

Interviewer: Unknown
Transcribed by Debbie Leftwich

Mississippi Narratives
Prepared by
The Federal Writer's Project of
The Works Progress Administration
For the State of Mississippi

Elbert Myers, ex-slave

Foreward: Elbert Myers, who was born a slave in 1851, property of Tommy Harris, relates the following:

"I was taken from my mother at the age of five years, carried to Ole Marster's house, trained up as house and yard boy. We were living near Old Shongalo, then one mile west of Vaiden. We lived there until the Harris Academy burned then moved to what is now called the old Colmery place; Marse Jim, my young master, was a member of the Vaiden Artillery under Captain Baines.

"One day when ole Marster was kinder sick, the dogs started barking and just kept on barking. Ole Miss told me to go see what they were barking at. When I walked out the door I saw lots of men on horseback. They said, 'Boy, we want that horse you have here;' I said, 'Taint no horse here 'cept Marster's ridin' horse;' they said, 'We want the horse; if you don't get him we are going to kill you.' So I turned Marster's horse, 'a big claybank,' out of the stable. They cussed and said that the one they were looking for was a big white horse, the swiftest animal in the country; and they wanted him for their lieutenant. The horse they were looking for was one that had been run out from Yazoo City. You see, these men were Yankees. About that time I heard young Marse Jim come riding the white horse through the woods, he rode up and said, 'What the --- are you doing here?' They said 'We want that horse you are riding.' Marse Jim said, 'You can't get him; this horse is mine.' They said, 'If you will go with us up to this little "Hog hole" (meaning Vaiden) and prove he is yours, we will give you \$200.' About that time Mr. Arl Caldwell from Vaiden rode up and asked what the trouble was. He said, 'You can't do that. Jim is a paroled soldier.' This horse belonged to Dr. C. Gadberry, of Lexington. Anyway, they took the horse but left Marse Jim his saddle.

"Times got pretty tough sometimes. When provisions would get scarce, we would kill cows but had no salt, so would get dirt out of the smokehouse, put it in a pot of water to boil, then dip the meat into it, then hang it up to smoke. We would send hog meat to Grenada, where there was a commissary with guards. Marse Jim wrote once that he paid \$25 for a mule's ear. Ole Marster was not mean to any of us slaves, and I don't remember him ever whippin' any of us but one time, and that was the time he whipped Aaron. Aaron had climbed in the storeroom one day to steal 'taters. He threw a lot of them on the ground so he could get them later, but he found he couldn't escape as the storeroom was locked

and he couldn't climb out as it was ceiled on the inside with no place for 'toe-holds,' so he had to stay locked in all night. When the cook opened the door next morning she found Aaron in the 'taterhouse; she then called Marster. He picked up a buggy trace and began to whip him; and when he got through with Aaron, he sho was a whipped 'nigger.' He crawled off in a ditchbank and stayed there some time before he came back; but Aaron ain't never stole no more 'taters.

"There was not much sickness in those days. Dr Sanderson, Dr. Weir, and Dr. Armistead were the doctors here then. When we had a bad headache or any other ache, they used what they called a cupping-glass (a kind of cup with India Rubber top). They would prick the skin and place the cup over the place, and the cup would just fill up with blood.

"Ole Mistiss uster teach me; she taught me to spell liability, publication, baker, and lady. She never could teach me to write 'cause I had heard Marster tell about some 'niggers' that wanted to get to a free country, and someone wrote them a pass, and the man was caught and the fingers of his right hand chopped off, so I was afraid to learn to write--afraid I might write something that would cause my fingers to get chopped off.

"I went to the war and stayed three weeks and came back; I didn't like it. When Captain Forrest and Jefferson Davis ordered all troops to Vicksburg, Ole Marster carried Marse Jim and Mr. Arl Caldwell back to their regiment. I went with them. We went in a wagon. During the Siege of Vicksburg we could hear the Boom! Boom! of the cannons day and night; sometimes I can almost hear them now. I used to love to see them drilling the soldiers out here at Old Shongalo. Mr. Tom Purnell was the captain, and wooden guns were used in drilling. Ole Marster's oldest son was killed in the Siege of Vicksburg. I was eighty-six years old the thirteenth day of last December and am now living right in old Marster's house, about one-quarter of a mile from the cabin where I was born."

Interviewer: Unknown
Transcribed by Debbie Leftwich

Mississippi Narratives
Prepared by
The Federal Writer's Project of
The Works Progress Administration
For the State of Mississippi