

Mississippi Narratives
Prepared by
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Abe McKlennan age 90

Foreword: Stooped and wobbly with age, hobbling along with the aid of a stick, straggly grey hair and long, thick beard blowing in wild disorder from beneath a dilapidated, age-old felt hat, Uncle Abe McKlennan is quite a shock upon first appearance. He is about five feet, ten inches in height, ninety years old, light in coloring and possesses a pair of clear, dark brown eyes which never waver for an instant as he looks squarely back into the face of the person he is speaking to. His speech and vocabulary are above the average. Born in Lawrence County on a plantation located on Pearl River a few miles from Monticello, Miss. he finally drifted after the war to his present home, a mile from Sontag, Miss.

"Laws', I sho tinks you be de law a comin' jest now. I 'pologize fo' makin' you all scout 'roun dese quarters a' lookin' fer me, but I din' rightly knowed what you want me fer right off.

Huh! Does I knows 'bout plantations an de wah? Has I been a slave? You has come to de' 'sactly right one to tell you 'bout all dat. Uncle Abe can sho' tell you chile. I reckon he can.

White folks, when I bees' a lil chap I be'long to Marster Jackson Burkett an' I libes on his plan 'tation on de Pearl Riber, frum th' time I was' borned 'till come a year after de wah. Woopee! He, he, he, sometimes hit bees' so hot an' I bees so little dey jst slip a ole shirt ovah ma' haid an' I runs 'roun de place wid'out nary nother stitch on ma' hide. I stan at de bars lookin' out in de fiels at dem a' wukin' an' dey look up at me an' laugh dere haid off at ma' shirt tails a floppin' 'round ma lags.

We knowed we gwine' be sot free. We hears it all th' time. Some white folks slip out to us an say - "You all ain't gwine be slaves long. Dere's gwine be a wah sot you free. You won't hev' plow, an' wuk fer nobody but only jest yo'self." We hears tell of hit all th' time.

Marster Burkett purtygood man. He feed us plenty. White folks we et all th' time. Plenty meat, po'tatoes, greens. All th' milk, an' mo'lasses we wants. Marster had 'round 'bout three, fo' hunnerd acres l specks. An 'roun bout, less' see, 'roun bout fifteen slaves.

My pappy was Max McKlennan, an' he libes over on de nex plan'tation. He be'long to Marster Lem Spikes, an my Ma' belong to Marster Burkett. They visit ebery Sadtitty. I was de onliest chile.

White folks I'd'ruther be free like I is now. We has all we wants on de plantation, but hit warn't ours. I'd 'ruther eat ma' own vittals.

We had a overseer. Name Anderson. He bees' surly mos' time. Knockin' and cuffin' us 'roun like dawgs when we hain't done nuthin'.

Marster Burkett had three sons, four gals. Th' Marster went off to wah' an' com' back with lots o' medals.

Me an' his son Jim growed up together. We loves each other mighty, an' we plays togethah' all th' time. Me an' Jim slip off an go a' fishin' an' if Jim cotch more n' me he di'vide, dat what he done. One time Jim save me frum' a' whippin'. The' overseer cotch me by de shirt tail one day an' gwine whip me good fer' makin' faces be'hin' hissen' back. But Jim say - "You let dat boy be I say," an he walk off an' let me be. Me an' Jim loves each othah like hogs did corn.

Th' quarters bees' off down a hill frum th' big house. On Sadtittys' when we gets to singin' an' cuttin' up crazy, we look up an dars' de White folks sitten up on de hill a' clappin' an callin' out -

"Do us a jig dar Abe. Look ole' Abe stomp de groun'." Whoopee! Dars' plenty keep us busy all th' time. Howin', plowin', feedin' the' animals'. Work all th' time.

One day we heahs' we done won th' wah. We is free! I don' knows how long Marster had de notification but, like it was today, an' den all nex day, all nex mawnin' pass by. Finally Marster Burkett com' out de '

fiels, up to us an' yell to' us to' all gather 'roun. Then he say like this he say - "Well, now you is all free! Jest as free as I am. Don' be'long to me, or no one, onliest yourselves." Den he say like this. Next question he put at us was - "Now, what you gwine do?" Jest like dat. "Now, what you gwine do?" Now dat was somethin' fret ovah. Warn't nobody say nothin'. Only stan' there. Marster Burkett look us ovah' an say - "Well, I reckon iffen you wants' ta' stay an' finish out de crop, I'll pay you fer hit. Then you can go or stay as you please. How 'bout hit?" We all stay an' finish out de crop.

My Ma' separate frum my Pappy. He married 'nother woman an' lef. Finally I lef' an worked 'roun de country on shares.

Marster Stamps place, then Marster Thompson' place. Staid at Marster Thompson' thirteen year. Dats' where I got married, in the year 1871. Then I lef' there, went to Wesson, com' back on to Lil' Bahali to Marster Robins' an staid five year. Den' I homesteaded this heah' place. Been heah' six year. Ma' firs' wife died an' I took this heah' woman.

Plantation days we libe' right. Today th' young folks libin' fas' life. Goin' to distruction. White folks thas' 'sactlya fac'.

Oh sho', sho'. We go to church once a month then. One thing I recollect particular de preacher always point up at us an yell - "Obey yo' Marster!" Then he throw to broadcastin' off at de White folks.

White folks, I larn' myself ta' read. Thas' what I done. We never had no schoolin' on de plantation.

Well now, I hates to see you be a' goin'. You com see ole Uncle Abe agin' now. White folks after all dat' talkin, ain't you got a nickle fo' po' ole' Uncle Abe?