

Joana Owens

520 E. Breckinridge St., Louisville, Kentucky

The following is the life and traditions of Joana Owens, 520 E. Breckinridge St., Louisville, Kentucky, an old negro mammy who was born during slavery.

My mother and father were slaves, and there were two children born to them, my sister, and me. We used to live in Hawesville, Kentucky, on the Ohio River. My people's name was Barr, and their master's name was Nolan Barr. You know they all had to take their masters names in slave days.

I will never forget how mean old Master Nolan Barr was to us. I was about fourteen years old and my sister was a little younger. We lived in an old log cabin. The cracks were filled with mud. My Mother did the housework for Master Barr's house. My father and sister and I had to work in the fields. He had a big farm and owned lots of slaves, and when the old master got mad at his slaves for not working hard enough he would tie them up by their thumbs and whip the male slaves till they begged for mercy. He sure was a mean old man. I will never forget him as long as I live. I don't know exactly how old I am, but I am close to ninety now. After I grew up and married a man named Owens, we come here to Louisville to live. That was a short while after the slaves were freed. I can remember how I and my sister used to go down to the river and watch the red hospital boats come in, bringing the wounded soldiers in to be cared for, and me and sister would go long singing—Nigger—Nigger—never die, if you want a chicken pie.