

**WPA in Ohio  
Federal Writers' Project  
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Dugan]**

**Ex-Slaves  
Jefferson County, District #2**

**PERRY SID JEMISON [TR: also reported as  
Jamison]  
Ex-Slave, 79 years**

(Perry Sid Jemison lives with his married daughter and some of his grand-children at 422 South Sixth Street, Steubenville, O.)

"I wuz borned in Perry County, Alabama! De way I remember my age is, I was 37 years when I wuz married and dat wuz 42 years ago the 12th day of last May. I hed all dis down on papers, but I hab been stayin' in different places de last six years and lost my papers and some heavy insurance in jumpin' round from place to place.

"My mudders name wuz Jane Perry. Father's name wuz Sid Jemison. Father died and William Perry was mudders second husband.

"My mudder wuz a Virginian and my father was a South Carolinian. My oldest brodder was named Sebron and oldest sister wuz Maggie. Den de next brudder wuz William, de next sister wuz named Artie, next Susie. Dats all of dem.

"De hol entire family lived together on the Cakhoba river, Perry County, Alabama. After dat we wuz scattered about, some God knows where.

"We chillun played 'chicken me craner crow'. We go out in de sand and build sand houses and put out little tools and one thing and another in der.

"When we wuz all together we lived in a log hut. Der wuz a porch in between and two rooms on each side. De porch wuz covered over—all of it wuz under one roof.

"Our bed wuz a wooden frame wid slats nailed on it. We jus had a common hay mattress to sleep on. We had very respectable quilts, because my mudder made them. I believe we had better bed covers dem days den we hab des days.

"My grandmother wuz named Snooky and my grandfather Anthony. I thought der wasn't a better friend in all de world den my grandmother. She would do all she could for her grandchildren. Der wuz no food allowance for chillun that could not work and my grandmother fed us out of her and my mudders allowance. I member my grandmudder giving us pot-licker, bread and red syrup.

"De furst work I done to get my food wuz to carry water in de field to de hands dat wuz workin'. De next work after dat, wuz when I wuz large enough to plow. Den I done eberything else that come to mind on de farm. I neber earned money in dem slave days.

"Your general food wuz such as sweet potatoes, peas and turnip greens. Den we would jump out and ketch a coon or possum. We ate rabbits, squirrels, ground-hog and hog meat. We had fish, cat-fish and scale fish. Such things as greens, we boil dem. Fish we fry. Possum we parboil den pick him up and bake him. Of all dat meat I prefar fish and rabbit. When it come to vegetables, cabbage wuz my delight, and turnips. De slaves had their own garden patch.

"I wore one piece suit until I wuz near grown, jes one garment dat we called et dat time, going out in your shirt tail. In de winter we had cotton shirt with a string to tie de collar, instead of a button and tie. We war den same on Sunday, excepting dat mudder would wash and iron dem for dat day.

"We went barefooted in de summer and in de winter we wore brogan shoes. Dey were made of heavy stiff leather.

"My massa wuz named Sam Jemison and his wife wuz named Chloe. Dey had chillun. One of the boys wuz named Sam after his father. De udder wuz Jack. Der wuz daughter Nellie. Dem wuz all I know bout. De had a large six room building. It wuz weather boarded and built on de common order.

"Dey hed 750 acres on de plantation. De Jemisons sold de plantation to my uncle after the surrender and I heard him say ever so many times that it was 750 acres. Der wuz bout 60 slaves on de plantation. Dey work hard and late at night. Dey tole me dey were up fore daylight and in de fields til dark.

"I heard my mudder say dat the mistress was a fine woman, but dat de marse was rigied [TR: rigid?].

"De white folks did not help us to learn to read or write. De furst school I remember dat wuz accessbile was foh 90 days duration. I could only go when it wuz too wet to work in de fields. I wuz bout 16 years when I went to de school.

"Der wuz no church on de plantation. Couldn't none of us read. But after de surrender I remember de furst preacher I ebber heard. I remember de text. His name was Charles Fletcher. De text was "Awake thou dat sleepeth, arise from de dead and Christ will give you life!" I remember of one of de baptizing. De men dat did it was Emanuel Sanders. Dis wuz de song dat dey sing: "Beside de gospel pool, Appointed for de poor." Dat is all I member of dat song now.

"I heard of de slaves running away to de north, but I nebber knew one to do it. My mudder tole me bout patrollers. Dey would ketch de slaves when dey were out late and whip and thress dem. Some of de owners would not stand for it and if de slaves would tell de massa he might whip de patrollers if he could ketch dem.

"I knowed one colored boy. He wuz a fighter. He wuz six foot tall and over 200 pounds. He would not stand to be whipped by de white man. Dey called him Jack. Des wuz after de surrender. De white men could do nothin' wid him. En so one day dey got a crowd together and dey shoot him. It wuz a senation [TR: sensation?] in de country, but no one was arrested for it.

"De slaves work on Saturday afternoon and sometimes on Sunday. On Saturday night de slaves would slip around to de next plantation and have parties and dancin' and so on.

"When I wuz a child I played, 'chicken me craner crow' and would build little sand houses and call dem frog dens and we play hidin' switches. One of de play songs wuz 'Rockaby Miss Susie girl' and 'Sugar Queen in goin south, carrying de young ones in her mouth.'

"I remember several riddles. One wuz:

'My father had a little seal,  
Sixteen inches high.

He roamed the hills in old Kentuck,  
And also in sunny Spain.  
If any man can beat dat,  
I'll try my hand agin.'

"One little speech I know:

'I tumbled down one day,  
When de water was wide and deep  
I place my foot on the de goose's back  
And lovely swam de creek.'

"When I wuz a little boy I wuz follin' wid my father's scythe. It fell on my arm and nearly cut it off. Dey got somethin' and bind it up. Eventually after a while, it mended up.

"De marse give de sick slaves a dose of turpentine, blue mass, caromel and number six.

"After de surrender my mother tole me dat the marse told de slaves dat dey could buy de place or dey could share de crops wid him and he would rent dem de land.

"I married Lizzie Perry, in Perry County Alabama. A preacher married us by the name of John Jemison. We just played around after de weddin' and hed a good time til bedtime come, and dat wuz very soon wid me.

"I am de father of seven chillun. Both daughters married and dey are housekeepers. I have 11 grandchillun. Three of dem are full grown and married. One of dem has graduated from high school.

"Abraham Lincoln fixed it so de slaves could be free. He struck off de handcuffs and de ankle cuffs from de slaves. But how could I be free if I had to go back to my massa and beg for bread, clothes and shelter? It is up to everybody to work for freedom.

"I don't think dat Jefferson Davus wuz much in favor of liberality. I think dat Booker T. Washington wuz a man of de furst magnitude. When it come to de historiance I don't know much about dem, but according to what I red in dem, Fred Douglas, Christopher Hatton, Peter Salem, all of dem colored men—dey wuz great men. Christopher Hatton wuz de furst slave to dream of liberty and den shed his blood for it. De three of dem play a conspicuous part in de emancipation.

"I think it's a good thing dat slavery is ended, for God hadn't intended there to be no man a slave.

"My reason for joining de church is, de church is said to be de furst born, the general assembly of the living God. I joined it to be in the general assembly of God.

"We have had too much destructive religion. We need pure and undefiled religion. If we had dat religion, conditions would be de reverse of that dey are."

(**Note:** The worker who interviewed this old man was impressed with his deep religious nature and the manner in which there would crop out in his conversation the facile use of such words as eventually, general, accessible, etc. The interview also revealed that the old man had a knowledge of the scripture. He claims to be a preacher and during the conversation gave indications of the oratory that is peculiar to old style colored preachers.)

**Word Picture of PERRY SID JAMISON and his Home** [TR: also reported as Jemison]

Mr. Jamison is about 5'2" and weighs 130 pounds. Except for a slight limp, caused by a broken bone that did not heal, necessitating the use of a cane, he gets around in a lively manner. He takes a walk each morning and has a smile for everybody.

Mr. Jamison is an elder in the Second Baptist Church and possesses a deep religious nature. In his conversation there crops out the facile use of such words as "eventually", "general", "accessible", and the like. He has not been engaged in manual labor since 1907. Since then he has made his living as an evangelist for the colored Baptist church.

Mr. Jamison says he does not like to travel around without something more than a verbal word to certify who and what he is. He produced a certificate from the "Illinois Theological Seminary" awarding him the degree of Doctor of Divinity and dated December 15, 1933, and signed by Rev. Walter Pitty for the trustees and S. Billup, D.D., Ph.D. as the president. Another document was a minister's license issued by the Probate court of Jefferson county authorizing him to perform marriage ceremonies. He has his ordination certificate dated November 7, 1900, at Red Mountain Baptist Church, Sloss, Alabama, which certifies that he was ordained an elder of that church; it is signed by Dr. G.S. Smith, Moderator. Then he has two letters of recommendation from churches in Alabama and Chicago.

That Mr. Jamison is a vigerous preacher is attested by other ministers who say they never knew a man of his age to preach like he does.

Mr. Jamison lives with his daughter, Mrs. Elizabeth Cookes, whose husband is a WPA worker. Also living in the house is the daughter's son, employed as a laborer, and his wife. Between them all, a rent of \$28.00 a month is paid for the house of six rooms. The house at 424 S. Seventh Street, Steubenville, is in a respectable part of the city and is of the type used by poorer classes of laborers.

Mr. Jamison's wife died June 4, 1928, and since then he has lived with his daughter. In his conversation he gives indication of a latent oratory easily called forth.

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