

Florida Slave Narratives: Boyd, Rev. Eli

Federal Writers' Project

1936

Reverend Eli Boyd was born May 29, 1864, four miles from Somerville, South Carolina on John Murray's plantation. It was a large plantation with perhaps one hundred slaves and their families. As he was only a tiny baby when freedom came, he had no "recomembrance" of the real slavery days, but he lived on the same plantation for many years until his father and mother died in 1888.

"I worked on the plantation just like they did in the real slavery days, only I received a small wage. I picked cotton and thinned rice. I always did just what they told me to do and didn't ever get into any trouble, except once and that was my own fault.

"You see it was this way. They gave me a bucket of thick clabber to take to the hogs. I was hungry and took the bucket and sat down behind the barn and ate every bit of it. I didn't know it would make me sick, but was I sick? I swelled up so that I all but bust. They had to doctor on me. They took soot out of the chimney and mixed it with salt and made me take that. I guess they saved my life, for I was awful sick.

"I never learned to read until I was 26 years old. That was after I left the plantation. I was staying at a place washing dishes for Goodyear's at Sapville, Georgia, six miles from Waycross. I found a Webster's spelling book that had been thrown away, and I learned to read from that.

"I wasn't converted until I went to work in a turpentine still and five years later I was called to preach. I am one of thirteen children and none of us has ever been arrested. We were taught right.

"I kept on preaching until I came to Miami. I have been assistant pastor at Bethel African Methodist Church for the past ten years.

"I belong to a class of Negroes called Geechees. My grandfather was brought directly from Africa to Port Royal, South Carolina. My grandmother used to hold up her hand and look at it and sing out of her hand. She'd make them up as she would look at her hand. She sang in Geechee and also made rhymes and songs in English."

Source:

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[Back](#)

[Home](#) > [Floripedia](#) > [Florida Slave Narratives](#) > Boyd, Rev. Eli

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