

**Ex-Slaves  
Stark County, District 5  
Aug 13, 1937**

**WILLIAM WILLIAMS, Ex-Slave**

Interview with William Williams, 1227 Rex Ave. S.E. Canton, O.

"I was born a slave in Caswell County, North Carolina, April 14, 1857. My mother's name was Sarah Hunt and her master's name was Taz Hunt. I did not know who my father was until after the war. When I was about 11 years old I went to work on a farm for Thomas Williams and he told me he was my father. When I was born he was a slave on the plantation next to Hunt's place and was owned by John Jefferson. Jefferson sold my father after I was born but I do not know his last master's name.

My father and mother were never married. They just had the permission of the two slave owners to live together and I became the property of my father's master, John Jefferson until I was sold. After the war my mother joined my father on his little farm and it was then I first learned he was my father.

I was sold when I was 3 years old but I don't remember the name of the man that bought me.

After the war my father got 100 acres and a team of mules to farm on shares, the master furnishing the food for the first year and at the end of the second year he had the privilege of buying the land at \$1.00 per acre.

When I was a boy I played with other slave children and sometimes with the master's children and what little education I have I got from them. No, I can't read or write but I can figure 'like the devil'.

The plantation of John Jefferson was one of the biggest in the south, it had 2200 acres and he owned about 2000 slaves.

I was too young to remember anything about the slave days although I do remember that I never saw a pair of shoes until I was old enough to work. My father was a cobbler and I used to have to whittle out shoe pegs for him and I had to walk sometimes six miles to get pine knots which we lit at night so my mother could see to work.

I did not stay with my father and mother long as I was only about 14 when I started north. I worked for farmers every place I could find work and sometimes would work a month or maybe two. The last farmer I worked for I stayed a year and I got my board and room and five dollars a month which was paid at the end of every six months. I stayed in Pennsylvania for some years and came to Canton in 1884. I have always worked at farm work except now and then in a factory.

I had two brothers, Dan and Tom, and one sister, Dora, but I never heard from them or saw them after the war. I have been married twice. My first wife was Sally Dillis Blaire and we were married in 1889. I got a divorce a few years later and I don't know whatever became of her. My second wife is still living. Her name was Kattie Belle Reed and I married her in 1907. No, I never had any children.

I don't believe I had a bed when I was a slave as I don't remember any. At home, after the war, my mother and father's bed was made of wood with ropes stretched across with a straw tick on top. 'Us kids' slept under this bed on a 'trundle' bed so that at night my mother could just reach down and look after any one of us if we were sick or anything.

I was raised on ash cakes, yams and butter milk. These ash cakes were small balls made of dough and my mother would rake the ashes out of the fire place and lay these balls on the hot coals and then cover them over with the ashes again. When they were done we would take 'em out, clean off the ashes and eat them. We used to cook chicken by first cleaning it, but leaving the feathers on, then cover it with clay and lay it in a hole filled with hot coals. When it was done we would just knock off the clay and the feathers would come off with it.

When I was a 'kid' I wore nothing but a 'three cornered rag' and my mother made all my clothes as I grew older. No, the slaves never knew what underwear was.

We didn't have any clocks to go by; we just went to work when it was light enough and quit when it was too dark to see. When any slaves took sick they called in a

nigger mammy who used roots and herbs, that is, unless they were bad sick, then the overseer would call a regular doctor.

When some slave died no one quit work except relatives and they stopped just long enough to go to the funeral. The coffins were made on the plantation, these were just rough pine board boxes, and the bodies were buried in the grave yard on the plantation.

The overseer on the Jefferson plantation, so my father told me, would not allow the slaves to pray and I never saw a bible until after I came north. This overseer was not a religious man and would whip a slave if he found him praying.

The slaves were allowed to sing and dance but were not allowed to play games, but we did play marbles and cards on the quiet. If we wandered too far from the plantation we were chased and when they caught us they put us in the stockade. Some of the slaves escaped and as soon as the overseer found this out they would turn the blood hounds loose. If they caught any runaway slaves they would whip them and then sell them, they would never keep a slave who tried to run away."

**NOTE:** Mr. Williams and his wife are supported by the Old Age Pension.  
Interviewed by Chas. McCullough.