --- Frank --- Sarah --- Wilfred --- Delia --- Mary --- Willie --- Celia --- Charlie --- and me. Not all uf us hed the same pappy. My pappy was named William Raiborn Wash ington. I doan kno' whut becum uf him cept he was carried off. Dr. Felder cum by him through his second wife. She brung him lots uf slaves, en when her oldest boy married, she giv my pappy to him, en was carried down en the low lands near Mobile."

"Yessum, I has a good memory. I ken remember a dress my mammy wore. It was blue en had picturs uf gourds in it en mammy sed I was 3 years old when she hed dat dress. I remember de old cow "Star" was rattle snake bit en dey hed to kill her en mammy sed I was only three years old when dat hap'ened. I remember ebery thing eny body tells me. I remember whut I reads in the Bible, ef I didn't I cudent preach."

"I cum frum a long life stock. My mammy was 112 years old when she died. I doan call myself old. My grand mammy on my pappy's side uf de house liv'd to be 132 years old. She died down here close ter Magnolia, near de bridge dat crosses de Tangipahoa River. He master was named Mr. Sandel. She was born in Madagascar, on the coast of Mozam Bisque Channel. She was captured en put in a French vessel and landed on the coast uf Maine. Dey tole her dey was goin' ter giv her to a Indian fer a wife, but 'stead of dat dey brung her south en sold her. She smoked a clay pipe. She was black en she could "kunger" folks. She could put spells on 'em. She hed 13 chilluns".

My Great grand mammy on my Mammy's side uf de house cum from Congo Free States in Africa. She was captur'd wid a lot uf Africans en brung to New Orleans en sold fur slaves. Mr.

Abner O'Neil in Amite County bought her en giv her to Adam O'Neil fur wife. Her son ernuther Adam en his wife Dinah wus my grand pappy en mammy. Den my mammy wus named Martha. Dr. Charles Felder bought her."

"Dr. Felder wus a good man. He never 'lowed his slaves to be brutalized. He made dem wurk, but he never 'lowed the driver to strip the women folks en whip dem. En ernuther thing he never 'lowed a woman who wus breedin' to be whip'ed. He hed er overseer but he wudnt 'low him ter mistreat dem."

"He hed a big bell en ebery morning jes' bout daybreak dat bell wud ring callin' de slaves to cum to de field. When de crops wus pushin' en all de women wus in de field he kept two women at de house to cook for de whole force. All de slaves hed deir own gard'ns. He hed er old Colored woman named Barbara; she muster hev ben nearly 100 years old to stay at de house en keer fur de little chilluns. We played under de trees when de weather wus good en when it rained we played in de house. He give us lots uf milk en bread. Our mammys wus hoe hands en de field."

"When eny of de slaves got sick Dr. Felder doctored us. He giv us bad medicin' --- Ole granny boiled herbs en giv us un be kno 'in to de Dr."

"Yessum, I remember de bed I slept on. It wus made uf heavy timber wid holes bored in de sides en hed en bottom, en ropes wus put through dese holes en pulled right tight, en a feather bed laid on dat. It beat springs all to pieces. We hung our close on de walls. I never seed a wardrobe till after I cum to de railroad. I slept in de quarters where all de slaves slept. Sumtimes I et en de quarters en sumtimes at de big house. Dey fixed a plate or put sumthing in a pan en set me on de steps en told me to eat. I hed plenty to eat en we all hed good homespun clothes."

Sometimes he giv his slaves a holiday, eb den dey hed fine eaten's --- specly Christmas when dey hed dances, en sum of de men wud git drunk. Yessum de Dr give dem whiskey to make dem feel good. Sum nigger wud call de figger en how dey wud dance. Dey played a fiddle ur de musick, dose niggers sho could shuffle deir feet. De niggers now doan kno' how to dance."

"I wus down at Dr. Felder's old home not meny year ergo en found sum body hed bin pullin' de plank offen de wall. I pick up a piece en brung it home fur a keep sake. (I saw the piece. It was a small piece of the door facing about three inches wide and one inch thick and had been broken off about two feet long. All heart pine. Mrs. Holmes) Dat old place lies in ashes now."

"Dr. Felder did not go ter de war. I doan kno' why. He wus a mity busy man. I remember de Yankees when dem cum. Sum of dem wus on horses en sum uf dem wus walking. Dey all wore blue close, two uf de men hed big brass buttons on deir close. Dey talk wid de Dr. en dey took his fine horses en mules en left us deir old scrubs. Dey killed one cow en took her down de road en roasted her. Dey tuk our meal en flour. When dey left we went down de road to git whut dey left. Sum of de folks sed de meat wus not fittern to eat, but I et it en thought it wus good. Dr. had his Carriage hid in de woods en all de silver. Dey did not git dat."

"One day de big bell rung jest 'fore dinner time en all de slaves cum to de big house en the Dr. sed dey wus all free now. He tole dem ef dey wud stay en finish de crop he wud pay dem for deir

wurk. Dey all stayed til de end uf de year, en sum uf dem stayed a long time. My mammy left de next year en went to Mr. Sam Newmans, near Osyka ter wurk for him, en meny a time since den hev we gone hongry. We never wus hongry while we lived wid de Dr. He saw ter it dat we hed plenty ter eat."

"Atter dat we moved to Chatawa and farmed for Mr. Sam Lea. He got long very well but he died, en de lady moved way. Den we cum to Summit en I work where I culd git a job. Atter while I moved here. De place wus called Elizabethtown den. I doan kno' why but dey changed de name uf dis place to McComb. I wus here when de furst man wus buried in de cemetary. I hoped to dig dat grave. He died wid yellow fever en ebery body wus skeered to death. When I cum here dis place wus in de woods. I seed de furst train cum in de town."

"I jined de Baptist church when I lived at Chatawa en atter I cum here I wurk for Mr Heber Craft. His son taught me how ter read en play de pinany en fiddle. Den I went to school here in dis town. I wanted ter learn to read so I could read de Bible en learn de Holy Writ. When I finished school I founded de Flowery Mount Baptist Church an pastored it fur 20 years. I preached all ober de country. I believe dis is de time fur de Gentiles. Dey are to have de gospel for 2000 years en den de Jew will reign. De Gentiles abuse deir priverlege just like de Jew once did en de Gospel will be tuk frum dem jist list it wus frum de Jews."

"No mam I never seed a ghost. I doan believe in ghost. I hev buried many dead people en dey doan cum to life egin. One time I wus preachin' up on de Yazoo river en a good old lady, named Katy, she wus de muther uf de church. Sister Katy wus all bent over en couldnt lie down. En while de meetin' wus going on she died. Dey had her in a house on de coolin' board en put weights on her chest en legs to straighten her out 'fore she got stiff, en de rest de niggers wus in de other room prayin' en singin' en pattin' deir feet when dey heard a loud noise in de room where de dead woman wus. One nigger looked up en peeped in dat room en sed, 'O, Lord, I is leavin' here' en he left. De other niggers looked in de room en left, en I left too, fur I wus not gwine ter stay wid dat dead woman en she settin' straight up on her coolin' board. We all run up to de white mans house whose place she died on en told him to cum en see fur himself. He en sum more white folks cum down dar en sed de pattin' uf de feet shook de weights offen de woman's chest en she riz. No I am not skeered uf ghost but I jest naturly did not want ter stay dar by my self. De white folks buried dat woman. Ebery time I goes to a wake, I watches fur dey corpse to set up."

"I married a woman named Alice Moore, she died en I married ergin en she died. Den I married de third time en she wus so bad I divorced her. No I never married ergin. De Bible says all men must hav only one livin' wife, eny more is Mormonism."

"I hev five chilluns. Three in Chicago. I have one daughter who is de best performer on de piany in de world. She blongs to sum orchestra in Chicago. One son is in Atlantic City, N. J. en one son in College."

"I soon will be 83 years old en dey tell me I am too old to pastor a church, but shucks, I speck I will live to be 100. I aint near dead yet. O, I preach sum times but I am no pastor now. I live here by myself, dis house is mine en paid fur en I gits a little pension en den I make a salve dat will

cure eny sore en de wurld. My granny showed me how to mek it when I wus a child. I grow de herb right here in my gard'n en I boils it down low en den I add real thick heavy cream en boils it all down till it gits thick. You put dat on eny sore, let it be burns or blood poisen en it will cure it. I sells plenty uf dat en dat helps me to sustain life."

"I hev lived right her on dis spot fur more dan fifty years en I hopes to die here. I am not old I ken git er bout mighty good. I wurk de gard'n en can plow a little. Whut wud I do if I git sick? Sum Body wud cum in en take keer uf me."

"Thank de Lord, I'm in God's hands."

Rev. James W. Washington lives in the North of Berglundtown, a negro settlement belonging to He is old, so he says, but seems to be active.