

Mississippi Narratives
Prepared by
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James Augustus Holmes - Age 94

"I was born in Thomas County, Ga. near Thomasville, the county seat, August 2, 1843. My father was name Brister Holmes and my mother, Louvenia. There was fourteen boys of us and five girls. George, Peter, Frank and Aleck lived until they's old mens. My sister, Martha, lives in Birmingham. She is 80-odd year old. She had a twin sister name Susie. One more sister I keeps in tech with is "Sister Matilda." She lives in Little Rock, Ark."

"I wus 22 year old when freedom come. I remembers seeing my grandfather and my great-grandfather. His name wus Henry Holmes. He come from Bedford, Mass. Dats whar old Marsta bought him. He bought 300 slaves at one time and brought them all to Georgie. He kept most of these slaves til' freedom. He sold some and den some run away. When dey run away he puts the "nigger hounds" on dem. Sometimes dey ketch 'em and bring 'em back; some of dem come back on der own 'cord, and den some newver did come back. Ef dey didn't promise not to run off any more, an' was stubborn about it, he had 'em whupped, or if dey wus onusually rebellious, he put 'em in stocks. He usually sold dat kind first chance, "ef dey didn't repent of der stubbornness."

"Old Marsta went to war and served under General Johnston. He was captured by the Yankees once and put in prison, but was exchanged fer another prisoner. When de slaves got sick we had de bes' of doctors in de country. Old Doctor Porter was our doctor and when he died his son, Dr. Eugene Porter tuk his place. Ole Marsta wanted us to be healthy and he give us plenty of good things to eat. My grandma was de cook, and my mother was a house girl and helped with the weaving. My father was a blacksmith and carpenter. He bought his freedom before de war was over. He bought my mother's freedom, too,

and as many of the chillun as he could. Some of dem old Masta wouldn't sell. He could not buy me 'cause dey done give me to young "Miss Virginia." When she married Mr. Crayton I went to live with her at Bainbridge, Ga. I remembers the Griffins was our neighbors, on de next plantation to de south. They was fine people. My wuk was to take care of the calves and wuk around the yard and help in de house when dey needed me. When "Miss Virginia" married dey had a big wedding. Dey is cooking a week for it and we had a three days feast afterwards."

"I remember the white "overseers". We had one mean one name T. J. Linton. The reason I member him so well is dat he stepped on my hand once and broke two of my fingers. Old Masta called him up and paid him off and tole him to go. We didn't like any of the "overseers" ceptin' one name "John Wilkes." He was good to us and old Masta liked him, too. He afterwards bought some slaves of his' own. We had a "nigger driver" name "Ben Habersham" and the niggers sho hated him. He did most of the whupping. My young mistess taught me how to read and write, and spell some, and keep talley. I didn't hear of any trouble dem days 'tween de whites and blacks. Sometimes de slaves toted news back and forth, but dey had to be mighty careful not to let de white folks hear 'bout it. Dey was purty close-mouf' dem days."

"I jes' remember three old songs my mother usta sing to me: "We Shall Sleep, but Not Ferever;" "All The Way My Savior Lead Me;" and "I'm Pressing on the Upward Way."

Christmas and Thanksgivin' was our big days dem times, with plenty of company and feastin.'"

"I usta believe in ghosts and was powerfully superstitious but I got over dat. Ef I started somewhar and turned back I allus made a cross mark in de san' or on somethin. Onct I thought I saw a whole house full of ghosts. It was one night I was drivin' a hearse with a corpse in it. I had to pass a country church with a graveyard round it. Wen I 'proach dat church, de moon was shinin' and I could see a whole heap of white forms movin' about-----in de church. I jes' natchly fell outa dat wagon atter I drap dem lines, and take back toards home as fas' as I could run." It was 18 mile to whar I live but I got dar about daybreak and tole my father about it. He got de preacher, ole brother Jenkins, and we went back to whar I'd left dat hearse and the hosses. Dey was jes' grazing round in de graveyard, and dat church was full of goats, what had got themsels locked up in dar. Brother Jenkins tole me dat der want no sech things as ghosts, but them sheep shore looked like ghosts to me dat night. Dey didn't have the "wake" dat night, as the corpse never got there till nex' day. Dey sat up all night waitin' fer me to come wid it.

"My health was good til' bout a year ago, a catfish finned me in one of my little toes. It got pizened and I was sick almost a year frum it, till young Dr. Sheely cut off my toe. I am able to do some work. I live on Mr. Ben Grisman's place. He takes keer of me. I have had six wives, all of em dead. I have had 14 boys and 13 girls-----27 in all. I can't tell you where but five of them is now. They is all grown and livin' with der families."

"I remembers seein' two presidents--Grant and Johnson. General Beauregard and Jefferson Davis has both been to our house in Georgy."

"Slav'ry times wus not so bad fer some of us who had good masters. Some of us old ones would not min' having somebody to look after us these days."