

FRANK BELL, 86, was a slave of Johnson Bell, who ran a saloon in New Orleans. Frank lives in Madisonville, Texas.

"I was owned by Johnson Bell and born in New Orleans, in Louisiana. 'Cordin' to the bill of sale, I'm eighty-six years old, and my master was a Frenchman and was real mean to me. He run saloon and kept bad women. I don't know nothing 'bout my folks, if I even had any, 'cept mama. They done tell me she was a bad woman and a French Creole.

"I worked 'round master's saloon, kep' everything cleaned up after they'd have all night drinkin' parties, men and women. I earned nickels to tip off where to go, so's they could sow wild oats. I buried the nickels under rocks. If master done cotch me with money, he'd take it and beat me nearly to death. All I had to eat was old stuff those people left, all scraps what was left.

"One time some bad men come to master's and gits in a shootin' scrape and they was two men kilt. I sho' did run. But master cotch me and make me take them men to the river and tie a weight on them, so they'd sink and the law wouldn't git him.

"The clothes I wore was some master's old ones. They allus had holes in them. Master he stay drunk nearly all time and was mean to his slave. I'm the only one he had, and didn't cost him nothing. He have bill of sale made, 'cause the law say he done stole me when I'm small child. Master kept me in chains sometimes. He shot several men. [Pg 61]

"I didn't have no quarters but stays 'round the place and throw old sack down and lay there and sleep. I'm 'fraid to run, 'cause master say he'd hunt me and kill nigger.

"When I's 'bout seventeen I marries a gal while master on drunk spell. Master he run her off, and I slips off at night to see her, but he finds it out. He takes a big, long knife and cuts her head plumb off, and ties a great, heavy weight to her and makes me throw her in the river. Then he puts me in chains and every night he come give me a whippin', for long time.

"When war come, master swear he not gwine fight, but the Yankees they captures New Orleans and throws master in a pen and guards him. He gets a chance and 'scapes.

"When war am over he won't free me, says I'm valuable to him in his trade. He say, 'Nigger, you's suppose to be free but I'll pay you a dollar a week and iffen you runs off I'll kill you.' So he makes me do like befo' the war, but give me 'bout a dollar a month, 'stead week.

"He say I cost more'n I'm worth, but he won't let me go. Times I don't know why I didn't die befo' I'm growed, sleepin' on the ground, winter and summer, rain and snow. But not much snow there.

"Master helt me long years after the war. If anybody git after him, he told them I stay 'cause I wants to stay, but told me if I left he'd kill him 'nother nigger. I stayed till he gits in a drunk brawl one night with men and women and they gits to shootin' and some kilt. Master got kilt. Then I'm left to live or die, so I wanders from place to place. I nearly starved to death befo' I'd leave New Orleans, 'cause I couldn't think master am dead and I'm 'fraid. Finally I gits up nerve to leave town, and stays the first night [Pg 62] in white man's barn. I never slep'. Every time I hears something, I jumps up and master be standin'

there, lookin' at me, but soon's I git up he'd leave. Next night I slep' out in a hay field, and master he git right top of a tree and start hollerin at me. I never stays in that place. I gits gone from that place. I gits back to town fast as my legs carry me.

"Then I gits locked up in jail. I don't know what for, never did know. One the men says to me to come with him and takes me to the woods and gives me an ax. I cuts rails till I nearly falls, all with chain locked 'round feet, so I couldn't run off. He turns me loose and I wanders 'gain. Never had a home. Works for men long 'nough to git fifty, sixty cents, then starts roamin' 'gain, like a stray dog like.

"After long time I marries Feline Graham. Then I has a home and we has a white preacher marry us. We has one boy and he farms and I lives with him. I worked at sawmill and farms all my life, but never could make much money.

"You know, the nigger was wild till the white man made what he has out of the nigger. He done ed'cate them real smart.