

Mississippi Narratives
Prepared by
The Federal Writer's Project of
The Works Progress Administration
For the State of Mississippi
John Gilstrap Age 80

Height, 6 feet; weight, 175 pounds; color, dark brown. Intelligent and thrifty.

"I belonged to Calvin Gilstrap. He owned a plantation eight miles west of Fulton, Mississippi and had around twelve slaves. My father was Henry and my mother was Jane.

"I was too young to remember the War. The only thing I do remember was hearing the guns during the battle at the Cross Roads.

"I remember seeing the Ku Klux men because they was dressed so funny with great long caps on top of their heads. And they talked fine like a woman, --- didn't talk like men. They carried my father off once, - not far, and they didn't do nothing to him.

"Two of my uncles ran off and fought with the Yankees and we never saw them again. We heard that they died. I heard about it long afterwards when I was big.

"Mr Gilstrap had 'em all come up to his porch one day. They stood out doors and he set on the porch. He had a long paper in his hand and he kept reading it and telling 'em how to live and so on. Then he told 'em they was free.

"All the others stayed on with him except my father, he moved right away. That was in May and my father worked at day work the rest of that year, then he went to farming on the shares. Those that stayed on with their white folks had the easiest time. I reckon I've had as good a time as if I had been a grown-up slave though.

"As a boy I played marbles, but not ball. Ballplaying is a new game.

"We didn't have a regular white overseer. My mother's uncle looked after the farm for Mr Gilstrap.

"I don't ever remember seeing Mr Gilstrap whip no colored person ---he was good, he was kind and his folks were kind.

"After the war, I went to school for eight months, but that was all.

"I married and had six children, two boys and two girls are still living. I moved to Holly Springs on account of the schools. They all went to M.I. College but didn't finish.

"I never heard much about Lincoln or Jefferson Davis either but I heard Booker Washington speak once.

"I been running a blacksmith shop here since 1910, but I can't work now like I could twenty years ago. I'm able to work some though. I own my shop and my home and they are free of debt.

"I don't know how to express what I do think of the young people. They appears to have gone wild.

"I have never thought that there ought to be slaves and yet it looks as if colored people are of a disposition not to know what is right or wrong. It just seems that God in His wise providence, brought the colored people over here as slaves so they could be civilized."