

Mississippi Narratives
Prepared by
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Simon Durr,

Simon Durr, ex-slave, lives with his children at Hazelhurst and Magee Mississippi. He was born about the year 1847, was owned during slaverytime by Michael Durr in Copiah County. This old ex-slave is rather small in size, he weighs scarcely a hundred and twenty five pounds, and is only about five feet and two inches in heighth. His general coloring is a rich redish brown, known among the negroes as a 'ginger cake color'. He is in fairly good health for his age. This old Negro was educated above the average ex-slave, yet as is so often the case, his association with his race he holds strictly to the old negro dialect. He tells this story.

"I sho' didn't hab no hard time much when I was a slave as I had de good luck of belonging to Marse Michel. He owned my pa an' ma, brung them from No'th Carolina when he settled here to farm. He jes' owned a fair sized plantation wid several families ob slaves. He didn't go into hit lak de mos' ob 'em did. Marse was powerful prosperous an' lived in de style an' top o' his day. He had a big rambling house all filled wid slaves, servants, house maids, cooks an' nurses fer de chillun. Dey rid 'round in a fine coach an' had pretty horses an' fancy harnesses.

"Mos' everything was growed an' made right dier on de plantation. De cows from de green pasteurs furnished all de milk an' butter, de drove ob hogs furnished all de meat an' lard. De vegetables, 'taters an' meal come from de fiels'. De lassis was made from de cane, de barn yard was full o' chickens, turkeys an' ducks which gib us all de fresh eggs an' fowl meat we could use. De candles, soap, cheese, cloth an'

mos' every thing was made right dier. I keeps yo' busy but yo' sho' know diers gwine be plenty to eat, a good place to live an' some 'em to wear. We wore home spun clothes an' us boys went in our shirts 'till us was 'round fifteen years ole, it was like breakin' in a colt to git use to our first pants. We went barefooted so much 'till cold didn't have no effect on our feet much, course in de coldest we wore shoes. Dey was course an' heavy an' might on comfortable to us dat wont use to wearing 'em.

"I wuked 'round de place when I was a little slave boy. I done fust one thing an' then another, but mostly 'round de lot an' horses. When I got big 'nuf to handle 'em Marse put me to drivin'. I sho did lak dat as I got to go to all de places de family went. It was plumb grand, me all dressed up a drivin' dem purty horses all hitched up to dat coach. Hit was one ob dem kind whar de driver rid on de outside. I was always ready to go too.

"When de war broke out I was 'bout fourteen years ole. It took a purty good while to stir it all up. It was talked an' talked ob afore hit ever come on. Us slaves never understood much ob what it was all a gwine to come to or what it was gwine to mean to us. We wanted to be free at times, den we would git scart an' want to stay slaves. We was tole all kinds of things but didn't never know jes' what to believe.

"Marse Michael was a good man an' believed in takin' care o' his slaves. He seed dat us was fed, clos'ed an' had good comf'table cabins to live in. We was let go to church in de white folks meetin' house an' us was taught to be polite an' how to act. We was also taught how to treat white folks. Marse wanted his slaves to hab some book learnin' so's us was taught to read an' write an' figer. We was give our time to hab pleasures. Dey would gib us a pass an' we could go visit on uder plantations an' go to frolics. We would meet wid fiddles an' guitars an' play an' sing an' dance. At dese times was when we did de mos' ob our romancin'. Den we could meet an' play games. Sometimes we would build big fires at night an' hab a time.

"When de war finally broke loose an' kept a gwine on an' on, Marse den he had to go. Dat was sad news fer all ob us. Things was a lookin' bad 'nuf wid out dat. De day come when he had to go, an' he say to me, "Simon I'se a gwine to take yo' wid me." I was glad an' scart too, but I went wid him as a servant an' stayed wid him 'till de war ended. I had a heap o' sperences durin' dat time. I seed de men a marchin' an' drillin'. I seed 'em come foot sore an' mos' dead after de battle. I'se seed 'em go hungrey. I'se seed 'em kilt, an' die from sickness an' exposure. Dey was finally jes' starved out. Dats' what won de war. Sometimes dey would camp close to de union Army, one on one side ob a river an' one on de uder side. At night dey would swim across an' set wid each other 'round de camp fire, dey would tell jokes, wrestle an' swap tobacco an' food stuf. Dey would have fun an' joke lak nothin' was wrong, den dey would swim back across de river knowin' dey would be a killin' each other de nex day.

"When de war ended we stayed several years wid marse. Everything was up sot an' had to be built back. An' so many changes, it was hard fer every body to git along. We was glad to stay on wid Marse. We at

las' homesteaded a little farm an' started life fer our selves. I married when I was 'bout twenty years ole an' had nine chillun I sont 'em all to school an' dey is a doin' purty well. Fer years after my ole 'oman died I lived on de ole place alone an' batched, but I'se a gittin' so ole an' feeble now I lives wid my chillun 'round fust one place an' den another.

"Dese modern times is beyond dis ole nigger, to fas' to ketch up wid. Everything is jes' a flyin'. I tell yo' its all too fas'.