

FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT
American Guide, (Negro Writers' Unit)

James Johnson, Field Worker
Monticello, Florida
December 15, 1936

PATIENCE CAMPBELL

Patience Campbell, blind for 26 years, was born in Jackson County, near Marianna, Florida about 1883[TR: incorrect date?], on a farm of George Bullock. Her mother Tempy, belonged to Bullock, while her father Arnold Merritt, belonged to Edward Merritt, a large plantation owner. According to Patience, her mother's owner was very kind, her father's very cruel. Bullock had very few slaves, but Merritt had a great many of them, not a few of whom he sold at the slave markets.

Patience spent most of her time playing in the sand when she was a child, while her parents toiled in the fields for their respective owners. Her grandparents on her mother's side belonged to Bullock, but of her father's people she knew nothing as "they didn't come to this country." When asked where they lived, she replied "in South Carolina."

Since she lived with her mother, Patience fared much better than had she lived with her father. Her main foods included meats, greens, rice, corn bread which was replaced by biscuits on Sunday morning. Coffee was made from parched corn or meal and was the chief drink. The food was cooked in large iron pots and pans in an open fireplace and seasoned with salt obtained by evaporating sea water.

Water for all purposes was drawn from a well. In order to get soap to wash with, the cook would save all the grease left from the cooking. Lye was obtained by mixing oak ashes with water and allowing them to decay; Tubs were made from large barrels.

When she was about seven or eight, Patience assisted other children about her age and older in picking out cotton seeds from the picked cotton. After the cotton was weighed on improved scales, it was bound in bags made of hemp.

Spinning and weaving were taught Patience when she was about ten. Although the cloth and thread were dyed various colors, she knows only how blue was obtained by allowing the indigo plant to rot in water and straining the result.

Patience's father was not only a capable field worker but also a finished shoemaker. After tanning and curing his hides by placing them in water with oak bark for several days and then exposing them to the sun to dry, he would cut out the uppers and the soles after measuring the foot to be shod. There would be an inside sole as well as an outside sole tacked together by means of small tacks made of maple wood. Sewing was done on the shoes by means of flax thread.

Patience remembers saving the feathers from all the fowl to make feather beds. She doesn't remember when women stopped wearing hoops in their skirts nor when bed springs replaced bed ropes. She does remember, however, that these things were used.

She saw her first windmill about 36 years ago, ten years before she went blind. She remembers seeing buggies during slavery time, little light carriages, some with two wheels and some with four. She never heard of any money called "shin-plasters," and she became money-conscious during the war when Confederate currency was introduced. When the slaves were sick, they were given castor oil, turpentine and medicines made from various roots and herbs.

Patience's master joined the confederacy, but her father's master did not. [Although Negroes could enlist in the Southern army if they desired,] none of them wished to do so but preferred to join northern forces and fight for the thing they desired most, freedom. When freedom was no longer a dream, but a reality, the Merritts started life on their own as farmers. Twelve-year old Patience entered one of the schools established by the Freedmen's Bureau. She recalls the gradual growth of Negro settlements, the churches and the rise and fall of the Negroes politically.

REFERENCE

1. Personal interview with Patience Campbell, 910 Cherry Street, Monticello, Florida