

FRANK COOPER

MANDY COOPER

715 Ott St., Franklin, IN

LINCOLN COUNTY, KENTUCKY

Interviewed by Wm. R. Mays

Dist. 4, Johnson County, IN

July 29, 1937

Frank Cooper, an aged colored man of Franklin, relates some very interesting conditions that existed in slavery days as handed down to him by his mother.

Mandy Cooper, the mother of Frank Cooper, was 115 years old when she died; she was owned by three different families: the Good's, the Burton's, and the Cooper's, all of Lincoln Co. Kentucky.

"Well, I reckon I am one of the oldest colored men hereabouts, confessed aged Frank Cooper. What did you all want to see me about?" My mission being stated, he related one of the strangest categories alluding to his mother's slave life that I have ever heard:

One day while my mammy was washing her back my sistah noticed ugly disfiguring scars on it. Inquiring about them, we found, much to our amazement, that they were mammy's relics of the now gone, if not forgotten, slave days.

This was her first reference to her misery days that she had ever made in my presence. Of course we all thought she was telling us a big story and we made fun of her. With eyes flashing, she stopped bathing, dried her back and reached for the smelly ole black whip that hung behind the kitchen door. Bidding us to strip down to our waists, my little mammy with the boney bent-over back, struck each of us as hard as ever she could with that black-snake whip, each stroke of the whip drew blood from our backs. Now, she said to us, you have a taste of slavery days. With three of her children now having tasted of some of her misery days she was in the mood to tell us more of her sufferings; still indelibly impressed in my mind. [TR: illegible handwritten note here.]

'My ole back is bent over from the quick-tempered blows feld by the red-headed Miss Burton. At dinner time one day when the churning wasn't finished for the noontday meal, she said with an angry look that must have been reborn in my mammy's eyes—eyes that were dimmed by years and hard living, three white women beat me from anger because they had no butter for their biscuits and cornbread. Miss Burton used a heavy board while the missus used a whip. While I was on my knees begging' them to quit, Miss Burton hit the small of my back with the heavy

board. I knew no more until kind Mr. Hamilton, who was staying with the white folks, brought me inside the cabin and brought me around with the camphor bottle. I'll always thank him—God bless him—he picked me up where they had left me like a dog to die in the blazing noonday sun.

'After my back was broken it was doubted whether I would ever be able to work again or not. I was placed on the auction block to be bid for so my owner could see if I was worth anything or not. One man bid \$1700 after putting' two dirty fingers in my mouth to see my teeth. I bit him and his face showed anger. He then wanted to own me so he could punish me. Thinking his bid of \$1700 was official, he unstrapped his buggy whip to beat me, but my master saved me. My master declared the bid unofficial. At this auction my sister was sold for \$1900 and was never seen by us again.'

My mother related some experiences she had with the Paddy-Rollers, later called the Ku Klux, these Paddy-Rollers were a constant dread to the Negroes. They would whip the poor darkeys unmercifully without any cause. One night while the Negroes were gathering for a big party and dance they got wind of the approaching Paddy-Rollers in large numbers on horseback. The Negro men did not know what to do for protection, they became desperate and decided to gather a quantity of grapevines and tied them fast at a dark place in the road. When the Paddy-Rollers came thundering down the road bent on deviltry and unaware of the trap set for them, plunged head-on into these strong grapevines and three of their number were killed and a score was badly injured. Several horses had to be shot following injuries.

When the news of this happening spread it was many months before the Paddy-Rollers were again heard of.