

**Mississippi Narratives**  
**Prepared by**  
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**For the State of Mississippi**  
**Cyrus Bellus, age 73**

"I was born in Mississippi in 1865 in Jefferson County. It was on the tenth of March. My father's name was Cyrus Bellus, the same as mine. My mother's name was Matilda Bellus.

"My father's master was David Hunt. My father and mother both belonged to him. They had the same master. I don't know the names of my grandfather and mother. I think they were Jordans. No, I know my grandmother's name was Annie Hall, and my grandfather's name was Stephen Hall. Those were my mother's grandparents. My father's father was named John Major and his mother was named Dinah Major. They belonged to the Hunts. I don't know why the names was different. I guess he wasn't their first master.

"I have heard my folks talk about how they were traded off and how they used to have to work. Their master wouldn't allow them to whip his hands. No, it was the mistress that wouldn't allow them to be whipped. They had hot words about that sometimes.

"The slaves had to weave cotton and knit sox. Sometimes they would work all night, weaving cloth, and spinning thread. The spinning would be done first. They would make cloth for all the hands on the place.

"They used to have tanning vats to make shoes with too. Old master didn't know what it was to buy shoes. Had a man there to make them. "My father and mother were both field hands. They didn't weave or spin. My grandmother on my mother's side did that. They were supposed to pick---the man, four hundred pounds of cotton, and the woman three hundred. And that was gittin' some cotton. If they didn't come up to the task, they was took out and give a whipping. The overseer would do the thrashing. The old mistress and master wouldn't agree on that whipping.

"The slaves were allowed to get out and have their fun and play and 'musement for so many hours. Outside of those hours, they had to be found in their house. They had to use fiddles. They had dancing just like the boys do now. They had knockin' and rasalin' and all such like now.

"So far as serving God was concerned, they had to take a kettle and turn it down bottom upward and then old master couldn't hear the singing and prayin'. I don't know just how they turned the kettle to keep the noise from goin' out. But I heard my father and mother say they did it. The kettle would be on the inside of the cabin, not on the outside.

"The slaves lived in log houses instead of ones like now with weather---boarding. The two ends duffed in. They always had them so they would hold a nice family. Never had any partitions to make rooms. It was just a straight long house with one window and one door.

"Provisions were weighed out to them. They were allowed four pounds of meat and a peck of meal for each working person. They only provided for the working folks. If I had eight in a family, I would just get the same amount. There was no provisions for children.

"But all the children on the place were given something from the big house. The working folks ate their breakfast before daylight in the log cabin where they lived. They ate their supper at home too. They was allowed to get back home by seven or eight o'clock. The slaves on my place never ate together. I don't know anything about that kind of feeding.

"They had mires, old folks that weren't able to work any longer. All the children would go to the same place to be cared for and the old people would look after them. They wasn't able to work, you know. They fed the children during the day. "My father and mother and grandmother said the overseer told them that they were free. I guess that was in 1865, the same year I was born. The overseer told them that they didn't have any owner now. They was free folks. The boss man told them too---had them to come up to the big house and told them they had to look out for themselves now because they were free as he was.

"Right after emancipation, my folks were freed. The boss man told them they could work by the day or sharecrop or they could work by groups. A group of folks could go together and work and the boss man would pay them so much a day. I believe they worked for him a good while---about seven or eight years at least. They was in one of the groups.

"My own earliest recollections was of picking cotton in one of those squads---the groups I was telling you about. After that, the people got to renting land and renting stock for themselves. They sharecropped then. It seems to me that everybody was satisfied. I don't remember any one saying that he was cheated or beat out of anything.

"We had a public school to open in Jefferson County, Mississippi. We called it Dobbins Bridge. There was a bridge about a mile long built across the creek. We had two colored women for teachers. Their names was Mary Howard and Hester Harris. They only used two teachers in that school. I attended there three years to those same two women. "We had a large family and I quit to help take care of it.

"I don't think there was much disturbance from the Ku Klux on that plantation. The colored folks didn't take much part in politics.

"I stopped school and went to work for good at about fifteen years. I worked at the field on that same plantation I told you about. I worked there for just about ten years. Then I farmed at the same place on shares. I stayed there till I was 'bout twenty-six years old.

Then I moved to wilderness Place in the Cotton Belt in Mississippi. I farmed there for two years.

"I farmed around Greenville, Mississippi for a while. Then I left Greenville and came to Arkansas. I came straight to Little Rock. The first thing I did I went into the lumber grading. I wasn't trained to it, but I went into it at the request of the men who employed me. I stayed in that eight years. I learned the lumber grading and checking. Checking is seeing the size and width and length and kind of lumber and seeing how much of it there is in a car without taking it out, you know.

"I married about 1932. My wife is dead. We never had any children.

"I haven't worked any now in five years. I have been to the hospital in the east end. I get old age assistance---eight dollars and commodities."