



Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

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Introduction used at the door

Sarah Graves, Nodaway County, Mo.

"I was brought to Missouri when I was six months old, along with my mama, who was a slave owned by a man named Shaw, who had allotted her to a man named Graves. When a slave was allotted, somebody made a down payment and gave a mortgage for the rest. A chattel mortgage. Times don't change, just the merchandise."

Individual Slave Narratives

Mary Armstong, St. Louis, Mo.

"I'se Aunt Mary all right, but you all has to 'scuse me if I don't talk so good 'cause I has been feelin' porly for a spell an' I ain't so young no more. I's 91 years old. Law me, when I think back what I used to do. Why Mis' Olivia, my mistress, used to put a glass plumb full of water on my head an' then have me waltz 'round the room an' I would dance so smooth like, I don't spill nary a drop. That was in St. Louis whar I was born. You see when I was born my mamma belong to old William Cleveland an' old Polly Cleveland an' they was the meanest two white folks what ever lived 'cause they was always beatin' on their slaves. Old Polly whipped my little sister what was only nine months old,...jus' cause she cry like all babies do, an' it killed my sister.

The farms was lots difrunt from down here [in Texas]. They call 'em plantations down here, but up at St. Louis they was jes' farms. An' that's jes' what they was, cause we raise wheat, barley, rye, oats, corn, an' fruit. They wasn't no cotton growin' up there. The houses was built with brick an' heavy wood 'cause... it was sure cold in the wintertime.

Mamma had been put together with my father, Sam Adams, what belonged to a nigger trader what had a place next to old Cleveland. But that didn' make no difference to old Cleveland. He was so mean that he never would sell the man an' woman, an' chillen to the same one. He would sell the man here, an' the woman there, an' if they was chlllen, he would sell them some place else. An' when he would sell a slave, he would grease their mouth all up to make it look like they had been fed good an' was strong an' healthy.

Mis' Olivia had took a likin' to me an', though her papa and mama so mean, she's kind to everyone, an' they jes' love her. She marries to Mr. Will Adams what was a fine man, an' has 'bout five farms, and 500 slaves, an' he buyz me for her from old Cleveland.

We don't live on the farm, but we live in St. Louis on Chinquapin Hill, an' I's house girl for Mis' Olivia, an' when the babies starts to come I nusses 'em, an' when they was asleep, I spins thread for clothes.

Then I hear old Cleveland take my mamma to Texas... but I couldn' do nothin' 'bout it.



Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

I stayed with Mis' Olivia 'til in '63 when Mr. Will set all his slaves free. He said we had a right to freedom an' read a proclamation. I was a big girl then, bout 17 years old. Mis' Olivia, she ask me what I want to do an' I tell her I want to find my mamma. Mis' Olivia talk to Mr. Will an' he fixes me up two papers... both has written,' on what I don't know about, an' big gold seals what he says is the seal of the State of Missouri. An' he gives me money, an' buys my fare ticket to Texas. He tells me they is still slave times down here, an' to put the papers in my bosom, but to do whatever the white folks tells me to, even if they want to take an' sell me. But he says, 'Before you get of the block jes' pull out the papers, but jes' hold 'em up to let folks see 'em, an' not let 'em get out of your hands, an' when they see them they has to let you alone.'

"They put me in the back end [of the boat] whar the big old wheel what run the boat was. Nobody bothers me 'tall 'cause de Capt'ins all tell folks I has papers an' has had the fare all the way paid. I looks 'round Houston, but not long, ...an' I gets the stagecoach to go to Austin.

Then I has trouble sure. Some man...come to whar I is at an' say 'Who you belong to?' I tells him nobody now, I has been freed an' am lookin' for my mamma. Then I sure 'nuff got scared... They takes me to a block what they sells slaves on. I gets right up like they tells me, 'cause I rec'lec's what Mr. Will had tol' me to do, an' they starts lookin' me over an' biddin' on me. An' when they cried off, an' ...Mr. Crosby come up to get me, I jes' pulled out my papers an' held 'em up high,... an' when he sees the gold seals, he says 'Lemme; see it,' but I says 'You jes' look at it up here.' Mr. Crosby he squints up an' say, 'Why sure 'nuf, this gal is free an' has papers.'

Mr. Crosby he say to me, in a few days that they is a slave refugee camp of slaves an' some of 'em been brought down from Missouri. Mr. Crosby tells me how I can get there, but I din' have no money much left. But he let me work in the house for my livin' an' paid me a little besides an' when the war was over, I started out an' looked for mamma again an' found her like they said. Law me, talk 'bout cryin', an' singin', an' crying some more. We sure done it.

But law me, so much has gone out of my mind years 'cause I'se 91 years old now an' my mind jes' like my legs, jes' kinda hobble 'round a bit."

George Bollinger, Bollinger County, Mo.

"We lived out on de edge o' Bollinger County. 'Ole Massa's name was Dal Bollinger. Dey wuz 'bout 20, mebby 25, slaves on de place, en' we all lived in a big, old, log house. My mammy was a good cook en' she cud spin en' weave. She made all de clothes we wore. Us chilluns never wore no pants jes' sumpin like a long shirt made o' homespun.

My pappy was a smart man. He cud read and write. I don't know whar he learned it. We didden know nuthin' 'bout learnin'. Aunt Polly en' mammy allus know'd whut to do when a body waz ailln'. Det alus had a bag o' yarbs (herbs) hangin' under de porch.

Dey wuz a church, but we didden go much, 'en we never had no kind 'er gatherin's. Dey wouldn' let de cullered folks congregate, no suh. . . . De bes' times we-ens had wuz going fishing, an' man, did we



Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

like to fish. Allus we had Saturday afternoon off, 'lessen it war whet harvest 'er sumthin' special like. En' Sundays we allus fished all day long.

De nigger buyers ust'a cum roun' our place. It was sight to see. Dere 'ud be mebbe five or six men a ridin' fine hosses an' a-drivin' a whole flock o' slaves along de road, jes' like stock, all chained togedder. Ole Pete Smith wuz gonna buy me, but my young folks begged Mass' not to sell me cause we'd all played togedder, so he didden' sell me. But dey wuz gonna buy my pappy an' take him way off, but my pappy was smart. He had made baskets at night an' sold 'em when he cud, en' saved de money. Dat night he goes to de fireplace an' lifts up a stone an' out o' de hole he pulls out a bag a' money an' he runs away. I ain't never seed my pappy since.

Lord, when I thinks of de way we used to work. Out in de field before day and work plumb till dark. My boss would say, 'George, take two men, or maybe three men, and git dat field plowed, or dat woods patch cleared.' And he knowed if he tell me, de work would be done. But what do dese young folks know 'bout work? Nuthin'! Look at dat grandson of mine, just crossed de porch – why he's fourteen and he can't even use an ax. Too young? Go on with you! I tells you dese young folks just don't know how to work.

When Mista' Lincoln made his Proclamation young Massa' Dave set us free. He gave us a yoke of oxen an' a wagon full o' everythin' we needed, an' he sent us into de Cape, an' we been livin' roun' here ever since."

Mark Discus, Dade County, Mo.

"I was born...just about four/five miles from here and my first master was a Presbyterian preacher, his name was Jeff Montgomery. My Pappy's name was Hardin Montgomery and my Mammy was Susan Montgomery. There was ten children of we-uns and we was all separated. I was sold when I was four years old. I remember my Mammy cryin' and I was scared. They stood me on a big stump and auctioned me off, ...they said for four hundred and fifty dollars. Wish I had the money now, I could shore use hit good.

A man by the name of Miller bought me first and then I was sold to ol' Ned Discus. This sale was just a trade, so I just changed homes, so to say.

Married folks lived in log cabins, but the single folks lived in the big house. I lived in the big house. I slept on a pallet on the floor in the kitchen and every mornin' the ol' master would hollar, 'Mark, Mark, light that fire.' And if I didn't git right up I got a cane over my head. Once I remember he whooped me 'til the blood run offen my heels for breakin' an axe handle. We knowed to step when he yelled at us.

When I was nine years old I cut all the corn stalks offen a forty-acre field with a hoe. We had to work from sun up 'til dark too.

We had 'nough of what we got [to eat], but it was course grub. We allus had fat meat, but none of the ham.



Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

We wore a one piece garment called a skift. It was a hol' lot like a long night shirt. It was the coarsest of cotton stuff an' had no collar. In the winter we had ol' clothes of the master's family. Only in the coldest of weather we had split leather shoes without any linin'. I have had my feet freeze and crack open on the heels and bleed. Didn't do us no good to complain neither.

[During the war ol' master] didn't take sides much, but he thought the Confederates was right. Ol' master wanted to see us free when he saw how things was goin', but his oldest son had took charge of things and he said 'no.' It was right funny. Ol' master had refused to sell me for twelve hundred dollars, so young master loaded me and four others of the best slaves in a wagon and linked our hands together and started South with us to sell us. We got within twelve miles of the Texas line when we met some soldiers and they said to turn the niggers loose. Freedom had come. That made young master mad as a hornet, but he let us go right there and then."

Rachal Goings, Cape Girardeau, Mo.

"My full name wuz Rachal Exelina Mayberry. You see, I carried de name Mayberry cause dat wuz my masta's name. I didden' know de ole Missus. Dey tol' me she went crazy and kilt herself shortly after I wuz borned 'cause she though' I was white.

We wuz de only slave family Masta' had en' he wuz good to us. Only one time mast' whip me. We made lots o' molasses on our place. Oh, lots of molasses an' dey wuz allus some barrels standin' up right with bungs in close to de bottom so de' lasses run out. One day...I pushed at de bung, I pushed dis way, en dat way like I seed [others] do when all at once dat bung flew out en' dat lasses flew all over de place. De barrel was full en' it cum out so fast I couldn't git de bung back in. I tried till I wuz wadin' lasses to my knees. Den I run call masta' and tell him a bung bust out. He knowed how I done it. Den he laid me on de floor an' he put his foot on my haid. He took his switch and he gave me one good. Den he kept beatin' on de floor. I guess dat wuz to make de others think he wuz giving me a big beatin'.

De big house stood facing de road. It wuz built like lots 'o houses wuz in dem days, de kitchen an' dinin' room on one side. Masta's room on de udder with a big open hallway between. Across de front was a big porch. We called it a gallery. Across de road, back a piece, wuz our cabin.

[Mammy] did all de cookin' an' she wuz a good cook. We allus had plenty good things to eat. De white folks would sit down en' eat, en when dey's through we'd sit down at de same table. I members de first shoes I ever had. One of de men had got 'em fo' his little girl, en' dey was too small, so he give 'em to my step-daddy for me. Dey wuz too big, but I wore 'em en' wuz proud of 'em.

When my little brother wuz borned, I members dat day. Mammy and I wuz working out in the corn patch. She wuz coverin' corn, an' she jes had 'bout three or four more rows to cover when she ran to de house. De udder children...called me to cum quick cause Mammy found a baby... by the chimney corner.



Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

I must a been 'bout eight year old when de war start. Fust I knowed, one day Masta said to me, 'Child, go out to de gate an see if anyone comin'.' I went to de gate like he tole me an' dere was men comin' down de road. Whew! I never seed so many men in all my life. After that we saw lots o' sojers, dey'd stop at our place but dey never bother nuthin'. The Rebels wore brown coats and the Northerners wore blue suits with pretty gold pieces on dey shoulders. My! But dey wuz pretty."

Sarah Graves, Nodaway County, Mo.

"I was born March 23, 1850 in Kentucky, somewhere near Louisville. I was brought to Missouri when I was six months old, along with my mama who was a slave owned by a man named Shaw, who had allotted her to a man named Graves, who came to Missouri to live with his daughter. When a slave was allotted, somebody made a down payment and gave a mortgage for the rest. A chattel mortgage. Times don't change, just the merchandise.

We left my papa in Kentucky. My papa never knowed where my mama went, an' my mama never knew where papa went. They never wanted mama to know, 'cause they knowed she would never marry so long she knew where he was. Our master wanted her to marry again and raise more children to be slaves. Mama said she wold never marry again to have children, so she married my stepfather 'cause he was sick an' could never be a father.

We lived in a kitchen, a room in a log house joined on to the master's house. There was most always something to do. Master never allowed nobody to be idle. Mama worked in the house and the fields too. My mama worked in the field, even when I was a little baby. She would lay me down on a pallet near the fence while she plowed the corn or worked in the field. At night, after she come home from the field, she had to grate corn for the family next day. Stepfather and mama often tended their own tobacco and grain in the moonlight. This they could sell and have the money.

I worked in the fields, and I worked hard too. Plantin' and harvestn' in those days was really work. I carried water for the field hands. I've carried three big buckets of water from one field to another, one in each hand and one balanced on my head.

Nowadays, when you-all want a nice dress, all you got to do is go to the store and get it. When I was growin' up an' wanted a nice wool dress, we would shear the sheep, wash the wool, card it, spin it and weave it. If we wanted striped, we used two threads. We would color one by using herbs or barks.

My Master was not as bad as some Masters was to their slaves. One time... my Master said, 'You have not had a currying down for a time, come over here,' and he whipped me with a cat-of-nine-tails. This cat was made of nine small pieces of leather fastened on to the end of the whip. Lots of times when they hit with the cat it left nine stripes of blood. I have got many whippings for being blamed for doing things the Master's children did. One time...one of the Master's daughters told that I was mean and that I kicked up dirt so that dust would get on [a] lady's dress and I got the worst whipping I ever got in my life by the Mistress, and I still have the marks on my body.

Things is changed. We workin' for ourself now, an' what we get is our'n an' no more whipin's."



Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

Richard Kimmons, Lawrence County, Mo.

“I was born in Missouri, Lawrence County, about fourteen years before de Civil War, near as I can tell. Mos’ all de slaves everywhere lived in log houses which had two rooms. We made our beds by driving logs in the dirt floor an’ makin’ a kinda scaffold. Den ropes was stretched across ‘stead of springs and we filled ticks with grass, or straw, or corn shucks an’ made our beds.

My mother was de head cook on de plantation. Our white folks was good to us an’ treated us like we was w’ite as dey was. Ef dey had flour, meal, coffee, or sugar we had some too. We all had de garden togedder, an’ de slaves got what dey wanted out of de garden to cook. Dere was a might fine big apple orchard on de Missouri plantation.

Our marster made all de shoes us wore. I could make shoes an’ even made de shoe lasts what you make de shoes on.

Our w’ite folks was considered well-to-do. [Master] didn’t have no oberseer. He had two or three little small farms, but he seed atter his niggers an’ mules heslef. Said he didn’t want ‘em drug roun’ an’ all bruised up. My w’ite folks tried to larn me to read an write. Marster’s baby chile tried to larn me, but shaw! I couldn’t sit in dat house an’ study. ‘Twas my own fault ‘cause I nebber learned to read an’ write.”

Emma Knight, Florida, Mo.

“We lived on a creek near Florida, [Missouri]. We belonged to Will Ely. He had only five slaves, my father and mother and three of us girls. My mother told me she come from Virginia or down south some place. Dey brought her in a box car with lots of other colored people. Dere was several cars full, with men in one car, women in another, and de younger one in another, and de babies in another with some of the women to care for dem. Dey brought dem to Palmyra and sold dem. Master bought my mother. I don’t know where my father come from.

I was only eight or nine years old. De Elys had eight children. Lizzie was de oldest girl and I was to belong to her when she was married.

We didn’t have to work none too hard, ‘cus we was so young, I guess. We cut weeds along de fences, pulled weeds in de garden and helped de mistress with de hoeing. We had to feed de stock, sheep, hogs, and calves... In de evenings we was made to knit a finger width and if we missed a stitch we would have to pull all the yarn out and do it over.

De master’s girls learned us to read and write.

We didn’t have hardly no clothes and most of de time just rags. We got dem things only once a year. I had to wear de young master’s overalls for underwear and linseys for a dress. We went barefoot until it got real cold. Mother made moccasins for our feet form old pants. Our feet would crack open from de cold and bleed.



Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

My father was took away. My mother said he was put on a block and sold 'cause de master wanted money to buy something for de house. Mistress always told us dat if we run away somebody would catch us and kill us. We was always scared when somebody strange come. Some Union soldiers come and told us that we was free like dey was and told us not to be afraid, dey wouldn't hurt us. Dey told us de war was over. De master told mother not to go away, dat if she stayed awhile he would give her a couple hundred dollars. We stayed awhile, but she never got no money.

I tell you we was raised plenty tuff dem days. De young folks can't stand such raising dese days. Dey just couldn't go through what we was through."

Charlie Richardson, Warrensburg, Mo.

"I was born at Warrensburg, Missouri...in March. Didn't never give no day. Jest March.

The Marster, he have a very fine home. About ten rooms, built of common brick. It ware a very purtty house. [We had] log cabins...all in a long row. Piles of 'em. They was made of good old Missouri logs daubed with mud and the chimney was made of sticks daubed with mud. Our beds was poles nailed to sticks standing on the floor with cross sticks to hold the straw ticks.

Big boys and g'won folks wore jeans and domestic shirts. Us little kids wore just a gown. In the wintertime we wore the same only with brogans with the brass toes.

A big bell hanging in the center of all the cabins rang at 4 a.m. and then most of the grown folks worked from dawn till eleven at night. I carried in the water and wood to the Misses house and helped Ma. We never had no Saturday's off like they do now. Nor no Sunday's off neither.

No games, no play, only work. [After work we] mostly go to bed. We kids did early. But I wake up lots of times and hear my Ma and Pappy praying for freedom. They do many times.

Most of the negroes cooked in the cabins, but my Mammy was a house girl and lots of times fetched my breakfast from the Masters house. Most of the negroes though cooked in or near the cabins. They mostly used dog irons and skillets, but when they wanted to bile anything they used tin buckets. It ware just plain hoe cake mostly. No dishes or dish like we has nowadays. No Sah! This here hoe cake was plain old white corn meal battered with salt and water. Not much grease, jest 'nough to keep it from stickin'. We has coffee some time, but it were made of burned corned meal. That was purtty good coffee. We never had no flap-jacks in the cabins. No Sah! Flap-jacks was something special for only Marster and the Misses.

That makes me remember a funny story about flap-jacks. My Ma brought some flap-jack stuff down to the cabin on day. You know, jest swiped it form the house where she worked. Well, Ma was frying away . . . when she hears the Misses comin' with her parrot. So Ma hides them flap-jacks right quick...under the pad on the chair. Soon the Misses come in our cabin and was talkin' to my Mammy when that crazy old parrot, he began to get fussy like somethin' was wrong. He were a smart parrot. Purtty soon the Misses go over to sit in the chair Ma had with a big pad on it, and before the Misses could set down that crazy parrot begun to yell, 'look out Mam, it's hot'. And sure 'nough the misses



Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

she get a peek at a flap-jack stickin' though under the pad where Ma hid them. And Ma almost got a good lickin' for that.

We never had no jails. Your back was the jail. When you done something serious Marster Warren called in the 'whuppers' and they made your back bleed and then rubbed salt into the skin. After that they chained you to a tree and let you suffer.

We always knowed when they was going to sell, cause they would let them lay around and do nothin'. Jest feed them and git fat. They even smeared their faces with bacon rine to make 'em look greasy and well fed afore the sale.

We never had no 'block' on Master Warren's place. We calls it 'Puttin' 'em on the stump,' but the 'stump were' neither block not stump. It were a box; big wooden box. There were some buyers from south Texas was after to buy my step-pappy, but the Marster would never sell him. So one time they comes up to our place at buying time (that was about once every year) and while buying other slaves they asked Master Warren if he wouldn't sell my step-pappy, cause he was a sure 'nough worker in the field. He could do more work than three ordinary men. But the Marster tried to git rif of the buyer again by saying, 'I don't take no old offer of \$2,000 for Charlie, an' I won't sell under \$2,500.' The buyer he said right quick like, 'Sold right here.' So that's how he come to leave us and we never seed him again. Like to broke my Mammy up, but that's the way we slaves had it."

Bill Simms, Osceola, Mo.

"I was born in Osceola, Missouri, March 16, 1839. I lived on the farm with my mother and my master. My master's name was Simms and I was known as Simms' Bill, just like horses. When I came out here, I just changed my name from Simms' Bill to Bill Simms. I had a good master most of the masters were good to their slaves.

A man who owned ten slaves was considered wealthy and if he got hard up for money he would advertise and sell some slaves. Like my oldest sister was sold on the block with her children. She sold for eleven hundred dollars, a baby in her arms sold for three hundred dollars. Another sold for six hundred dollars and the other for a little less than that. I have never seen her since. My master was offered fifteen hundred dollars for me several times, but he refused to sell me because I was considered a good, husky slave.

The slaves usually lived in a two-room house made of native lumber. The houses were all small. A four or five room house was considered a mansion.

We never know what boughten clothes were. We made our own clothes: had spinning wheels and raised and combed our own cotton, clipped the wool from our sheep's backs, combed it, and spun [them] into cotton and wool clothes. I learned to make shoes when I was just a boy and I made shoes for the whole family.



Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

Slaves were never allowed to talk to white people other than their masters or someone their masters knew, as they were afraid the white man might have the slave run away. The masters aimed to keep their slaves in ignorance.”

Tishey Taylor, Poplar Bluff, Mo.

“I wusn’t very old during slave time, but I worked, yes sir, I did. And my por’ mammy chile’, it was from daylight ta dark and on good light nights it wus way up in the night. Mammy used to card wool and cotton, and spin, then she would weave goods. I took care of [marster’s son] Little Murry for ma; (tisk sound) and I warn’t much bigger’n him, but did I let him git hurt? Not me, chile’!

Ole’ Man Sha’p owned ‘bout two, three hundred us slaves and he had cabins built all over and around his plantation. This house is po’r enuf’ but then we jes had one little room and ‘irt floo’s and no windas, sometime jus holes cut. ‘Nother thing, our beds wus poor stuff, but mammy said she wus ‘dog tired’ and could ‘a sleep on the ground.’ They wus straw ticks. We didn’t know what springs was.

Some slaves cooks in their cabin, not what they wanted but what marse’ gibd ‘em. Most times wus beans an’ ‘tators and corn bred and milk, and sometimes ‘round hog killin’ time he pass out the jowl meat. I jest don’ ‘member, but it seems we did eat three times a day. I wus allays so glad to hear dat bell ring.

Mammy cooked in the big house for Marse’ and then som’ time when her work was done in there she was took to the fields and lef’ me and my brother and sister by our selves ‘till she come.

I never knowed Sunday from Monday, ‘cept on Sunday the white man come and we are called out under the brush arbor, didn’ have no work in the fiel’ ‘at day, and he stand up ‘fore us and preach. I ‘member every preach day he say, ‘Mind you not to steal from Missis or Marster.’ He was plenty strong on that part. Times it seems I can hear them sing ‘Hark From the Tomb’ and ‘I am a Soldier of the Cross.’

The older ones had some fun too about that time. Someone get ‘mission from his marster and gib a’hoe down (calls dance now). Anyone that went from all the close plantations got ‘mission from the marster or overseer to go, but they had to be home at a certain time or they would wish they hadn’t went.

At Christmas time, we knowed ‘bout that, Ol’ Man Sha’p alluys gib us a pair of stockings and some candy and apples. For the men folks they sometimes get whiskey. New Years was ‘bout the same and I don’ ‘member no other holidays.

After we wus free there wus plenty of work, they couldn’t whip nobody, and had to pay us for the work. It is best to be free. If you carry yourself right you’ll be free all your days.”

Slavery in Missouri

Peter Corn, Ste. Genevieve County, Mo.

“As I look back on it, people ought never to have been slaves. Dat was the low downest thing dat ever



Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

was... Slavery didn't teach you nothin' but how to work and if you didn't work you back would tell it. Slavery taught you how to lie too... De conditions now of de colored people is of course better now cause dey is somebody. But every day dey is tryin' to starve us out and give de white man a job. De do dat to keep us down."

Perry McGee, Fayette, Mo.

"Dere ain't but two classes of people, good and bad, and dey been tryin' to separate de black people from de white people but de line has already been cut."

Delicia Patterson, Boonville, Mo.

"I think the time will soon be when people won't be looked on as regards to whether you are black or white, but all on the same equality. I may not live to see it but it is on the way. Many don't believe it, but I know it."

Rhody Holsell, Fredericktown, Mo.

"Slavery learnt me how to work and I wasn't feared of no kind of work."

Hannah Allen, Fredericktown, Mo.

"Some of the colored folks are better off today and some are worse. The young race says we who was slaves are ten times worse off than they cause we had bosses and couldn't read or write... They say today that I don't know nothing cause I was a slave and all I learned was what the marster told me. But I know enough to keep out of devilmint... I say the young race has got all this to go by and they ought to be much better off than they are. We are better off in one sense than the young race cause about half of them don't know how to raise their children and they don't know how to do nothing. I think our folks have just as good a chance now as the white folks, but they don't get cultivated."

Robert Bryant, Caledonia, Mo.

"Slavery might a done de other fellow some good but I don't think it ever done de colored people no good. Some of dem after freedom didn't know how to go out and work for themselves. If dey would have freed de slaves and give dem a piece of ground I think dat would been a heap better den de way dey did."

Fil Hancock, Rolla, Mo.

"You know it's a funny thing, de white folks took everything from us niggers, even try to take our old songs and have dem on the radio."

Mary Peters, Phelps County, Mo.

"Those white people in Missouri didn't have many slaves. They just had four slaves – my mother, myself, another woman, and an old colored man called Uncle Joe."

Bill Simms, Osceola, Mo.

"The masters aimed to keep their slaves in ignorance and the ignorant slaves were all in favor of the Rebel army, only the more intelligent were in favor of the Union army. When the war started, my master sent me to work for the Confederate army. I worked most of the time for three years off and on, hauling cannons, driving mules, hauling ammunition and provisions. When the Union Army came



Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

close enough I ran away from home and joined the Union Army. There I drove six-mule teams and worked at wagon work...until the war ended.”

Ann Stokes, Pemiscot County, Mo.

“I learnt my alphabet in de middle ob a field unnerneath a ‘simmon tree. My cousin teached me, you know we weren’t ‘lowed to hab books in dem days. They didn’t want us to know nothin’.”

Treatment

James Abbot, Perry County, Mo.

“Dey shore wuz mean to us but God bless you, dey’s all daid an’ gone an’ de Lawd has spared me.”

Harriet Casey, Farmington, Mo.

“Our home was not pleasant. The mistress was cruel. Her brother would go down in de orchard and cut de sprouts and pile ‘em up under de house so as de mistress could use ‘em on us. She also used a bed-stick to whip with. One day we took de cows to pasture and on de way home I stopped to visit Mrs. Walker and she gave me a goose egg. And den when we got home de old mistress kicked me and stomped on us and broke my goose egg. Didn’ mind de whipping but sure hated to break my egg.”

Mary Peters, Missouri

“I have seen many a scar on my mother. She had mean white folks. One day her mistress...left a lot of work for my mother to do. She was only a girl and it was too much. When her old mistress came back and her work was not all done she beat my mother down to the ground, and then she took one of the skillets and bust her over the head with it. I have seen the scar with my own eyes. It was an awful thing.”

Bill Simms, Osceola, Mo.

“Slaves were never allowed to talk to white people other than their masters or someone their masters knew, as they were afraid the white man might have the slave run away.”

Gus Smith, Osage County, Mo.

“My master let us come and go pretty much as we pleased. In fact, we had much more freedom dan most of de slaves in those days.”

Rachel Goings, Cape Girardeau, Mo.

“We wuz de only slave family Masta’ had en’ he wuz good to us. Only one time masta whip me.”

Housing

Parson Allen, Harrison County, Mo.

“My boss was John McWiggin. He had ‘bout 230 darkies on de place. We lived in log cabins. Dey had slip doors for de windows. Man, what you talkin’ ‘bout? We never saw window glass.”

John Barker, Sedalia, Mo.

“Dey keep us in de back, little bit o’ house no bigger’n a chicken house where you eat and sleep. We



Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

made de kind o' beds we had in dem days. You see dese posts here? Well, you take t'ree or fo' of 'em put togedder and make a bed out of dat and you take dis bark off trees an' make slats out of dat, an' deses here towsacks an' sew 'em togedder. You put shucks in dat to make de mattress an' make de pillows de say way."

Eliza Overton, Farmington, Mo.

"Mr. Coffman had a whole row of slave cabins. Our cabin war small an' we had a corded bed, trundle bed ta slip unda' the big bed ta save room, home made split bottom chairs, tin plates, wooden boxes, an' a fireplace."

Charlie Richardson, Warrensburg, Mo.

"Log cabins, that's what they was. All in a long row- piles of 'um. They was made of good old Missouri logs daubed with mud and the chimney was made of sticks daubed with mud. Most of the negroes cooked in the cabins. They mostly used dog irons and skillets, but when they went to b'ile anything, they used tin buckets."

Bill Simms, Osceola, Mo.

"The slaves usually lived in a two-room house made of native lumber. The houses were all small. A four or five room house was considered a mansion."

Necessities: Food, Clothing and Medicine

Food

Fil Hancock, Rolla, Mo.

"Our old granny was de white folk's cook. Up to de cabins where de other niggers was, had salt meat, cabbage, 'taters, and shortnin' bread three times a day. We all had plenty vegetables we raised ourselves. Once a week we had hot biscuits."

Dave Harper, Montgomery County, Mo.

"De next morning after he bought me, de boss carried me to de old woman and told her to take care of me. Dat morning de kettle was full of spare ribs and de people fished dem out with sticks. I didn't see no knives or forks. When dey asked me why I didn't get something to eat, I asked 'bout [de forks] and a table where I could eat. De overseer just cried."

Harry Johnson, Mississippi County, Mo.

"I looks back sometimes and thinks times was better for eatin' in slavery dan what dey is now. My mammy was a reg'lar cook and she made me peach cobbles and apple dumplin's. In dem days, we'd take cornmeal and mix it with water and call 'em dodgers and dey awful nice with plenty butter. We had lots of hawg meat and when dey kilt a beef a man told all de neighbors to come get some of de meat."

Gus Smith, Osage County, Mo.

"My goodness! We don't have nothin' to eat now like we did then. All kinds of game, wild ducks,



Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

geese, squirrels, rabbits, 'possum, pigeons, and fried chicken... Great big 'pound cakes a foot and a half high. You don't see such things now-a-days."

Clothing

Sarah Waggoner, Savannah, Mo.

"In de winter old Miss made us stockings out of yarn, and we had brogan shoes. Dey was neither lined or bound. ...if dey did hurt we had to wear 'em anyway. Dem old brogans; I'm sure glad they're gone."

Charlie Richardson, Warrensburg, Mo.

"Big boys and g'own folks wore jeans and domestic shirts. Us little kids wore just a gown. In the wintertime we wore the same only with brogans with brass toes."

Bill Simms, Osceola, Mo.

"We never knowed what boughten clothes were. We made our own clothes: had spinning wheels and raised and combed our own cotton, clipped the wool from our sheep's backs, combed it, and spun [them] into cotton and wool clothes. I learned to make shoes when I was just a boy and I made shoes for the whole family."

Sarah Graves, Nodaway County, Mo.

Nowadays, when you-all want a nice dress, all you got to do is go to the store and get it. When I was growin' up an' wanted a nice wool dress, we would shear the sheep, wash the wool, card it, spin it and weave it. If we wanted striped, we used two threads. We would color one by using herbs or barks."

Medicine

Will Daily, St. Louis, Mo.

"We had a doctor and good care when we was sick. I's don't remember much 'bout what kinds of medicine we took, but I know it was mostly homemade."

George Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Mo.

"Aunt Polly en mammy allus know'd what to do when a body waz ailln'. Dey alus had a bag o' herbs hangin' under de porch."

Slave Society: Marriage, Religion and Free Time

Marriage

John Baker, Sedalia, Mo.

"Dey wasn't allowed to marry. But if dey seen you talkin; to sombody like you was makin' love, whether you love 'em or no, dey make you live wid dem. Dat was marryin' each other all right, but you ain't got no papers an' t'ings like dat."



Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

Sarah Graves, Nodaway County, Mo.

“We left my papa in Kentucky. My papa never knowed where my mama went, an’ my mama never knew where papa went. They never wanted mama to know, ‘cause they knowed she would never marry so long she knew where he was. Our master wanted her to marry again and raise more children to be slaves. Mama said she wold never marry again to have children, so she married my stepfather ‘cause he was sick an’ could never be a father.”

Religion

George Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Mo.

“Dey wuz a church, but we didden go much. ‘En we never had no kind ‘er gatherin’ s. Dey wouldn’ let de culled folks congregate, no suh.”

Tishey Taylor, Poplar Bluff, Mo.

“I never knowed Sunday from Monday, ‘cept on Sunday the white man come and we are called out under the brush arbor, didn’ have no work in the fiel’ ‘at day, and he stand up ‘fore us and preach. I ‘member every preach day he say, ‘Mind you not to steal from Missis or Marster.’ He was plenty strong on that part.”

Free Time

George Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Mo.

“De bes’ times we-ens had waz going fishing, an’ man, de we like to fish. Allus we had Saturday afternoon off, lessen it war wheat harvest ‘er somthin special like. En’ Sundays we allus fished all day long.”

Eliza Overton, Farmington, Mo.

“In ever’ cab’n thar war fiddles an’ on Sunday we could have a good time. One of de games we wud play out in front of the cab’n was ‘Swing Ole Liza Single.’ This here game waz play’d by havin’ two rows line up an’ a man wud dance up or down the line an’ swing each one. We wud all sing an’ pat our han’s an’ feet ta keep time for the dance.”

William Black, New London, Mo.

“In de evening when de work was done we would sit ‘round and play marbles an sing songs. We made our songs up as we went along. Sometimes dere would be a corn shuckin’ and dat is when we had a good time, be we always shucked a lot of dat corn.”

Uncertain Future

Malinda Sloan Discus, Dade County, Mo.

“I remember that my mother used to gather us children around her and pray that we would not be separated. She was separated from her parents when eleven years old and brought to Missouri from Tennessee. She never saw any of her folks again and the last words her mother said to her was, ‘Daughter, if I never see you again any more on earth, come to heaven and I will see you there.’”



Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

Dave Harper, Montgomery County, Mo.

“I’ve seen slaves go through Danville in droves like cattle. Dey was chained together and dey walked ‘em to St. Louis to de nigger yard. One mother gave out. De man in charge made her give her baby away, she couldn’t carry it no further. Someone near Danville raised de baby.”

Perry McGee, Fayette, Mo.

“A man by de name of Grigsby was a slave buyer. It was like you would want a hog or cow and dey would put slaves on de block and ‘cry the off.’ You have got to make a profit on de deal. A good strong man would sell for \$300 and some for \$100. A house slave was worth more den a field slave.”

Margaret Nickens, Paris and Liberty, Mo.

“Mr. McCann was a rich slave holder. His daughter... was married to a Mr. Dawson and lived in Liberty. When I was ‘bout eight years old de Dawsons come back to Paris to visit. Dey had two children den so dey took me as a nurse for de children.... My mother had to stand dere like I wasn’t hers and all she could say was, ‘Be a good girl, Margaret.’”

Charlie Richardson, Warrensburg, Mo.

“We calls it ‘puttin’ ‘em on the stump.’ But the ‘stump’ were neither block or stump, it were a box. Big wooden box... We always knowed when they was going to sell, cause they would let them lay around and do nothin’. Jest feed them and git fat. They even smeared their faces with bacon rine to make ‘em look greasy and well fed afore the sale. They never had no grease to eat only now and then. Masta’ Warren he makes it look like them niggers is well fed and cared for.”

Bill Simms, Osceola, Mo.

“A man who owned ten slaves was considered wealthy, and if he got hard up for money, he would advertise and sell some slaves.”

Carrie Smith, Hannibal, Mo.

“I knowed of only one slave in our family dat was sold, and dat was my Aunt Harriet. She was sold on de block down on Fourth Street right here in Hannibal. I was only five or six years old den.”

Gus Smith, Osage County, Mo.

“My master’s father, before he died, told his chillun, dat at his death he wanted each child to put their slaves out to work until dey earned \$800 a piece, to earn their own freedom, in dat way each slave paid it dem selves. He did not believe it was right to keep dem in slavery all their lives.”

Esther Easter, Westport, Mo.

“One time I tell him, you better put me in your pocket (sell me) Master Jim, else I’s going run away. He don’t pay no mind and I don’t try to runaway ‘cause of the whips. I done see one whipping and that enough. They wasn’t no fooling about it. A runaway slave from the Jenkin’s plantation was brought back and there was a public whipping, so’s slaves could see what happens when they tries to get away.”

Margaret Nickens, Paris and Liberty, Mo.

“My father come from Virginia and my mother from Kentucky when dey was little. Dey never seen



Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

dere parents no more. Dey watched for a long time among de colored people and asked who dey was when dey thought somebody looked like dere parents, but never could find dem.”

Freedom

Richard Bruner, Saline County, Mo.

“Well you see I was a runaway nigga; I run away when I was about grown and went to Kansas. When de war broke out I joined de 18th United States Colored Infantry. . . I fit three years in de army. My old Marsa’s two boys just older than me fit for de south. Dey was mighty good boys, I liked them fine.”

Delicia Patterson, Boonville, Mo.

“When freedom was declared Mr. Steele told me that I was as free as he was. He said I could leave them if I please or could stay, that they wanted me and would be glad to have me if I would stay and his wife said, ‘Course, she is our nigger. She is as much our nigger now as she was the day you bought her two years ago and paid \$1,500 for her.’ That made me mad so I left right then. . . I hired myself out to a family named Miller’s at \$3.00 a week, and lived on the place. . . I don’t know what the ex-slaves expected, but I do know they didn’t get anything. After the war we just wandered from place to place, working for food and a place to stay.”

Peter Corn, Ste. Genevieve County, Mo.

“You know if you was raised from birth like dis you could stand it.”

“When I was freed I felt like I was goin’ into a new world.”

Work

George Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Mo.

“Lord, when I thinks of de way we used to work. Out in de field before day and work till plumb dark. My boss would say, ‘George take two men, or maybe three men, and git dat field plowed, or dat woods patch cleared.’ And he knowed if he tell me, de work would be done. But what do dese young folks know ‘bout work? Nuthin’! Look at dat grandson of mine, just crossed de porch – why he’s fourteen and he can’t even use an ax. Too young? Go on with you! I tells you, dese young folk just don’t know how to work.”

Will Daily, St. Louis, Mo.

“Soon as I was big enough, about four or five years ole, ole miss, she starts trainin’ me for a house boy. I’s a doin’ all sorts of chores by de time I was six years old. Den ole marster he starts sendin’ me out on de plantation to drive up de hosses. I sho’ likes dat job ‘cause ain’t nothin’ I loves any better den hosses. Den when I was bigger he starts me to carryin’ de breakfast to de field whar de grown niggers had been out workin’ since way ‘fore day.”

Henry Dant, Ralls County, Mo.

“We worked hard on de farm. I cradled wheat and plowed corn often till midnight. We often drove hogs to Palmyra and Hannibal. When dere was no crops in de fields we made brooms and baskets.”



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Slavery's Echoes: Interviews with Former Missouri Slaves Audio Quote Transcripts

Isabelle Henderson, Saline County, Mo.

“My work in slave times was in the house of my master and mistress. I was taught to sew and had to help make clothes for the other slaves. I nursed all the children of the mistress and one time was hired out to the white preacher’s family to take care of his children when his wife was sick.”

Emma Knight, Monroe County, Mo.

“We didn’t have to work none too hard, ‘cus we was so young, I guess. We cut weeds along de fences, pulled weeds in de garden and helped de mistress with de hoeing. We had to feed de stock, sheep, hogs, and calves... In de evenings we was made to knit a finger width and if we missed a stitch we would have to pull all the yarn out and do it over.”

Bill Simms, Osceola, Mo.

“On the plantation we raised cows, sheep, cotton, tobacco, corn, which were our principal crops. There was plenty of wild hogs, turkey, and deer and other game.”

Bill Simms, Osceola, Mo.

“My wife died when we had three children. She had had to work hard all her life and she said she didn’t want her children to have to work as hard as she had, and I promised her on her death bed that I would educate our girls. So I worked and sent the girls to school. My two girls both graduated from Ottawa University, the oldest one being the first colored girl to ever graduate from that school. The younger girl also graduated and went to teach school. I have worked at farm work and tree husbandry all my life. My oldest daughter bought me my first suit of clothes I ever had.”