

Mississippi Narratives
Prepared by
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I was 8 years ole at surrender my ole Master used to tell me. My Pa was William Santee, and my Ma was Mehalie Santee. She was born in Jackson county, but I dont recollect where dey say my Pa was born.

Dey used to tell me dat I was born in slavery - yes Mam, and I was born and bred at Leaksville on Ole Mas John McInnis' plantation.

I reckon Ise weighs bout 160 pounds now. Used to weight 200, but I ain't the woman I used to be.

When de Yankee solgers cum to our plantation in May, my Ma she washed dey clothes, and me and de other chilluns toted water to de camps, but we was scet to talk to dem folksies. Dey didn't bother me and my people none - just drilled all de time - bout six months my white folks say, yes Mam dey was camped on Ole Mas' land fer six months, and I kin remember when dey rode way, dey flung out fish hooks and strings and cotch Ole Missus' chickens and take dem, and Ole Miss she was sho mad - but didn't do no good.

On de 8th day of May of de war my Pa he go off to fight, and we aint never knowed where dat nigger went or which side he was fightin' on.

I was a ligious chile in dem days and I'm ligious now too, but colored folks jes naturally had more ligion back dare fore de war. I kin remember when my Ma used to put us chilluns outside de cabin in de

quarters and den she would shut de doors and shut de windows tight and sit a tub of water in de middle of floor and kneel down and pray that de yolk of bondage be removed from de nigger's neck. All de niggers done dat, dey did. Ma allus said de sound of dey voices went down into the tub of water and de white folks couldn't hear dem prayin'.

Niggers didn't get sick so much in dem days either, but when dey did Ole Miss she would give them either salt, turpentine or calomel. I sho used to hates to see her comin' with any of hit too.

One time when I was bout 9 or 10 years ole I heard an ole scooch owl hollowing, and hit was rat atter one of our niggers died and I was scet, but my Ma she showed me how to take care of dat. She jes rolled up her sleeve rat tight and hold her breath. Said she was squeezing him to death, but dat very night a ole big owl got in de white folks chicken house and sot on de roost and kept apushin' and a pushin' de chickens offen de roost 'til dey falls on de ground, and den he cotch dem.

Ma used to tell me too when I heard one of dem crazy ole owls hollowing to throw a broom cross the fire place caze hit was bad luck, and I aint forgot hit yet. Ise does hit to dis very day, yes Mam.

Atter I growed up I used to sing plantation songs with de other niggers in de quarters nights atter de work was done. De onliest ones I kin member was: "Oh Preach De Gospel," "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," "Ise Gwine Home To Die No More," "Goodbye Church and let us go Home."

I went to church with my Ma and Pa, to de same church house as de white folks do, cepin' us niggers went in de back door and sot and de white folks dey come in de front and sot. De preacher he preach to us niggers one test I kin allus remember, and dat was - "Niggers obey your master and don't lie and steal."

Many times I seen niggers sold on de block and dem folksies what had de slaves had charge of de selling. Some times a woman would bring more money dan a man, sometimes hundreds of dollars, specially if she was a good breeder, and if she wont - den nobody would have her. She was jes like a "bubble on de water," and had to keep on adriftin. My ole Master bought some folks from South Carolina, Virginia and Tennessee fore de war, and dey all left dey families back dare in de mountins' and soon dey had another family on our plantation.

I sho glad hits all over wid now and I sho dont want to live in dem times no more.

I lives here with my chulluns now. Ise a widow and cant do nothin cepin' little house work. I goes to church. See dat little church house dare cross de road, yes Mam - well dats my membership!"

Aunt Rachael Santee is a typical slavery time negress, weighing about 160 pounds and standing about 6 feet in height. She is one of the dark skinned types with short kinky gray hair clinging closely to her head. She talks in a clear high-pitched voice and between her spats of terbaccy, relates incidents of her early life as if they happened only yesterday.

Around her head she wears a white cloth resembling a table napkin pinned up in the back, and a large white apron over her dark gingham ground-sweeping dress. The veins in her hands and arms stand out prominently, attesting the fact that they have been put through the acid tests and have been used to hard work.

Aunt Rachael is one of those superstitious old darkies who still throw salt in the fire and brooms across the door way when she hears an owl hollow and carries rabbit feet and buckeye in her pockets for good luck tokens.

In appearance Aunt Rachael would seem to be equal to any man's tast, but really she only does a little house work and lives with her children in a little three room shanty about 15 miles from Hattiesburg off the old river road.

She is the religious type and attends a little church across the road from her cabin.

Aunt Rachael enjoys talking about slavery times, but states that she would rather not have to live over those times again and says that she is contented to live just as she is today, with her children all around her and her church close at hand.