

Mississippi Narratives

Prepared by

The Federal Writer's Project of The Works Progress Administration

For the State of Mississippi

Laura Ford

Laura Ford, ex-slave, lives four miles out from Terry, Mississippi with her grand daughter. She was born in 1852, was owned during slavery time by Tilda Grandberry, in Hinds County. She is rather stout, weighing about one hundred and seventy pounds and is about five feet and two inches in height. She is in good health. Her general coloring is light brown and she is extremely neat in her appearance and rather stylish in her dress, carries her self well with a typical old southern air.

"I fails to recollect where Ole Missus come from, she was a widder as fer back as I can recall anything, as Ole Marse had been dead fer several years when I was born. I knows dey raised my ma deir in Hinds County. Marse bought a young slave from some slave traders, des slaves was young, strong, an a big ketch, when he landed on de plantation all de slave gals wanted him an my ma wound up a marring 'em.

"Dis Grandberry plantanta was big an' dey had several families o' slaves a livin' in one room log cabins built back ob Miss Tilda's big purty house, wid de purty flower yard an' garden.

"Everything 'bout dis plantation was kept gwine by de blow ob de ole cow horn. Dey had a signal fer everything, when to go to Ole Missus's fer meals, to de fiel's an' when to come in an' out lak dat. Dis ole horn was over a foot long, it was polished up 'till hit was plumb shinnin', a cord was fastened through a hole at one end an' kept hangin' on de back piazza.

"De slaves was fed in a big kitchen dat set way back from de main house. De cookin' was done on a fire place dat took up mos' one side ob de room, in de summer time us was fed out in de back yard. We et in

tin plates an' drunk from tin cups an' gourds. Water sho' do tas'e good an' sweet from a gourd, de water sparkles from de round rough bowl makin' it seem lak yo' is a drinkin' from a mossy spring right out ob de ground.

"We dressed in dark colored home spun dresses made straight an' plain. On Sundays us had lighter colors an' dey was checked an' stripped.

"It was wuk, wuk all through de week from day light 'till dark, in de fiels an' 'round de place. On Sundays us was good an' ready to res'. De grown up slaves would lie 'round on de cabin gallery flo or on de grass under de trees. De chillun played. When I was a little chile we played jumpin' grape vines an' swingin' on grape vine swings an' a makin' doll dresses fer our rag dolls. I was put in de fiel's when I was ten years ole. We wont taught no book learnin' but how to wuk, to cook, sew, knit an' weave an' de lak ob dat. Den us was taught how to be polite an' how to treat white folks.

"We didn't have no churches. We went to meetin' at de white folks meetin' house an' was allowed to jine. When we jined us was made to promise to obey our Masters. We did all ob our real worshipping in de fiel's, out deir we could turn loose in our own way. We could sing, shout an' pray. Dis is one ob de songs we use to sing out in de corn an' cotton fiel's:-

"Hark from de tomb, it does resound

Years ob tinder cry

Livin', livin' come over de ground

Where we shall lie

Prince in de clay mus' be our end In spite ob all our power.

De war come on to set us free. I don't know much 'bout de gittin' up ob it as we couldn't read. Folks come thro' a tellin' us all kind ob promises an' how things was a gwine to be but I was little an' didn't pay no 'tention to it all as we didn't understand it. De slaves was all purty peaceful lak. But de war upsot everything. Soldiers could be seed a marchin' 'round an' de cavalry men a ridin'

thro' a huntin' deserters, an food, an ho' ses all thro' de country. De fust thing we knowed dis land ob ours dat was so purty was all tore up an' ruint. It took years to git things half way straightened out.

"When we was freed I was fourteen years ole. We stayed on wid ole Missus a few years den went out an' wuked fer our selves on farms. I married when I was 'bout eighteen. I met Ford at a meetin' one Sunday. We fell in love right off. We had seventeen chillun, five ob 'em is dead. We gib 'em some learnin' an' dey growed up purty well.

"I has spent de mos' ob my time a cookin' fer white folks. Deysay I is a good cook. I guess I oughter be cause I'se sure done de cookin' in my life time.

I'se a livin' wid my grand chillun now an' gits a heap out ob life to be as ole as I is. My health is good an' I is taken care ob well. I loves purty things. I lakes to dress up an' go an' look nice. I lakes to go to meetin's an' to sing de Lords' praises. I likes to see my race gittin' educated an' goin' forward. It does my head good to see 'em ridin' in fine cars, an' a ownin' deir own homes, but dey ought to live better. Dey is a gwine to fas' an' a thinkin' to little. Back in my days us studied more 'bout religion as we wuked us sang ole songs lak "Old Time Religion" an' de ole nigger favorite "Swing Low Sweet Charriot."