

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

Webmaster's note: Rina Brown was a slave of John F. Lee and Atlanta Scott Lee who married in Franklin County on February 21, 1860. John Lee died of consumption and Atlanta married I. P. Mulder on February 16, 1865. Atlanta Scott Lee Mulder married for the last time on December 2, 1870 to Hugh Montgomery. Atlanta died not long after her marriage to Hugh Montgomery.

Foreword: Rina Brown, who lives on Avenue L in the extreme portion of Burglundtown, a Negro suburb of McComb, tells the following story.

"I wus eightyfo' years old dis past June gone by an' I wus a big gal when de war closed an' we wus sot free.

"I wus born in Franklin County on de Homochitto River, on de east side, 'bout forty-five from Natchez. Dar is a settlement at dat place now named Monroe, Mississippi. I lived in dat neighborhood all my life 'till nineteen hundred and 'leben, when I cum to McComb to live wid my daughters.

"My Marse wus Mr. John F. Lea and My Mistuss wus Miss Atlanta Lea. Dey wus de best white folks dat eber lived on dis earth. I wus raised right in de house an' nursed Miss Atlanta's two boys. I et at de

kitchen table an' had all de things to eat de white folks had to eat an' I slept on a lit'l bed in de corner uf de back room.

"My Mistiss whupped me when I needed it, but she wus always good to me an' give me nice clothes to wear.

"We had a big eight room house, but it wus all on de ground floor, an' de kitchen wus in de back yard, whilst de dining room wus in de big house; I hoped tote de grub frum de kitchen to de dining room, an' it wus my job to tote de dishes back to be washed.

"We had no well an' had to tote de water frum de spring, an' it wus down de hill. Ebery time Miss Atlanta wanted to take a bath I had to put a big wash tub in de back room an' den go down to de spring an' tote de water up dat hill an' pore it in de tub so she could take her bath. Dey didn't kno' whut a bath tub in de house wus.

"Dey had no carpets or rugs on de floors and ebery time dey wanted de floor scrubbed, I had to tote water frum de spring. My mammy did de scrubbin' an' she had a mop made wid holes bored in it an' shucks pulled through it; she put sand and home-made soap on dat floor an' pull dat mop ober it, an' when she rinsed it off dat floor sho' wus white an' clean.

"My mammy wus named Liddy an' she wus de cook, an' she done de washin' an' ironin' an' she cleaned de house an' she milked too. She uster take de clothes down to de spring an' wash, an' made me go down dar an' battle de clothes; dar wus no wash boards in dem days, an' she used home made soap.

"Ebery year afte' hog killin' time my mammy wud drip lie through de ash hopper an' make a bar'l uf soap; dat soap wud git de dirt outern dem clothes.

"De slave quarters wus 'bout half mile frum de big house, cross de crick, but my mammy lived right in de back yard. She hoped do all de wurk round de place, an' Mr. Lea had no overseer, so he made my pappy a kinder straw boss ober de wurk hands.

"My pappy wus named Wilson Lea, an' he drove de team to market, an' fed de hosses an' pigs an' plowed de garden an' wurk in de fiel' like de rest uf de slaves.

"Dar wus a house ober in de quarters whar Granny stayed an' kept de chaps while deir mammies wus in de fiel'. Granny lived to be one hundred and fifteen years old, an' she wus too old to wurk, so she jes'

stayed at de house an' tended to de lit'l chaps. Granny smoked a pipe an' kept her head tied up in a red flowered hank'chief.

"Granny' name wus Nanny, an' she wus my pappy's mammy. She sed she cum wid de older Leas to dis country way back yonder when dar wus jes' a few colored people in Mississippi, an' dis country wus full uf Injuns an' dey wus ready to fight.

"She sed when dey first cum here dey had no plows an' made de crops wid jes' a hoe. One year she made a bale uf cotton an' a load uf corn wid her hoe. Dem days dar wus no gins 'round dar, an' dey picked de lint frum de seed wid deir hands an' den carded dat lint, spun it an' made thread uf it an' den made de cloth. Afte' while dey put dat cotton in bags an' sont it to Natchez an' had it put in bales. She sed dey put corn in a wooden bowl and pestled it till it wus fine nuff to make bread. Her Marse wus named Joseph Lea.

"After Marse Joseph Lea died his wife mar'ied a Mr. Grissum, an' my mammy fell heir to her son by her fust husband, John F. Lea, an' my pappy b'longed to Mr. Grissum an' Marse John Lea bought him. My mammy had ten chulluns, but only four lived; dey wus Rose, Chaney, Rina an' Prustess, all uf dem is dead 'ceptin' me.

"While wurkin' round de house I heard dem talking bout folks buildin' de railroad from New Orleans to Summit, an' ebery time eny body wud pass dat way, Marse always asked dem "How fur dey had got wid de railroad?"

"Den I heard dem talk bout de big war an' how de South cud whup dem Yankees, an' afte' while Marse John went off to de war. He wus not gone many months 'fore he come back an' sed he wus sick wid de consumption, an' he wus on de bed a long time an' died. My pappy stayed right by his bed an' tended to him all de time he wus sick.

"He had a big funeral, an' all de white folks fur miles 'round come to see him buried an' sum uf de black folks too.

"He died in de fall uf de year an' de next spring my Mistiss mar'ied a gin. Dis time his names wus Mr. Moulter. He wus right kind to de slaves an' wus dar when we wus sot free.

"De Yankees never come to our house, but I heard dem talking bout how de Yankees went to sum plantashuns an' destroyed eberything. I never seed a Yankee, but sum of de Southern soljers wud drap in an' ask fur sumthing to eat, an' Mistiss wud give dem de best she had. Sum uf dem Soljers wus on deir way home on a furlow. My Mistiss never refuse to feed dem soljers.

"I remember when dey fout de battle at Vicksburgs. We cud hear de cannons roar an' den de glass in de windows wud shake an' rattle like a earth quake wus cumin'. Dem wus awful times.

"All de slaves wanted to be sot free so dey cud do like dey please wid no boss over dem, an' den dey wanted to go places an' have no patroller to ketch dem. Den dey wanted to make money like de white folks an' do deir own buyin'.

"One mornin' Mr. Moulter told all de slaves dey wus free now; he stood on de back steps an' read de papers to dem, den he ask dem to stay on de place an' finis' de crop --- dey all agreed to stay. Dey wurk mi'ty hard an' got nuffin fur it, so de next year dey went sum wahr else to wurk.

"My mammy stayed wid Miss Atlanta dat year an' de next year she went to Mr. Pink Harrington, jin'ing plantation to wurk, and tuk her chaps wid her. We all wurk mi'ty hard an' when de end uf de year wud come we got nuffin. Dat is de way it always wus, we wurk hard den git nuffin fur it.

"When we left Miss Atlanta's she give us nuffin to take wid us an' ebery thing we got we had to buy it on a credit an' den de white man got whut we made. Times wus mi'ty hard afte' de war; nearly starvation. My mammy wus a good washer an' ironer an' she went frum house to house an' done up de fine clothes fur de white ladies an' dey paid her in old clothes an' lit'l sumthing to eat.

"I mar'ied while I wus young. No, we had no preacher to marry us, we jes' tuk up togedder. He jes' lived a short time, den I mar'ied Wash Brown an' he is de pappy uf all my chilluns. We had twelve; sum uf dem is dead an' my two oldest gals went to de Delta years ago an' I aint heard frum dem in more dan two years. I's got seven chaps livin' right here in McComb. I stay wid dem an' dey do de best dey can fur me.

"I stayed right in de same neighborhood all my life, near whar I wus born, till nineteen hundred and 'leven, when my husband died, an' fore he died he told me to go to McComb an' let the gals take keer uf me so long as I live.

"When I got to McComb de railroad wus havin' a big strike in de shops an' dey wus shootin' up trains, an' put de men to wurk behind a big wall. Dem wus skeery times fur a country negro.

"Yassum, de white folks an' de colored folk uster have big dances an' old Joe wud play de fiddle while dey stepped lightly all de fancy steps, an' jes' fore dey wud break up in morning dey wud dance de Old Virginia Reel an' den sing

"Run Nigger, Run, de patroller'll git yo' Run Nigger, run, it's almost day.

Dat nigger run, dat nigger flew Dat nigger lost his brogan shoe Run nigger run, Its almost day."

And a nudder song dey uster sing and dance wus --- "Come 'long gals an' let's go to Boston,

Come 'long gals an' let's go to Boston,

Come 'long gals an' let's go to Boston

Early in de mornin'.

Jack, Jack, Jack, I'll tell you' daddy,

Jack, Jack, Jack, I'll tell you' daddy,

Jack, Jack, Jack, I'll tell you' daddy

Whar yo' go a courtin'.

Reckin I keer if yo' tell my daddy,

Reckin I keer if yo' tell my daddy,

Reckin I keer if yo' tell my daddy,

Whar I go a courtin' --"

"Dem wus good times an' ebery body liked it. Some uf dem men folks wud git a lit'l too much to drink but dey never done no mischief.

"Miss Atlanta didn't have a loom house; she made de women card de cotton and spin de thread an' sont it ober to her Mammy's an' have it made into cloth. Dat cloth wus brought home an' made into fine clothes. Dem days de ladies wore wide skirts and wide petticoats, an' de petticoats had ruffle afte' ruffle on dem an' made de dresses stand way out yonder, an' den dey wore hoop skirts an' when dey walk wid dem long dresses on dey had to lift dem skirts in de front. Den afte' dat dey uster wear bustles behind to

make dem skirts stand out in de back; dey wore lace capes round deir shoulders an' pretty lit'l bonnet on deir heads, an' Miss Atlanta had a lit'l feather on de side uf her bonnet. She wore gloves dat had no fingers in dem.

"Marse John an' Mistiss never had a carriage, but eberywhar dey went dey rode horse back, an' Mistiss wud set up straight as an arrow on dat hoss. She rode a side saddle an' a long skirt dat almos' touched de ground. Marse John always had spurs on his feet when he wud ride, an' when he wud git off dat hoss yo' cud hear dem spurs clack an' make a big fuss.

"Well Mistiss' husband died an' she mar'ied a gin an' dis time his name wus Montgomery but she didn't live long afte' she mar'ied dis last time. She jes' had two boys an' I help'd her raise dem. Dey wus name Willia an' Muggins. Dey are all dead now.

"After I come to McComb I washed a lit'l an' done whut lit'l wurk I cud to help make a livin' an' 14 years a go I wus piecing quilts scraps when I seed my eye sight wus failin' me. My sight kept on gittin' dimmer an' worsen an' I went stone blind. I aint seed day light now fur fourteen years. All I can do is to set here an' wait fur de good Lord to come an' claim me fur his own.

"I study all de time bout my heavenly home. I kno' my time is most 'xpired an' I am livin' an' prayin' to make it right wid my blessed Lord when he comes afte' me.

"I tried to train my chilluns to live right; I kno' my duty to de church an' tried to train my chilluns to kno' right frum wrong. If my chaps go 'stray, its deir own responsibility.

"People now a days do not recognize de House uf de Lord; dat is one House ebery body should honor. When I carried my chaps to church, I wud set dem down on de bench or de floor, an' iffen I had to serve de table, my chaps kno'd better dan to holler out in de Lord's House. Now when I go to church I cant hear de Preacher preach fur so much racket gwine on twix de mothers and de chaps. 'pears to me dey got no respect for de Lord's House.

"I is a Methodist; I uster be a shoutin' Methodist, but now I is a missionary Methodist. I cant go to church often cause we have to hire a car to take me an' dat cost money, but bless de Lord, I can pray at home an' He hears my prayer."

Interviewer's note:

Rina Brown is a little dried up woman, sitting in a broken rocker near the front door. She seems to be bent over; wears her head wrapped with a handkerchief and wears an apron, constantly fumbling with that apron. She is black and says her hair is white; appears to weigh about 105 pounds. She does not complain about being blind but seems to be thankful she is living.

Interviewer: Unknown

Transcribed by Ann Allen Geoghegan

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