

# Mississippi Narratives

## Prepared by

### The Federal Writer's Project of The Works Progress Administration

#### For the State of Mississippi

## Isaac Pringle

Foreword: Isaac Pringle is a small man, about five feet four or five, rather light brown in color, living on the Monroe Harper place, four miles from Vimville, in Lauderdale County, Mississippi. He is ninety-six years old and rather feeble but his mind is remarkably clear. He is a gentle old man, dignified and somewhat reserved until his confidence is gained, but loves to talk and, even more, to listen to the better class of white people, among whom he has many friends. He started to vote as soon as negroes were enfranchised but always sided with his white folks and, so highly is he regarded that, although not legally entitled to do so for many years, he is still permitted to cast his ballot unchallenged. He has spent his entire life, except for the war period, within five miles of where he was born, his travels, "all over de world," being to the extent only of his war experience and attendance at Confederate reunions, which latter are the high spots in his life. He is totally unreconstructed, a true negro of the Old South, and, although entirely free from any taint of servility or slavishness, still believes firmly that "'fo' de war" days were best.

"I was born right here in dis county, on de ninth day of May, eighteen hundred and forty-one, at Vimville; but, Law', I been pretty near all over de world sence dat time.

"I was born on de W. S. Pringle place. He was my old boss. My pa and ma both belonged to him.

"Dey call me Ike, but my name is Isaac, for my pa. My ma, she was named Beadie.

"My old boss was mighty strict for us to have plenty to eat. Dey raised all dey ate on de place, an' dey drew deir rations every Wednesday night. Dey had a big meat box dat never was empty. We had plenty to eat an plenty clothes.

"Dey had spinnin' wheels an' a loom, an my Ma did de spinnin' an' weavin'. All de women folks would

card an' spin every night till bed-time. Miss Sally run de house. Lem me see if I can count 'em. Dere was Joe, 'n William, 'n Frank, 'n Abraham, n' Mary, n' Laura; six child'en dey had.

"De cullud people had deir to-dos on Saturday night but I never could dance. Never could learn.

"We went to church too, wid de white folks. Dere was a circuit rider used to preach on Sunday night at de old church (Mt. Gilead dey called it den) an' white an' cullud went to church together. Hit was two or three years after de war before dey separated us.

"My old boss give me to one of his grandsons, named Frank. He was about my age. We youngsters was like chickens an' turkeys, we was so thick, an' one day de old man lined us all up an' say, 'Now, Frank, look 'em all over an' take your choice'. Mr. Frank studied us all for a while an' den he say, 'I'll take dis one', an' dat was me, so I went home wid him.

"Dey took me for a house boy, an' when de war started I went all through hit with him. We went to Atlanta an' went in de war in April 1862 an' come out in April 1865. Perryville, Kentucky, in August 1862, I was tied up all day in dat battle.

"Colonel W. F. Dowd was colonel of de 24th Miss. regiment, ridin' up an' down in front de lines, an', when de first shells come over, hit scared his horse so bad he run away straight through de Yankee army an' we never did see him no mo'.

"We didn't go to Virginia, jus up to de line. Den we went to Chattanooga an' fought aroun' till dey wallered everything out aroun' dere, den we went to Atlanta, Georgia.

"All dem three years of de war I never got to touch a horse. We'd walk all day an' a good piece of de night. An' dem campfires, wid ten thousand men around, you never saw anything like it. Hit looked like de whole world was lighted up.

"When we got word of de surrender, we wasn't mustered out. We all just scattered for our homes.

"After de war, Mr. Frank went to Florida but I come on back to de old home place.

"I didn't know what to think when I was freed. I'd always been tuk care of an' now I had to hit out for myself. We was in Washington County, Alabama, when I was freed. De boss told me I was free to go where I like an' do what I like, but, if I want to stay on wid him, he'd pay me ten dollars a month an' my keep, so I stayed.

"My wife belonged to a man by de name of Tarrell, in dis county. She stayed on wid her people an' I come to see her once a month. Mr. Tarrell was a good man too.

"I married my first wife in January 1860 an' she died de 23d day of September, 1868. Mary Tarrell was her name.

"My regular job was haulin' wood to de M. & O. Railroad at Deer Park. Dey burned wood den.

"Den we went to live two years wid my brother-in-law at Pritchut, Alabama, till my wife died.

"After dat, I come back here an' went to farmin'. I bought me a track of land, eighty acres, over here about a mile, an' a big fine mare an' raised my own mules.

"Hit was big talk den dat everybody was goin' to git forty acres an' a mule, but, when I got my mule, I bought him. Dey made powerful promises, but didn't anybody I know git nothin'.

"We never had no slave trouble around here. I heard about de underground railway an' found out hit was covered wagons, but nobody went from here. I wasn't tryin' to git away.

"I never had no use for de Yankees. I hired out to 'em in Mobile after de war an' I had enough of 'em den. Dey made me nurse an' everything. But dere was a heap of trouble after de war. Kep' up so long, look like hit never would git settled, but hit did. Dere was a man named Aaron Moore, was a ringleader, always stirrin' up trouble. He was our regular blacksmith around here an' got elected to de legislature. He was a big man but I never wanted to go wid him. I always voted for our side de house. Dey got after him one time an' he walked an' run all de way to Jackson an', if his strength hilt out, I reckon he's goin' yit. He never come back here no more. Dey looked for him on de train but he kep' to de rood.

"Dere was plenty of Ku Klux but dey wasn't lookin for me. I never was bothered wid 'em.

"I farmed an' was just as successful as a man could be. Always had money in de house. Gold money.

"I sold my place about twenty-five years ago, cause white folks bought all de land around, an we was de only cullud people in de neighborhood, so we moved over here.

"I'm too old to farm now, an' my wife too, but she picks some cotton, an' my granddaughter's got an interest in dis cornfield over here. I got more grandchildren dan any two men in de county.

"Mr. Harper's good to us, an' I got a little Confederate veteran's pension, four dollars a month, an' we're makin' out.

"Dese here my badges from de Confederate reunions. I been to every one, up to 1934, in Chattanooga. I'm de biggest fool in de world about dem things, an' I love to look at 'em.

"I think I'll ask 'em to bring me wid dis one.