

# Mississippi Narratives

## Prepared by

### The Federal Writer's Project of The Works Progress Administration

### For the State of Mississippi

### Myra Jones

Foreword: Myra Jones, ex-slave, lives in Jackson Mississippi. She was born in 1849 and was owned during slavery time by Robert Clark. She is about five feet and four inches in height and weighs about 160 pounds. Her general coloring is a dark rich brown with hair white with age. Her health is very good. She tells this story.

"I growed rite up here 'round Jackson. Marse Roberts' big purty house way back in slavery time was a settin' rite whar de new capitol is at. I'se played 'round deir more 'an eighty years ago while ma was wukin' fer Marse. She was his cook. Pa, he was kept over in Rankin County whar Marse's 'normous plantation was. I can't begin ter say how big it was, I jes knows he had 'round 500 slaves, little 'uns an' all. De plantation was run by over seers an' Marse he went out now an' den to see 'bout every thing. He made dese trips mos' ob de time on his fine ho'se, den again in de carriage. My white folks was sho' 'nuf high ups an' had plenty. I'se proud ob 'em fer dey was good en' an' sho' taken care ob deir slaves, give us plenty to eat an' to wear an' us had plenty good cottages to live in.

"My sister was alwas' kept at Marse as a house girl, but when I growed up big 'nuf I was sont to de plantation to wuk in de fiel's an' 'round de overseers house. I was taught to spin an' weave an' knit an' to help dye de cloth. We had to make de dye we used an' mos' every thing else, sich as candles from tallow, soap, lard, an' shoes an' socks.

"All through de week we wore plain solid colored dresses an' barefooted but on Sunday us felt dressed up fer our dresses was striped an' plaid. We put on our shoes too on Sunday. Mos' an' generally dey felt too heavy an' oncomfo'table so's we didn't usually keep 'em on long.

"I was a rite good size strip of a gal when dey started talkin' o' war to free us. Deir never was much stirrin' up 'bout it on Marse Roberts' plantation 'cause us was all a farein' too good lak we was. Hit was pictured purty to some, all 'bout us a gittin' lan', mules an' de lak which all turned out to be jest promises. Everything kept a stewin' up an' Mares a worrin' 'til de war 'ventually broke loose, an' plump ruined de whole land. We was all a gittin' 'long so well wid Marse, had all dem good vitials to eat an' didn't have nothin' to worry 'bout, how we was a goin' to live an' git 'long lak us has had to do since then. De war kept a gittin' wurser an' closer by. One day de Yankees was a comin' thro' a raidin' de whole country. Ole Marse he come out in a big hurry an' tole us all to git some things together in no time, dat he was gwine to refuge us a way off some wheres. We didn't know zackly what dat meant but de fus' thing we knowed we was off on dat journey. Hit lasted fer days. At night we camped back in de woods close to some stream of water. De men fed an' watered de horses an' got wood to cook wid, de women cooked up food. We was still gwine on de way, had got way over in Alabama when de yankees kotched up wid us. Marse managed to keep mos' ob us but my pa long wid some other run away wid 'em. Da tole 'em ifen dey got kilt dat dey would pay deir folks a big sum o' money.

"Well after we was kotched deir in Alabama Marse decided not to go no futher so he pitched camp right deir. He had bought a heap o' tents an' put 'em up in rows in a shady place close to a creek. He took care ob us deir 'till de war ended. We jes' lounged 'round mos' ob de time an' all dat could hire out did. We didn't hab no hard times fer Marse was rich an' kept things a gwine.

"When de war ended he say to us, "yo' all free an' don't b'long to me no mo'. Yo' can wuk fer pay fer who ever yo' please. But if any ob yo' wants to go back to Mississippi an' wuk fer me I will take yo' back." Purt nigh de whole bunch went wid him. He tole us dis from de camp kitchen. Us was so glad to git to go back till us sang an' shouted all de way.

"We broke camp an' de slow journey was started agin an' wif happier hearts cause us wont scared. We could sing an' have a merry time gwine back home wid Marse. We wont afraid to build big fires at night an' lie 'round 'em an' tell ob de times us had.

"Fer a spell after de war everything was topsy turvey. Mos' everything had to be rebuilt at Marse's place. His cattle an' good ho'ses was mos' all gone, de fences down an' lots ob de houses gone. De wust ob all was all de money marse had was wuthless. It was lak startin' from de ground up.

"When de men come back from de war, pa, he never showed up. We waited an' looked fer him but he never did git deir. After year passed de white folks looked hit up fer us an' found dat he was kilt, but de Yankees never did give us no money lak dey said dey would.

"I married when I was nineteen. I raised four chillun an' sent 'em to school. I has alwa's since I married wuked here in Jackson cookin. Ise cooked in every hotel in dis town 'cept de Robert E. Lee. I did cook a few years fer some show cars, but I laked wukin bes' in town.

"Folks is all time axin' me what I things ob de young generation. I alwa's tells 'em what is lakin' is will power an' de love o' God. De two have to go together, cause yo' can't have will power fer good wid out his help an' strength. I'se gwine to tell yo' why. I use to love to go to frolics an' dance an galavat 'round; so's one day I said I was jest gwine quit all my meanness an by God's help I quit dat day an' has lived up to it. Den another time I made up my mind to quit drinkin' coffee; until den I thought I couldn't make out wid out it to start de day on. Ifen I done wid out hit I took a turrible head ache. I said "pshaw, deir aint no use havin' some 'em a holt ob yo' lak dat so I quit rite off an' aint drunk another cup". It takes will power an' if dese folks ob dis day an' time don't go to fightin' fer will power dey is gwine to be in a powerful bad shape.