

Mississippi Narratives
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Mollie Williams
Hinds County, MS

Mollie Williams, who lives two miles west of Terry, Miss., tells her story (at her house, on Sunday, June 20, 1937):

"Iffen I lives 'til nex' September 15, I'll be eightyfo! I was born 'bout three miles frum Utica on de Newsome place. Me an' brudder Hamp b'longed to Marse George Newsome. Marse George was named afte' George Washington up in Virginny whar he come frum. Miss Margurite was our mistiss. My mammy? Well, I'll have to tell you now 'bout her.

"You see, Marse George come off down here frum Virginny lak young folks venturin' 'bout, en' mar'ied Mis' Margurite an' wanted to start up livin' right over thar near Utica whar I was born. But Marse George was po', an' he sho' foun' out ye can't make no crop wid'out'n a start of darkies, so he writ home to Virginny fer to git some darkies. All dey sont him was fo' mens an' old Aunt Harriet fer to cook.

"One day Marse George an' his Uncle, Mr. John Davenport - now thar was a rich man fer ye, why, he had two carri'ge drivers - dey rid over to Grand Gulf whar dey was a sellin' slabes offen de block an' Mr. John tol' Marse George to pick hissself out a pair of darkies to mate so's he could git hissself a start of darkies fer to chop his cotton an' like. So Marse George pick out my pappy fust. My pappy come frum North Ca'lina. Den he seen my mammy an' she was big an' strengthyan' he wanted her pow'ful bad. But lak I tol' you, he didn' have 'nough money to buy 'em both, so his Uncle John say he'd buy mammy an' den he would loan her over to Marse George fer pappy. An' de fust chile would be Mr. John's, an' de secon'

Marse George's, an' likewise. Mammy was a Missourian name Marylin Napier Davenpo't. An' pappy was name Martin Newsome.

"Darkies libed in li'l old log houses wid dirt chimbleys. Dat is, de rest of de darkies did. Dey kep' me up in de Big House, bein' mammyless lak. Mos'ly I slep' in de trun'le bed wid Miss MaryJane till I got so bad dey had to mek a pellet on de flo' fer me. Dey was Mr. Bryant, Mr. A.D., Miss Marthe, Miss Ann, Miss Helen, Miss MaryJane, an' Mr. George, all b'longin' to Marse George an' Miss Margurite.

"Mammy was a fiel' han'. She could plow an' wuk in de fiel's jes lak a man, an' my pappy, he done de same. Mammy, she hated house wuk - lak me. I jes natu'lly loves to be out runnin' roun' in de fiel's an' 'bout. I neber lak'd to do wuk roun' de house none t'all.

"We wo' lowell clo'es an' brass toed brogans. Miss Margurite made our dresses an' lak, an' afte' Aunt Harriet died, she done de cookin' too fer all de slabs an' de fambly. She fix up dinner fer de fiel' han's, an' I taken it to 'em. Marse George had old powder horn he blowed mornin's fer to git de darkies up 'fo day good, an' dey come in 'bout sundown.

"We growed corn an' taters an' cotton plentiful, an' we had gran' orchids (orchards) an' penders (peanuts). Den, sheeps an' hogs an' cows an' lak.

"Miss Margurite had a pianny, a 'cordian, a flutena, an' a fiddle. She could play a fiddle good as a man. Law, I heerd many as three fiddles goin' in dat house many a time. An' I kin jes see her li'l old fair han's now, playin' jes es fast as lightnin' a chune (tune) 'bout

'My father he cried, my mother she cried,

I wasn' cut out fer de army.

O, Capt'in Gink, my hoss me think,

But feed his hoss on co'n an' beans

An s'port de gals by any means!

'Cause I'm a Capt'in in de army.'

"All us chullun begged ter play dat an' we all sing an' dance - great goodness!

"One song I 'member mammy singin':

'Let me nigh, by my cry,

Give me Jesus.

You may have all dis world,

But give me Jesus.'

"Singin' an' shoutin', she had 'ligion all right. She b'longed to Old Farrett back in Missouri.

"We didn' git sick much, but mammy made yeller top tea (dog fennel) fer chills an' fever an' give us. Den iffen it didn' do no good, Miss Margurite called fer Dr. Hunt lak she done when her own chullun got sick.

"None of de darkies on dat place could read an' write. Guess Miss Helen an' Miss Ann would'a learned me, but I was jes so bad an' didn' lak to set still no longer'n I had to.

"I seen plenty of darkies whapped. Marse George buckled my mammy down an' whapped her 'cause she run off. Once when Marse George seen pappy stealin' a bucket of 'leases an' totin' it to a g 1 on 'nother place, he whapped him but didn' stake him down. Pappy tol' him to whup him but not to stake him - he'd stan' fer it wid'out de stakin' - so I 'member he looked jes lak he was jumpin' a rope an' hollerin', 'Pray Marsen', ever time de strop hit 'im.

"I heered 'bout some people whut nailed de darkies years(ears) to a tree an' beat 'em but I neber seen none whapped dat way.

"I neber got no whuppins frum Marse George 'cause he didn' whup de chulluns none. Li'l darky chullun played 'long wid white chullun. Iffen de old house is still thar I 'spec you kin fin' mud cakes up under de house whut we made out'n eggs we stole frum de hen nests. Den we milked jes anybody's cows we could ketch, an' churned it. We's all time in ter some mischief.

"Thar was plenty dancin' 'mong'st darkies on Marse George's place an' on ones nearby. Dey danced reels an' lak in de moonlight:

'Mamma's got de whoopin' cough,
Daddy's got de measles,
Dat's whar de money goes,
Pop goes de weasel.'

'Buffalo gals, can't you come out tonight,
Come out tonight, an' dance by de light of de moon?'

'Gennie, put de kettle on,
Sallie, boil de water strong,
Gennie, put de kittle on
An' le's have tea!'

'Run tell Coleman,
Run tell everbody
Dat de niggers is arisin'!!
'Run nigger run, de patterrollers ketch you --
Run nigger run, fer hits almos' day,
De nigger run; de nigger flew; de nigger los'
His big old shoe.'

"When de War come, Marse George went to fight beck in Virginy. Us all thought de Yankees was some kin' of debils an' were was skeered to death of 'em.

"One day Miss Mary June, Helen, an' me was playin' an' we seen mens all dressed in blue coats wid brass buttons on dey bosoms ridin' on big fine hosses, drive right up to our po'ch an' say to Aunt Dalia whar she was sweepin':

"'Good morning, Madam, no men's about?'

"When she tol' 'em wa'nt no mens 'bout, day ax fer de keys to de smokehouse an' went out an' hep'ed deyse'ves an' loaded dey wagons. Den dey went out in de pasture 'mongst de sheeps an' killed off some of dem. Nex' dey went in de buggyhouse an' all together shuck down de carri'ge so we neber could use hit no mo'. Yessum, dey done right smart of mischief 'roun' thar.

"Some of de darkies went off wid de Yankees. My brudder Howard did, an' we ain't heerd tell of him since. I'll tell you 'bout it. You see, Mr. Davenpo't owned him an' when he heard 'bout de Yankees comin' dis way, he sont his white driver an' Howard in de carri'ge wid all his valuables to de swamp to hide, an' while dey was thar de white driver, he went off to sleep an' Howard was prowlin' 'roun' an' we all jes reckon he went on off wid de Yankees.

"You mean hoo doo? Dat's whut my pappy done to my mammy. You see, dey was allus fussin' 'bout fust one thing, den 'nother, an' mammy got mad 'caus'n pappy slipped her clo'es out'n her ches' an' taken over to de other gals for to dance in, an' when he brung 'em back mammy would see finger prints on 'em whar he been turnin' 'em 'roun' an' she sho' be mad en' fight him. She could lick him too caus'n she was bigger. One day pappy come in an' say to mammy:

"Does you want to be bigger an' stronger dan whut you already is?' An' mammy say she did. So nex' day he brung her a li'l bottle of somethin' blood red wid somethin' looked like a gourd seed in de middle of it, an' he tol' her to drink hit iffen she want to be real strong. Frum de fust drink she fell off. Place of walkin' off, she jes stumbled an' got wo'ser an' wo'ser till she plum los' her min'. Fer a long time, dey had to tie her to a tree. Den afte' de War, she lef' Mr. Davenpo't's an' jes traveled 'bout over de country. I stayed on wid Miss Margurite he'pin' her jes lak I'd been doin'. One day mammy come afte' me an' I run an' hid under a pile of quilts an' laked to smothered to death waitin' fer her to go on off.

"Nex' time she come, she brung a written letter to Miss Margurite frum de Free Ben's Board an' taken me wid her. He jes went frum place to place 'til I got mar'ied an' settled down for myself. I had three chillun, but ain't none livin' now."