

Florida Slave Narratives: Boynton, Rivana

Federal Writers' Project

Circa 1935

1. Where, and about when, were you born? Some time in 1850 on John and Mollie Hoover's plantation between Savannah and Charleston near the Georgia line.
2. If you were born on a plantation or farm, what sort of farming section was it in? They raised rice, corn wheat, and lots of cotton, raised everything they et—vegetables, taters and all that.
3. How did you pass the time as a child? What sort of chores did you do and what did you play? I had to thin cotton in the fields and mind the flies at the table. I chased them with a fly bush, sometimes a limb from a tree and sometimes wid a fancy bush.
4. Was your master kind to you? Yes, I was favored by being with my massy.
5. How many slaves were there on the same plantation and farm? I don't know. There was plenty o' dem up in de hundreds, I reckon.
6. Do you remember what kind of cooking utensils your mother used? Yes, dey had spiders an' big iron kettles that dey hung in de chimney by a long chain. When dey wanted to cook fast dey lowered de chain and when dey wanted to bake in the spiders, they's put them under de kettle can cover with coals until dey was hot. Dey'd put de pones in does double concerned spiders and turn them around when dey was done on one side.
7. What were your main foods and how were they cooked? We had everything you could think of to eat.
8. Do you remember making imitation or substitute coffee by grinding up corn or peanuts? No. We had real coffee.

9. Do you remember ever having, when you were young, any other kind of bread besides corn bread? Yes, batter and white bread.

10. Do you remember evaporating sea water to get salt? [TR: word illegible] did hit dat way.

11. When you were a child, what sort of stove do you remember your mother having? Did they have a hanging pot in the fire place, and did they make their candles of their own tallow? Always had fireplaces or open fires on the plantation, but after a long time while my massy had hearth stoves to cook on. De would give us slaves pot liquor to cook green in sometimes. Dey lit de fires with flint and steel, when it would go out. We all ate with wooden paddles for spoons. We made dem taller candles out of beef and mutton tallow, den we'd shoog 'em down into the candle sticks made of tin pans wid a handle on and a holder for the candle in the center. You know how.

12. Did you use an open well or pump to get the water? We had a well with two buckets on a pulley to draw the water.

13. Do you remember when you first saw ice in regular form? No. Ice would freeze in winter in our place.

14. Did your family work in the rice fields or in the cotton on the farm, or what sort of work did they do? They did all kinds of work in the fields.

15. If they worked in the house or about the place, what sort of work did they do? I was house maid and did everything they told me to do. Sometimes I'd sweep and work around all the time.

16. Do you remember ever helping tan and cure hides and pig hides? This was done on the plantation. I took no part in it.

17. As a young person what sort of work did you do? If you helped your mother around the house or cut firewood or swept the yard, say so. I helped do the housework and did what the mistress told me do.

18. When you were a child do you remember how people wove cloth, or spun thread, or picked out cotton seed, or weighed cotton or what sort of bag was used on the cotton bales? No.

19. Do you remember what sort of soap they used? How did they get the lye for making the soap? Yes, I'd help to make the ash lye and soft soap. Never seed and cake soap until I came here.

20. What did they use for dyeing thread and cloth and how did they dye them? They used indigo for blue, copperas for yellow, and red oak chips for red.

21. Did your mother use big, wooden washtubs with cut-out holes on each side for the fingers? Yes, and dey had smaller wooden keels. Never seed any tin tubs up there.

22. Do you remember the way they made shoes by hand in the country? Yes, they made all our shoes on the plantation.

23. Do you remember saving the chicken feathers and goose feathers always for your featherbeds? Yes.

23. Do you remember when women wore hoop [TR: illegible] in their skirts and when they stopped wearing them and wore narrow skirts? Yes. My missus, she made me a pair of hoops, or I guess she bought it, but some of the slaves took thin limbs from trees and made their hoops. Others made them out of stiff paper and others would starch their skirts stiff with rice starch to make their skirts stand way out. We thought those hoops were just the thing for style.

25. Do you remember when you first saw your first windmill? Yes. They didn't have them there.

26. Do you remember when you first saw bed springs instead of bed ropes? I slept in a gunny bunk. My missus had a rope bed and she covered the ropes with a cow hide. We made hay and corn shuck mattresses for her. We'd cut the hay and shucks up fine and stuff the ticks with them. The cow hides were placed on top of the mattresses to protect them.

27. When did you see the first buggy and what did it look like? It was a buggy like you see.

28. Do you remember your grandparents? No. My mother was sold from me when I was small. I stayed in my uncle's shed at night.

29. Do you remember the money called "shin-plasters"? No.

30. What interesting historical events happened during your youth, such as Sherman's army passing through your section? Did you witness the happenings and what was the reaction of the other Negroes to them? I remember well when de war was on. I used to turn the big corn sheller and sack the shelled corn for the Confederate soldiers. They used to sell some of the corn and they gave some of it to the soldiers. Anyway the Yankees got some and they did not expect them to get it. It was this way: The Wheeler boys came through there ahead of Sherman's Army. Now, we thought the Wheeler boys were Confederates. They came down the road as happy as could be, a-singin'

"Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah
Hurrah for the Broke Book Boys
Hurrah for the Broke Brook Boys of South Carolina."

So of course we thought they were our soldiers a-singin' our songs. Well, they came an' tol' our boss that Sherman's soldiers were coming' and we'd better hide all our food and valuable things, for they'd take everything they wanted. So we "hoped" our Massy hide the tings. They dug holes and buried the potatoes and covered them with cotton seed and all that. Then our ma say give dem food and thanked them for their kindness and he set out wid two of the girls to tote them to safety, but before he got back after the missus the Yanks were on us.

Our missus had od[TR:?] led us together and told us what to say. "Now you beg for me. If they ask you whether I've been good to you, you tell 'em 'yes'. If they ask you if we give you meat, you say 'yes'." Now de res' didn't git any meat, but I did, 'cause I worked in the house. So I didn't tell a lie, for I did git meat.

So we begged, an' we say, "Our missus is good. Don't you kill her. Don't you take our meat away from us. Don't you hurt her. Don't you burn her house down." So they burned the stable and some of the other buildings, but they did not burn the house nor hurt us any. We saw the rest of the Yanks comin'. They never stopped for nothin'. Their horses would jump the worn rail fences and they come 'cross fields 'n everything. They bound our missus upstairs so she couldn't get away, then they came to the sheds and we begged and begged for her. Then they loosed her, but they took some of us for refugees and some of the slaves went off with them of their own will. They took all the things that were buried all the hams and everything they wanted. But they did not burn the house and our missus was saved.

31. Did you know any Negroes who enlisted or joined the northern army? Yes.

32. Did you know any Negroes who enlisted in the southern army? Yes.

33. Did your master join the confederacy? What do you remember of his return from the war? Or was he wounded and killed? Yes. Two boys went. One was killed and one came back.

34. Did you live in Savannah when Sherman and the Northern forces marched through the state, and do you remember the excitement in your town or around the plantation where you lived? We lived north of Savannah. I don't know how far it was, but it was in South Carolina.

35. Did your master's house get robbed or burned during the time of Sherman's march? We were robbed, but the house was not burned. We saved it for them.

36. What kind of uniforms did they wear during the civil war? Blue and gray.

37. What sort of medicine was used in the days just after the war? Describe a Negro doctor of that period. She used to make tea out of

the Devil's Shoe String that grew along on the ground. We used oil and turpentine. Put turpentine on sores.

38. What do you remember about northern people or outside people moving into the community after the war? Yes. Mrs. Dermont, she taught white folks. I didn't go to school.

39. How did your family's life compare after Emancipation with it before? I had it better and so did the rest.

40. Do you know anything about political meetings and clubs formed after the war? You had to have a ticket to go to church or the paddle rollers.

41. Do you know anything regarding the letters and stories from Negroes who migrated north after the war? No.

42. Were there any Negroes of your acquaintance who were skilled [TR: illegible] particular line of work? Yes. In making shoes and furniture, they had to do most everything well or get paddled.

Source:

Excerpt from "Rivana Boynton" The Federal Writers' Project. Miami, Florida, Circa 1935.

Keywords: african americans, riviana boynton, rivana boynton, slavery, slavery in florida, slaves

[Back](#)

[Home](#) > [Floripedia](#) > [Florida Slave Narratives](#) > Boynton, Rivana [Site Map](#)

[Exploring Florida: A Social Studies Resource for Students and Teachers](#)

Produced by the [Florida Center for Instructional Technology](#),
College of Education, University of South Florida © 2005.