

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

Foreword: Charlie Powers, ex-slave, lives near New Hebron, Mississippi in Lawrence County. He was born about 1851, was owned during slavery time by Abb Powers in Covington County. He is about five feet and six inches in height and weighs about one hundred and forty five pounds. His general coloring is a dark blackish brown, his hair is white with age. He is in very good health and is active for his age. At the present time he lives on his own place with his daughter. His four children are very well educated. He tells this of his life.

"I goes by de name Powers, 'cause dat was my ole Marse's name. Yo' all knows us colored folks didn't hab no names only what us got from our owners. Some times if a slaves was sole several times he jes' naturally had a new name fer ever new master.

"My pa was bought from North Carolina years ago when Marse Abb fust settled on Dry Creek to start a plantation ob about three or four hundred acres. Dis was a mighty good farming section, one ob de bes in South Mississippi. All dey needed deir was a creek an' dey jes' some how made one and called it Dry Creek. Marse's plantation was near Ole Mt. Carnel where de cotton and corn sho' did thrive.

"My grand pappy use to tell 'bout how he was brought down to North Carolina. He say how he come down de Niagria River in a little ole row boat wid twenty other slaves to be sold. He say fer days dey sailed down de river, at times dey would stop fer a few days at some point an' den on again. My grand pappy was finally sold to a man and brung down to North Carolina to a plantation an married. Den years later my pa was sole from dis plantation and brung down here to Mississippi whar I was born. Another thing my grand pappy uster tell 'bout back in North Carolina was 'bout my grand mamy alwa's laked to

sing an' shout an' praise de Lord. De white folks wouldn't 'low 'em to make much racket. Dey would come and quiet 'em off right now. So one day my grand mamy was a feelin' happy an' a singin' dat Ole song "O Fer a Thousand Tongues". She was a singin' purty loud an' grand pappy call out "yo has got one too many now, fer if you don't watch out yo' will make de white folks hear yo' wid de one ye got.

"My grand parents say dat dey lived an' was raized up 'bout lak a bunch ob pigs, jes any ole way. Yo' might say jes' fed an' wuked an' slept, but dey was powerful strong an' lived to be mighty ole.

"My ole Marse raised cotton, corn an' all kinds o' food stuff. He was kind to his slaves an' fed an' clo'sed us well. De cabins was small wid one room an' a dirt an' straw chimney. De slaves wuked from early till late in de fiel's an' wid de stock an' cattle. Deir was big hog killin's, syrup makin' time, deir was a heap o' spinnin', quiltin' an' weavin' to be done an' soap an' candles to be made. All de close had to be made by han'. We wore course an' thick clos'e but alwa's went clean. We was fed in de kitchen at Ole Marse's in de winner time an' out in de back yard in de summer time.

"When dey begun to talk ob war things began to git upsot. It fust stirred 'round an' we was tole us would be free to live an' wuk fer ourselves. When it did breakout at fust us didn't know much 'bout it, but it kept a gittin' closer an' closer. De calvery men had came through so much an' tore up an' burned down things down an' turnt de stock out an' took de good ho' ses an' every thing to eat got scarce. One day during de war de darkies on Marse's plantation was a havin' a frolic in de fiel's. Dey was a havin' a time, dancin' an' makin' merry in general. It was a bright moon light night. De darkies was a pattin' an' a dancin', some was buck dancin while others was a playin' games. Den some was settin' round off by them selves a courtin' an' love makin' when de patrole riders rid up. My grand pappy was asleep at de time. Every body began to run an' holler, scared mos' nigh to death. My grand pappy declares he run a whole half mile asleep, says he way from deir 'fore he waked up good. Dey all thought de war an' yankees had come up on 'em. Yo' know de niggers was sho' scared ob de yankees. When de war ended us was freed; we stayed wid ole Marse 'bout a year an' wuked fer him, den us went out fer our selves. Dese days right after de war was bad times fer de whites an' de black as de whole country was 'bout ruint an' had to be fixed up wid no money an' so many changes. De Klu Klux Klan ride 'bout scarin' de niggers mos' to death an' a whippin' 'em, dey was terrors. I never seed much 'bout 'em, jes' knowed to be scared ob 'em.

"My pappy voted in de two fust presidential election after de war. He voted both times fer yankees presidents. I can't say which 'uns he voted fer as I don't recollect hearing him say who all run.

"I married when I was twenty one years ole. I courted dat gal two years an' every time I seed her in dem two years I talked 'bout me an' how much I thought ob her. We married de fust day ob January. I thought dat would be startin' de New Year off right. We wuked hard and bought and paid fer our own home and farm. We raised four children and gib dem a farmers education. Dey is all a farmin' an' a doin'

purty well. I is still livin' on my farm an' has one ob my daughters an' her family livin' wid me. I is still able to git about an' wuk quiet a heap fer my age.

"My idea ob de young generation ob de colored people is, I'se phoned to see 'em a gitting chances to climb but my advice is dey had better stop an' think long wid everything else.

"I enjoys life an' wants to do right by everybody an' I'se glad to see freedom an progress.