



Fred Brown

**FRED BROWN, 84, 1414 Jones St., Fort Worth, Texas, was born a slave to Mr. John Brown, who owned a plantation along the Mississippi River, in Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana. Fred was eight years old when the Civil War started. During the War, he and a number of other slaves were taken to Kaufman Co., Texas, as refugees, by Henry Bidder, an overseer. He worked five years as a laborer after he was freed, then worked as a cook until 1933.**

"Sho', I has time to talk to you 'bout my life, 'cause I can't work any more and I has nothin' but time. It am de rhumatis' in de leg, it ketch me dat way, from de hip to de knee, —zip— dat pain goes!

"I's bo'n in ole Louisiana, in Baton Rouge Parish, on de 16th of November, in 1853. I knows, 'cause massa give dis nigger a statement. You see, dey don' larn de niggers to read in dem days, nor figger, but I can read figgers. See dem on dat car? Dat am 713. Dat am bad figgers, I never has any truck with sich numbers as de 7 or de 13.

"Massa have quite pert a plantation in Louisiana, dis side de Mississippi River. De slaves him own am from 40 to 50 sometimes. In our family am pappy, mammy and three brudders and one sister, Julia, and six cousins. Dat am 13 and dat's why massa had so much trouble with niggers runnin' 'way!

"Everyone have dere certain wo'k and duties for to do. Mammy am de family cook and she he'p at de loom, makin' de cloth. My daddy [Pg 157] am de blacksmith and shoemaker and de tanner. I 'spains how he do tannin.' He puts de hides in de water with black-oak bark and purty soon de hair come off and den he rolls and poun's de hides for to make dem soft.

"When I's 'bout 8 years old, or sich, dey starts me to he'pin' in de yard and as I grows older I he'ps in de fields. Massa, him raises cane and co'n mostly, no cotton.

"De buildings on de place am de resident of de massa and de quarters for de niggers. Dey am built from logs and de quarters has no floors and no windows, jus' square holes whar de windows ought to be. Dey have bunks for sleepin' and a table and benches, and cooks in de fireplace.

"We allus have plenty for to eat, plenty co'nmeal, 'lasses and heavy, brown sugar. We gits flour bread once de week, but lots of butter and milk. For de coffee, we roasts meal bran and for de tea, de sassafras. Den we has veg'tables and fruit dat am raised on de place. De meat mostly am de wil' game, deer and de turkey, but sometimes hawg meat.

"Massa have overseer and overlooker. De overseer am in charge of wo'k and de overlooker am in charge of de cullud women. De overseer give all de whippin's. Sometimes when de nigger gits late, 'stead of comin' home and takin' de whippin' him goes to de caves of de river and stays and jus' comes in night time for food. When dey do dat, de dawgs is put after dem and den it am de fight 'tween de nigger and de dawg. Jus' once a nigger kills de dawg with de knife, dat was close to freedom and it come 'fore dey ketches him. When dey whips for runnin' off, de nigger am tied down over a barrel and whipped ha'd, till dey draws blood, sometimes.

"Dem fool niggers what sneak off without de pass, have two things for to watch, one is not to be ketched by de overseer and de other am [Pg 158] de patter-rollers. De nigger sho' am skeert of de patters. One time my pappy and my mammy goes out without de pass and de patters takes after dem. I'se home, 'cause I's too young to be pesterin' roun'. I sees dem comin,' and you couldn' catched dem with a jackrabbit. One time anoudder nigger am runnin' from de patters and hides under de house. Dey fin' him and make him come out. You's seen de dawg quaver when him's col'? Well, dat nigger have de quaverment jus' like dat. De patters hits him five or six licks and lets him go. Dat nigger have lots of power—him gits to de quarters ahead of his shadow.

"Now, I tell 'bout some good times. We is 'lowed to have parties and de dance and we has for music, sich as de banjo and de jew's harp and a 'cordian. Dey dance de promenade and de jeg. Sometimes day have de jiggin' contest and two niggers puts a glass of water on dere heads and den see who can dance de longes' without spillin' any water. Den we has log-rollin'. Dere was two teams, 'bout three to de team, and dey see which can roll de log de fastes'. Den sometimes a couple am 'lowed to git married and dere am extry fixed for supper. De couple steps over de broom laid en de floor, dey's married den.

"Sometimes de overlooker don' let dem git married. I 'splains it dis way. He am used for to father de chillun. Him picks de portly, and de healthy women dat am to rear de portly chillen. De overlooker, he am portly man. Dem dat him picks he overlooks, and not 'low dem to marry or to go round with other nigger men. If dey do, its whippin' sho.' De massa raises some fine, portly chillen, and dey sel' some, after dey's half-grown, for \$500 and sometimes more. [Pg 159]

"De war didn' make no diff'runce, dat I notices, 'cept massa and one overseer jines de army. Massa come back, but de overseer am captured by de Yankees, so massa says, and we never hears 'bout him after dat. De soldiers passes by lots of times, both de 'federates and de 'blue bellies', but we's never bothered with dem. De fightin' was not close enough to make trouble. Jus' 'fore freedom come, de new overseer am 'structed to take us to Texas and takes us to Kaufman County and we is refugees dere. De Yankee mans tells us we am free and can do sich as we pleases. Dat lef' us in charge of no one and we'uns, jus' like cattle, wen' wanderin'.

"Pappy, him goes back to Lousiana to massa's place. Dat am de las' we hears from him. Mammy and I goes to Henderson and I works at dis and dat and cares for my mammy ten years, till she dies. Den I gits jobs as cook in Dallas and Houston and lots of other places.

"I gits married in 1901 to Ellen Tilles and I cooks till 'bout four years ago, till I gits de rhumatis'. Dat's all I can tell you 'bout de ole days.[Pg 160]

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