

Miriam Logan, Lebanon, Ohio
Warren County, Dist. 2
July 2, 1937

Interview with SAMUEL SUTTON, Ex Slave.
Born in Garrett County, Kentucky, in 1854

(drawing of Sutton) [TR: no drawing found]

"Yes'em, I sho were bo'n into slavery. Mah mothah were a cook—(they was none betteah)—an she were sold four times to my knownin'. She were part white, for her fathah were a white man. She live to be seventy-nine yeahs an nine months old."

"Ah was bo'n in Garrett County, but were raised by ol' Marster Ballinger in Knox County, an' ah don remember nothin 'bout Garrett County." When Lincoln was elected last time, I were about eight yeahs ol'."

"Ol' Marster own 'bout 400-acres, n' ah don' know how many slaves—maybe 30. He'd get hard up fo money n' sell one or two; then he'd get a lotta work on hands, an maybe buy one or two cheap,—go 'long lak dat you see." He were a good man, Ol' Mars Ballinger were—a preacher, an he wuk hisse'f too. Ol' Mis' she pretty cross sometime, but ol' Mars, he weren't no mean man, an ah don' 'member he evah whip us. Yes'em dat ol' hous is still standin' on the Lexington-Lancaster Pike, and las time I know, Baby Marster he were still livin'."

"Ol' Mars. tuk us boys out to learn to wuk when we was both right little me and Baby Mars. Ah wuz to he'p him, an do what he tol' me to—an first thing ah members is a learnin to hoe de clods. Corn an wheat Ol' Mars. raised, an he sets us boys out fo to learn to wuk. Soon as he lef' us Baby Mars, he'd want to eat; send me ovah to de grocery fo sardines an' oysters. Nevah see no body lak oyster lak he do! Ah do n' lak dem. Ol Mars. scold him—say he not only lazy hese'f, but he make me lazy too."

"De Wah? Yes'em ah sees soldiers, Union Calvary [HW: Cavalry] goin' by, dressed fine, wid gold braid on blue, an big boots. But de Rebels now, I recollect dey had no uniforms fo dey wuz hard up, an dey cum in jes common clothes. Ol' Mars., he were a Rebel, an he always he'p 'em. Yes'em a pitched battle start right on our place. Didn't las' long, fo dey wuz a runnin fight on to Perryville, whaah de one big battle to take place in de State o' Kentucky, tuk place."

"Most likely story I remembers to tell you 'bout were somepin made me mad an I allus remember fo' dat. Ah had de bigges' fines' watermellon an ah wuz told to set up on de fence wid de watermellon an show 'em, and sell 'em fo twenty cents. Along cum a line o' soldiers."

"Heigh there boy!... How much for the mellon?" holler one at me.

"Twenty cents sir!" Ah say jes lak ah ben tol' to say; and he take dat mellon right out o' mah arms an' ride off widout payin' me. Ah run after dem, a tryin' to get mah money, but ah couldn't keep up wid dem soldiers on hosses; an all de soldiers jes' laf at me."

"Yes'em dat wuz de fines' big mellon ah evah see. Dat wuz right mean in him—fine lookin gemman he were, at the head o' de line."

"Ol' Marster Ballinger, he were a Rebel, an he harbors Rebels. Dey wuz two men a hangin' around dere name o' Buell and Bragg."

"Buell were a nawtherner; Bragg, he were a Reb."

"Buell give Bragg a chance to get away, when he should have found out what de Rebs were doin' an a tuk him prisoner ah heard tell about dat."

"Dey wuz a lotta spyin', ridin' around dere fo' one thing and another, but ah don' know what it were all about. I does know ah feels sorry fo dem Rebel soldiers ah seen dat wuz ragged an tired, an all woe out, an Mars. He fell pretty bad about everything sometimes, but ah reckon dey wuz mean Rebs an southerners at had it all cumin' to em; ah allus heard tell dey had it comin' to em."

"Some ways I recollect times wuz lots harder after de War, some ways dey was better. But now a culled man ain't so much better off 'bout votin' an such some places yet, ah hears dat."

"Yes'em, they come an want hosses once in awhile, an they was a rarin' tarin' time atryin to catch them hosses fo they would run into the woods befo' you could get ahold of 'em. Morgan's men come fo hosses once, an ol Mars, get him's hosses, fo he were a Reb. Yes'em, but ah thinks them hosses got away from the Rebels; seem lak ah heard they did."

"Hosses? Ah wishes ah had me a team right now, and ah'd make me my own good livin! No'em, don't want no mule. They is set on havin they own way, an the contrariest critters! But a mule is a wuk animal, an eats little. Lotsa wuk in a mule."

Mah boy, he say, 'quit wukin, an give us younguns a chance,' Sho nuf, they ain't the wuk they use to be, an the younguns needs it. Ah got me a pension, an a fine garden; ain't it fine now?"

"Yes'em, lak ah tells you, the wah were ovah, and the culled folks had a Big Time wid speakin'n everything ovah at Dick Robinsen's camp on de 4th. Nevah see such rejoicin on de Fourth 'o July since,-no'em, ah ain't."

"Ah seen two presidents, Grant an Hayes. I voted fo Hayes wen I wuz twenty-two yeahs old. General Grant, he were runnin against Greeley when ah heard him speak at Louieville. He tol what all Lincoln had done fo de culled man. Yes'em, fine lookin man he were, an he wore a fine suit. Yes'em ah ain't miss an election since ah were twenty-two an vote fo Hayes. Ah ain't gonto miss none, an ah vote lak the white man read outa de Emanicipation Proclamation, ah votes fo one ob Abe Lincoln's men ev'y time—ah sho do."

"Run a way slaves? No'em nevah know ed of any. Mars. Ballinger neighbor, old Mars. Tye—he harbor culled folks dat cum ask fo sumpin to eat in winter—n' he get 'em to stay awhile and do a little wuk fo him. Now, he did always have one or two 'roun dere dat way,—dat ah recollects—dat he didn't own. Maybe dey was runaway, maybe dey wuz just tramps an didn't belong to noboddy. Nevah hear o' anybody claimin' dem—dey stay awhile an wuk, den move on—den mo' cum, wuk while then move on. Mars. Tye—he get his wuk done dat way, cheap.

"No'em, don't believe in anything lak dat much. We use to sprinkle salt in a thin line 'roun Mars. Ballinger's house, clear 'roun, to ward off quarellin an arguein' an ol' Miss Ballinger gettin a cross spell,—dat ah members, an then too;—ah don believe in payin out money on a Monday. You is liable to be a spendin an a losin' all week if you do. Den ah don' want see de new moon (nor ol' moon either) through, de branches o' trees. Ah know' a man dat see de moon tru de tree branches, an he were lookin' tru de bars 'a jail fo de month were out—an fo sumpin he nevah done either,—jus enuf bad luck—seein a moon through bush."

"Ah been married twice, an had three chillens. Mah oles' are Madge Hannah, an she sixty yeah ol' an still a teachin' at the Indian School where she been fo twenty-two yeahs now. She were trained at Berea in High School then Knoxville; then she get mo' learnin in Nashville in some course."

"Mah wife died way back yonder in 1884. Then when ah gets married again, mah wife am 32 when ah am 63. No'am, no mo' chillens. Ah lives heah an farms, an takes care ob mah sick girl, an mah boy, he live across the lane thah."

"No'em, no church, no meetin hous fo us culled people in Kentucky befo' de wah. Dey wuz prayin folks, and gets to meetin' at each othah's houses when dey is sumpin a pushin' fo prayer. No'em no school dem days, fo us." "Ol Mars., he were a preacher, he knowed de Bible, an tells out verses fo us—dats all ah members. Yes'em Ah am Baptist now, and ah sho do believe in a havin church."

"Ah has wuked on steam boats, an done railroad labor, an done a lotta farmin, an ah likes to farm best. Like to live in Ohio best. Ah can vote. If ah gits into trouble, de law give us a chance fo our property, same as if we were white. An we can vote lak white, widout no shootin, no fightin' about it—dats what ah likes. Nevah know white men to be so mean about anythin as dey is about votin some places—No'em, ah don't! Ah come heah in 1912. Ah was goin on to see mah daughter Madge Hannah in Oklahoma, den dis girl come to me paralyzed, an ah got me work heah in Lebanon, tendin cows an such at de creamery, an heah ah is evah since. Yes'em an ah don' wanto go no wheres else."

"No'em, no huntin' no mo. Useto hunt rabbit until las yeah. They ain't wuth the price ob a license no mo." No'em, ah ain't evah fished in Ohio."

"No'em, nevah wuz no singer, no time. Not on steamboats, nor nowheres. Don't member any songs, except maybe the holler we useto set up when dey wuz late wid de dinner when we wuked on de steamboat;—Dey sing-song lak dis:"

'Ol hen, she flew
Ovah de ga-rden gate,
Fo' she wuz dat hungrey
She jes' couldn't wait.'

—but den dat ain't no real song."

"Kentucky river is place to fish—big cat fish. Cat fish an greens is good eatin. Ah seen a cat fish cum outa de Kentucky river 'lon as a man is tall; an them ol' fins slap mah laig when ah carries him ovah mah shoulder, an he tail draggin' on mah feet.—Sho nuf!"

"No'em, ah jes cain't tell you all no cryin sad story 'bout beatin' an a slave drivin, an ah don' know no ghost stories, ner nuthin'—ah is jes dumb dat way—ah's sorry 'bout it, but ah Jes—is."

Samuel Sutton lives in north lane Lebanon, just back of the French Creamery. He has one acre of land, a little unpainted, poorly furnished and poorly kept. His daughter is a huge fleshy colored woman wears a turban on her head. She has a fixed smile; says not a word. Samuel talks easily; answers questions directly; is quick in his

movements. He is stooped and may 5'7" or 8" if standing straight. He wears an old fashioned "Walrus" mustache, and has a grey wooley fringe of hair about his smooth chocolate colored bald head. He is very dark in color, but his son is darker yet. His hearing is good. His sight very poor. Being so young when the Civil War was over, he remembers little or nothing about what the colored people thought or expected from freedom. He just remembers what a big time there was on that first "Free Fourth of July."
