

Charles Anderson

Helena, Arkansas

Age: 77 or 78

Interviewer: Miss Irene Robertson

I was born in Bloomfield, Kentucky. My parents had the same owners. Mary and Elgin Anderson were their names. They were owned by Isaac Stone. Davis Stone was their son. They belonged to the Stones as far back as they could remember. Mama was darker than I am. My father was brighter than I am. He likely had a white father. I never inquired. Mama had colored parents. Master Stone walked with a big crooked stick. He nor his son never went to war. Masters in that country never went. Two soldiers were drafted off our place. I saw the soldiers, plenty of them and plenty times. There never was any serious happenings.

The Federal soldiers would come by, sleep in the yard, take our best horses and leave the broken down ones. Very little money was handled. I never seen much. Master Stone would give us money like he give money to Davis. They prized fine stock mostly. They needed money at wheat harvest time only. When a celebration or circus come through he give us all twenty-five or thirty cents and told us to go. There wasn't many slaves up there like down in this country. The owners from all I've heard was crueller and sold them off more often here.

Weaving was a thing the women prided in doing--being a fast weaver or a fine hand at weaving. They wove pretty coverlets for the beds. I see colored spreads now makes me think about my baby days in Kentucky.

Freedom was something mysterious. Colored folks didn't talk it. White folks didn't talk it. The first I realized something different, Master Stone was going to whip an older brother. He told mama something I was too small to know. She said, 'Don't leave this year, son. I'm going to leave.' Master didn't whip him.

Master Stone's cousin kept house for him. I remember her well. They were all very nice to us always. He had a large farm. He had twenty servants in his yard. We all lived there close together. My sister and mama cooked. We had plenty to eat. We had beef in spring and summer. Mutton and kid on special occasions. We had hog in the fall and winter. We had geese, ducks, and chickens. We had them when we needed them. We had a field garden. He raised corn, wheat, oats, rye, and tobacco.

Once a year we got dressed up. We got shirts, a suit, pants and shoes, and what else we needed to wear. Then he told them to take care of their clothes. They got plenty to do a year. We didn't have fine clothes no time. We didn't eat ham and chicken. I never seen biscuit--only sometimes.

I've seen a woman sold. They had on her a short dress, no sleeves, so they could see her muscles, I reckon. They would buy them and put them with good healthy men to raise young

slaves. I heard that. I was very small when I seen that young woman sold and years later I heard that was what was done.

I don't know when freedom came on. I never did know. We was five or six years breaking up. Master Stone never forced any of us to leave. He give some of them a horse when they left. I cried a year to go back. It was a dear place to me and the memories linger with me every day.

There was no secret society or order of Ku Klux in reach of us as I ever heard.

I voted Republican ticket. We would go to Jackson to vote. There would be a crowd. The last I voted was for Theodore Roosevelt. I voted here in Helena for years. I was on the petite jury for several years here in Helena.

I farmed in your state some (Arkansas). I farmed all my young life. I been in Arkansas sixty years. I come here February 1879 with distant relatives. They come south. When I come to Helena there was but one set of mechanics. I started to work. I learned to paint and hang wallpaper. I've worked in nearly every house in Helena.

The present times are gloomy. I tried to prepare for old age. I had a apartment house and lost it. I owned a home and lost it. They foreclosed me out. The present generation is not doing as well as I have.

My health knocked me out. My limbs swell, they are stiff. I have a bad bladder trouble. I asked for help but never have got none. If I could got a little relief I never would have lost my house. They work my wife to death keeping us from starving. She sewed till they cut off all but white ladies. When she got sixty-five they let her go and she got a little job cooking. They never give us no relief.