

# Florida Slave Narratives: Hilyard, Della Bess

Federal Writers' Project

**1937**

Della Bess Hilyard, or "Aunt Bess" as she is better known, was born in Darlington, South Carolina in 1858, the daughter of Resier and Zilphy Hart, slaves of Gus Hiwards. Both her parents were cotton pickers and as a little girl Della often went with her parents into the fields. One day she stated that the Yankees came through South Carolina with Knapsacks on their shoulders. It wasn't until later that she learned the reason.

When asked if she received any educational training, "Aunt Bess" replied in the negative, but stated that the slaves on the Hiwards plantation were permitted to pick up what education they could without fear of being molested. No one bothered, however, to teach them anything.

In regards to religion, "Aunt Bess" said that the slaves were not told about heaven; they were told to honor their masters and mistresses and of the damnation which awaited them for disobedience.

After slavery the Hart family moved to Georgia where Della grew into womanhood and at an early age married Caleb Bess by whom she had two children. After the death of Bess, about fifteen years ago, "Aunt Bess" moved to Fort Pierce, Florida. While there she married Lonny Hilyard who brought her to Titusville where she now resides, a relic of bygone days.

## **Source:**

Excerpt from "Della Bess Hilyard" The Federal Writers' Project, Titusville, Florida, 1937.

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