

Mississippi Narratives
Prepared by
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Simon Hare age 88

"If you knows where North Ca'lina is, you knows where I was bornd. Dat was where, close ter Newman, an' hit was eight-eight year ago because dat's how old I is.

"My marster was Dr. Dick Hare. He had three hund'ed head of Laborers an' about two sections of land. Hit was close ter a tobacco factory, at Newman. My mother stripped tobacco, name Maria; an' my father opened up land fer Dr. Hare - name Oliver. De country was jes openin' up. Hit was new an' full of woods. No'm, I don' reckon you'd call hid a plantation; hit was more jes kinder lumberin' an' strippin' tobacco. We had colored fo'mens, didn' have no overseer like dey call de white fo'mens in Alabama. Dr. Hare an' his fam'ly had a house, jes a house, you know, but de hands didn' have no houses, jes kinder shelters dey th'ow together. De young chullun had a trench ter eat in like hogs. Eat peas an' bread an' taters, feed 'em like pigs. We was glad ter git it, kep' us fat, didn' none of 'em git sick.

"We had winter time, show! Had big log fires outdoors. See, hadn't nobody lived in dat section much; we had ter open up de country. Had a old lady ter take care of de young chullun. Dey was seven of us was brothers an' sisters. Chullun play, show! Waller around in de ditch like a old sow; get sleepy, go ter sleep right dare till old lady come rustle us up. White chullun didn' play round us. Dr. Hare had chullun, but we didn' really never see no white chile close up till we start ter Alabama.

"White folks didn' have no comp'ny much, 'cep' de mail rider. Hit was wild like out there. Dr. Hare he was gone up an' down de road most of de time, sorter prospectin' you might call hit. I don' know'm what kind of a doctor he call hisse'f. Didn' never doctor on us. Maybe he knowed we go down ter de branch

an' git things grow in de branch for medicine. See one of 'em lookin' bad, old lady go ter de branch an' git bill-rush an' make tea fer sore th'roat, an' some kinder seed fer bowel trouble.

"Dey wasn' no dancin' much in North Ca'lina, wasn' what you might say, wild, much. Dey work 'em too close. Sing some; sing:

'Am I born ter die today,

Ter lay dis body down?'

Didn' know nothin' 'bout no show-'nough church in dem days. Colored folks jes kinder raised 'em up a colored preacher ter preach ter 'em. Didn' have nobody ter ordain nobody. Built a shelter of sticks wid a place fer de preacher ter stand; th'owed little bushy trees on top of hit fer a roof. Some of de white folks frum around car'y on in there till noon a heap of Sundays. I don' know what kind of preachin' dey had; wasn' none of us 'lowed ter go round while de white folks was there. Didn' no white preacher ever preach ter us. But de ev'nin's b'longed ter de colored - ever' Sunday an' other times, too. De sisters had dey skirts draggin' dey feets then. De preacher preach, an' dey rare (rear) like goats. Preacher had a Blue Back Speller an' a Bible. Dat was when I learn: 'I kin read my titles clear.'

First, dey call hit Baptist; then, after while, some new hands come in an', after while, dey git ter callin' hit Methodist. Didn' have nobody old enough in de faith ter baptise 'em anyhow, so dey give up callin' 'em Baptist.

"I don' know'm much what de white folks do wid deyse'fs in dem days. We didn' never see no white folks much, 'cep' de mail, always bus' our legs gittin' ter see him. But we had ter keep out of sight 'cause de Mistis always send ter meet de mail, quick as she hear him play dat tune on a bugle like. We chullun would lay down in de grass behind de fence an' peep th'ough an' watch him comin'. Driv a surrey wid two horses. Didn' stop, no'm. Th'owed off Marster's mail, come frum Mobile. Sometimes he bring iron same as letters; had ter git it frum Mobile, too. De mail was a white man, show, but he was all bundled up, seem like; we chullun try hard ter see him but we couldn' git so close. He might a done rest below on de road, but didn' never rest there. We got de notion he jes go on an' on, jes keep a goin' all de time.

"Befo' de war, dey driv us out. We'd done cleaned up dat section. Dr. Hare lookin' fer new land, bought mo' lands in Alabama; drive us befo' him all de way ter Alabama. I was ten year old; helt de horses when de white folks git out ter git on-cramped frum sittin' so long - in de wagon, you know. Dey was horses ter de wagon, an' de baby was in de cradle settin' up in de wagon, jes rockin' along. Young Marster John Hare rid a mule an' de other wagons had mules pullin' 'em. De hands walked, dem dat could walk. One

of 'em git sick - show 'nough sick, couldn' go no further - let him git up in de wagon. Roads was show bad - call 'em roads! You couldn' a driv no automobile over 'em.

"When we got ter where we was goin', dey was a old house on de land fer de white folks an' jes little shanties fer de colored. But we wasn' used ter houses an' we thought dey was all right. Had ter open up de country jes like dey done in North Ca'lina. Dr. Hare say his hands spend mo' time huntin' deers an' snakes an' pant'ers than dey did pullin' de cross-saw, an' he make de fo'mens tighten up. 'Course he hunted, an' young Marster John, too. When dey got de lan' cleared, dey put in cotton an' corn; didn' bother much about pullin' stumps in dem days.

"Didn' see white folks much, seldom see a white man. But we was mo' gayer in Alabama. Had banjos - pick wid yo' hands. Say, 'Balance right!' I hear 'em hollerin' back an' forth, an' dey understood what ter do. Say, 'Right wheel!' Dey'd handle hit good. We chullun stand around an' watch 'em. I kin see 'em plain, dey clothes an' all; goods had a kinder speck in hit, call hit osnaburg.

"De mainest thing bothered us - we was uster de Doctor an' his ways - de mainest thing bothered us was de patterrollers. Didn' know nothin' about patterrollers till we git ter Alabama. Dey git on dey mules an' ride ter de crossin' - like de railroad crossin' down here at de Fertilize', an' kotch you if you was gittin' away from yo' marster. Return 'em ter dey owner, an' owner'd pay him fer ketchin' him. Patterrollers didn' whup 'em - yo' marster'd do dat when he got you back. De Doctor he'd be settin' on his hoss, waitin' fer you. Had a big old hoss name Stonewall, mighty fine saddle. He'd rare (rear), den when old Marster'd git on him, he'd go.

"After we been in Alabama a year or two, de war come, an' young Marster John went off ter hit an' tuck my Uncle Robert wid him. Told him he was takin' him ter hold his hoss, but, bless God! when dey got there, he put Uncle Robert out in front at de breastworks where he s'posed ter be hisself. Young Marster John didn' come back - must a got killed some how er-nother.

"De Doctor gittin' kinder old by then. Come a bunch of 'em, a old set of folks, Yankees or some'pin, come an' take old Marster's stuff an' driv off all his hands, driv us befo' 'em ter de Noxubee River, put us ter workin' dey cotton, an' de Doctor couldn' he'p hisse'f. But dey couldn' rule Aunt Harriet, she was pruddy tough. An' she was a powerful big woman, wasn't sca'ed of nobody. Yankees couldn' do nothin' wid her. Dey had a time! She wouldn't travel, an' dey hung her up in de do' ter de sto'house where de place stick out - where de slain hang down, where dey h'istes (hoistes) de seed bags an' fodder, you know, an' lef' her there. We didn' never see her no mo'.

"Come de Surrender, colored folks had a bad time. Didn' know how ter make a trade no more'n nothin'. Didn' have nothin', not even a hat. My mother make us hats, twist rushes what dey shuttle up. She make

clothes too, make some pin dat would do me - I was little then - it wouldn' wear out. Wisht I had some of dat cloth she make now. Some was glad ter be free, some was sorry because dey was wuss off, work a whole year an' git nothin'. Marster jes said, 'Yawl is free.' An' he didn' do nothin' mo' fer us. Colored folks didn' have sense enough ter know how ter git on, wasn' use ter doin' fer deyse'fs. Had a bad time! We stayed right there. Hit done got ter be called Geiger by dat time. I stayed on till I got grown. Mother's buried there.

"Show! Ever'body knowed about de Klool Kluxes! One bunch of 'em come there one night, ridin' mules. Had things over dey eyes. You'd think hit was de devil. Git you off an' whup you so you be sca'ed ter show yo' face an' not go messin' wid white folks's bus'ness.

"We hear'd most ever'thing goin' on frum my father. He was pruddy lively an' got around considerable. Hit was a bunch of colored men; my father went around wid de bunch an' did like dey did. If he voted, I didn' know it, but we found out de diff'runce betwixt Radicals an' Democratics, but I don' remember jes how hit was now. Hit was Abe Lincoln said we was free, I think, an' ever' man free ter 'tend ter his own bus'ness. Trouble was, we didn' know how ter.

"I met Jefferson Davis! We toted him, right here in Mer-ree-dian, toted him on our shoulders, didn' let him put he feets on de ground, toted him frum de train ter de courthouse. He was gonter make a speech. He was a old gent'mun, looked mild. He got off de train at de Ragsdale Hotel. I was greasin' cwars then. Dey had little small engines an' had smokers on top of 'em, great big things; de first little engines de A. & V. run; th'owed wood in there. An' my fo'man said, 'Knock off an' go see our President. Had one lady wid him, Miss Winnie, say she was his daughter. He made a speech at de courthouse. Say, 'You b'long ter us. You aint free.' Say, 'You can't hurt a nigger; all he needs, keep him full of some pin t'eat; work him hard; he show steal if he git hongry; he steal him a hog an' car'y hit home. Feed him an' work him, dat's all.'

"I mar'ied at Geiger, name Maria too, jes like my mother. Things started gittin' slow around there an' I come on ter Mer-ree-dian. Dey'd meet you when you git off de cwars an' put you ter work on de railroad; hands was sca'ce. But I didn' git off at Mer-ree-dian like I was s'posed ter. Dey had ter tie me on de train. I was sca'ed plumb ter death. When I see de train light comin', I run - an' me mar'ied two years. Old gent'mun say, 'Where you goin', boy?' 'Cause I done gone an' hid behind a bank till de train could git by. But when I say, 'Goin' ter Mer-ree-dian,' dey put me on de train. Conductor say, 'Boy, aint you got yo' check?' An' I pull out ever'thing I had in my pocket an' giv hit ter him. He call a porter an' say, 'Hold dis boy. If he hadn' bought his check, I'd car'y him free, 'cause he so sca'ed.' I like ter vomited.

"When we git close ter Mer-ree-dian an' stop fer water, porter give a old watchman half a gallon of whiskey ter take care of me till mornin'. He kep' a little smoke down close ter de spur track. An' come day, he take me back ter de main line an' say, 'Anybody know dis boy?' Old man come an' say, 'Look like

I know him.' Ask me who I was, an' when I say I'm mar'ied ter Peter Simpson's girl, say he know him an' Aunt Martha - she was my grandmother - live right here in

Mer-ree-dian. Old colored man come along wid a yoke of steers ter a two-wheel wagon full of wood. He say he take me ter her, but he tuck me ter West End (Meridian), give me one meal a day an' no money a-tall, an' I cut wood like a dog fer him an', come Sad'dy, he tuck me ter town ter sell de wood. An' I slips out at de Fertilize' where a heap of colored folks was livin', an' I calls out, 'Anybody live round here name Martha Simpson?' An', show'nough, there she was. An' she take me ter her house an' say, 'I got a little piece of a boy here; let him lay down a spell an' res' hisse'f.' An' de very next day, here come de railroad folks an' got me, an' I haste on an' work fer 'em. An' frum then on, I worked on de railroad, greasin' cwars fer thirty-five years. Befo' I quit, I was de oldest colored workman dey had then. Dat was de Northeastern befo' day changed up de shops. Then dey say my eyes got too weak, an' dey pulled me off.

"I done bought me a house in Savannah Grove (Meridian negro quarter close to the 'Fertilize'" Factory) by this time, since President Harrison was President. I was gittin'

ninety cents a day an' bought my home, an' I'm still livin' right there.

"I has ten chullun. Dey scattered around up north an' in Bummin'ham. But five of my grandchullun lives wid me - an' jes dis one an' dat one, you know. I scratch around in my patch. Times is show bad since de Ree-lief done quit. I got 'karns (pecans) all sot out on my place. De Ree-lief folks say I ought ter sell 'em, but shucks! we eats 'em. I asked de high-sheriff could de Ree-lief ree-fuse me because I lets de chullun eat my 'karns stid of sellin' 'em, but he jes laugh.