

Mississippi Narratives
Prepared by
The Federal Writer's Project of
The Works Progress Administration
For the State of Mississippi
From the WPA Slave Narratives:
Mary Ann Kitchen - age 85

"I was eighty five dis June. My mammy's name was Harriet Ervin an' my pappy's name was Wilson Ervin. You see my pappy b'longed to de Ervin's, dats how come I was a Ervin fo' ever I married. But mammy b'longed to Marse William an' Mis' Ma' Ann Cooper. I was bawn on de Cooper place 'bout ten miles out west o' heah (Crystal Springs) on banks o' ole White Oak Creek. Dey was fo' boys of us an' two gals. Me an' Lucy, den Mondy, Andy, Richard an' Wylie. "Why chile, dey was a plum quarter o' darkies on de Cooper place. Dey had 'bout six houses o' slaveries. Us had good houses made out'n lumber wid dirt chimbleys. Dey was a overlooker on de place, he was a white man an' den unnder him was a driver an' he was a darkie. "Mammy an' pappy was bof fiel' hands. Dey would go to work 'bout sun up an' work till bout dark. Dey call 'em wid a plantation bell. "Some got plenty whuppins wid a strop 'bout dey work an' effen dey roamed off wid out'n a pass dey sho' got whapped too." I was jes a chile an' mos' I had to do was to tote water fo' de cook, Aunt Barbrie at de big house. Sometimes I helped make up de beds an' sweep de flo's. Mostly I jes played roun wid de udder lil' darkies. Cooper house was a big, one story, white house an' dey farmed bout two hundred an' fifty acres in cohn, cott'n an' tatoes an' lak. Den dey had sheeps, goats an' cows too. m" Dey was two o' de Cooper chillun but dey wasn't bawn den.

"Us wo' red russets an' clothes made out'n lowell. I disremembers jes who made our clothes but I knows I used to spin an' reel in de loom room some myself

"Principally, de slaves done dey own cookin' in big ole iron pots ober de fiah place in dey own houses. Us had greens, peas, possum an' rabbit stew. Us et hit out'n tin plates. Den de overlooker, he issued rashins ever week. I 'members us made 'lasses out'n watermellons! "Chris'mas time we had 'bout a week off an' frolicked 'bout an' went to de udder places near by. Mostly us had 'lasses cake an' all us went up to de big house an' dey gib us a dram' all 'roun'. I 'members one time Aunt Venus got a big sack all tied up at Chris'mas an' when she open hit wad'nt nothin but a ole lighter pine knot. "Us neber was sick much causin us wo' garlic an' aesphedity roun' our necks to keep off diseases. Den Mis' Ma' Ann issued out medecine when us needed it. "When de wah come 'long my pappy went off to de wah wid his marster, Mr. Ervin, an' he died o' de smallpox ober at Vicksburg. "I sho' does 'member when dem yankees came ridin' up to our house. Dey was all pretty well black hoses dey was ridin'. An' dem sojiers had on blue suits wid gold buttons an' caps to match. Dey jes march dey smart selves in an' taken what dey could find, den went out to de smoke house an' got de meats. Atter dat dey went down to de milk room, hit was built near a spring so as to keep de milk cool, an' dey filled up dey canteens wid fresh milk, dranked all dey could hole an' den po'd de res' on de flo'. I 'member onct when us saw dem Yankees comin' Aunt Barbrie catched up all de chickens an' put 'em in a box an' set herself on top of 'em an' tried to civer 'em wid her big ole apron. But dem sojiers say to her, "'Aunt Barbrie, we see dem chickens, git up off'n 'em'" An' dey taken 'em an' ring off dey heads rite an' lef'. Now dat was a mess to see but wadn't no stoppin' 'em. "I tell you honey, I seen sights an' wonders. Us had a mighty tight time dem days. "No'm dey didn' bother us collud peoples none. "Now atter de wah us didn' eben know us was free causn' Mis' Ma' Ann hadn't neber tole us but Grandma went to de Freeman's Bureau an' got us livence to leave. An' us lef' off'n de Cooper place an' farmed on halves fo' some udder peoples. "No'm didn' none us hab no learnin' but us chilluns been sont to school since surrender. "I cain let ye take no pitcher o' me caus'n I sho' would die. I don' believes in hit. Mary Ann Kitchens gave me the above information on July 1, 1937. She is about five feet three inches in height, grey hair, and must weigh about a hundred and ten pounds or less. Her features are coarse and African and her color is a rich dark brown. She lives in Crystal Springs with one of her children and is no longer able to work.