

**Title: Mississippi Slave Narratives from the WPA Records**

**Submitter: MSGenWeb Slave Narrative Project**

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**From the WPA Slave Narratives:**

**Ben Lewis**

"I was born a slave on de Wright plantation at Washington, Mississippi. It was de old capital of de Territory. I don' rightly 'membah de day and mont but hit was in de year 1860. My name is Ben Lewis an' all de old famblies in Natchez knows me. I is got a faint memory of my Marster, Mr. Jim Wright, who came prancin' home one day on a big hoss. He wore a grey uniform an' he was in de war. Eberybody made a heap of him an' I shined his boots.

My Mistus was Miss Mary an she was nice. I didn' hab no hard wuk to do 'cause I was too little. I just done light tasks about de house, an' shined de boots of my Marster. Mr. Duckett Rawlings was de brother of my Mistus. He lived at Bent Oaks and owned a lot of other places. He was a fine man. De Rawlings was frum Maryland. His folks come down to Mississippi in 1810 when Brigadier Gen'l Leonard Covington was sont wid a troop of Light Dragoons to hold de Fort in Washington. Gen'l Covington was a famous Indian fighter an' him an' de Rawlings was powerful close friends. When dis big party moved down de ribber

from Maryland dey brought all dere slaves. My grandma was Calline Cobun, an' she was frum Maryland. She mout\* a come den.

I was too young to know what de war was 'bout, but one day I seen de Yankees comin'. Dey was in long droves and beatin' drums. It was a gran' sight. Trufe is de colored folks was glad to see 'em an' jus' laughed an' laughed. Some of 'em even shouted out loud."After dat we all come to town. My maw was named Silvey Lewis an' my paw was Sam Lewis. He had trouble wid de overseer an' was whopped. Den he got shot in de laig or hip. Overseers was pretty mean 'less dey happened to be quality. Quality folks was kin' to dey servants. He was choppin' wood 'Under de Hill' when Natchez was shelled an' he seen de big gun boat an' de houses ketch a-fire. Dat was de time de little Beekman girl got killed. Hit was turrible'.

"For years I was a drayman an' worked for F.A. Dickson Co. till dey moved to New Orleans. Now I'se too old an' feeble to do heavy liftin', so I caint run a dray.

Besides de dray business is dyin' out. Our Drayman's Association is in a turrible fix. Soon dey wont be no more dump carts an' mules. Just a little while back de Geisenberger Drug Company traded dey mule an' cart in on a brand new truck. For forty years or mo' dat dray done all de haulin' for dat firm. Now I sits on de corner wid my friends, all of 'em draymen, an' dey is waitin' for calls dat nebbber

come. Hit's de way of de times. Times is gittin' too fas'.

"Fore I went in de dray business I was a old-time lamp lighter under Captain Baker. Den dey up an' quit havin' dem kind of lamps. Dey was gas lights an' powerful pretty. Dey had tall iron posts wid four sided glass shades. You turned on de gas so hit would spout out of de jet. Den you lit hit. Hit was easy, but you walked miles an' miles in all kinds of weather. Den you had to git up early in de mawnin' an' tromp over de same rounds turnin' 'em out. I aint no dram drinker an' I aint neber bin wild nor ibused my health. I'se always been honest an' lived right as good as I knowed how. I'se a deacon in de Rose Hill Baptis' Church an' takes a heap of pride in my church. Hits de oldest continuous Baptis' Church in de state. Hits 102 years old an' was firs' a white folks church. I kin 'membah when de cullud folks had a Methodis' church where Sharp's furniture store now stands. I used to go to hit 'cause I was raised betwixt de Methodis' an' de Baptis' but as I growed up I strayed from de Methodis'. Den de Baptis' caught me. I kin read 'cause I went to school a year or mo'. My white folks didn' teach me no learnin', dey had too many worries of deir own in dem days.