

JOHN EUBANKS & FAMILY
Lake County—District #1 Gary, Indiana
Interviewed by Archie Koritz, Field Worker

Gary's only surviving Civil War veteran was born a slave in Barren County, Kentucky, June 6, 1836. His father was a mulatto and a free negro. His mother was a slave on the Everett plantation and his grandparents were full-blooded African negroes. As a child he began work as soon as possible and was put to work hoeing and picking cotton and any other odd jobs that would keep him busy. He was one of a family of several children, and is the sole survivor, a brother living in Indianapolis, having died there in 1935.

Following the custom of the south, when the children of the Everett family grew up, they married and slaves were given them for wedding presents. John was given to a daughter who married a man of the name of Eubanks, hence his name, John Eubanks. John was one of the more fortunate slaves in that his mistress and master were kind and they were in a state divided on the question of slavery. They favored the north. The rest of the children were given to other members of the Everett family upon their marriage or sold down the river and never saw one another until after the close of the Civil War.

Shortly after the beginning of the Civil War, when the north seemed to be losing, someone conceived the idea of forming negro regiments and as an inducement to the slaves, they offered them freedom if they would join the Union forces. John's mistress and master told him that if he wished to join the Union forces, he had their consent and would not have to run away like other slaves were doing. At the beginning of the war, John was twenty-one years of age. When Lincoln freed the slaves by his Emancipation Proclamation, John was promptly given his freedom by his master and mistress.

John decided to join the northern army which was located at Bowling Green, Kentucky, a distance of thirty-five miles from Glasgow where John was living. He had to walk the entire thirty-five miles. Although he fails to remember all the units that he was attached to, he does remember that it was part of General Sherman's army. His regiment started with Sherman on his famous march through Georgia, but for some reason unknown to John, shortly after the campaign was on its way, his regiment was recalled and sent elsewhere.

His regiment was near Vicksburg, Mississippi, at the time Lee surrendered. Since Lee was a proud southerner and did not want the negroes present when he surrendered, Grant probably for this reason as much as any other refused to accept Lee's sword. When Lee surrendered there was much shouting among the troops and John was one of many put to work loading cannons on boats to be shipped up the river. His company returned on the steamboat "Indiana." Upon his return to Glasgow, Ky, he saw for the first time in six years, his mother and other members of his family who had returned free.

Shortly after he returned to Glasgow at the close of the Civil War, he saw several colored people walking down the highway and was attracted to a young colored girl in the group who was wearing a yellow dress. Immediately he said to himself, "If she ain't married there goes my wife." Sometime later they met and were married Christmas day in 1866. To this union twelve children were born four of whom are living today, two in Gary and the others in the south. After his marriage he lived on a farm near Glasgow for several years, later moving to Louisville, where he worked in a lumber yard. He came to Gary in 1924, two years after the death of his wife.

President Grant was the first president for whom he cast his vote and he continued to vote until old age prevented him from walking to the polls. Although Lincoln is one of his favorite heroes, Teddy Roosevelt tops his list of great men and he never failed to vote for him.

In 1926, he was the only one of three surviving members of the Grand Army of the Republic in Gary and mighty proud of the fact that he was the only one in the parade. In 1937 he is the sole survivor. He served in the army as a member of Company K of the 108th, Kentucky Infantry (Negro Volunteers).

When General Morgan, the famous southern raider, crossed the Ohio on his raid across southern Indiana, John was one of the Negro fighters who after heavy fighting, forced Morgan to recross the river and retreat back to the south. He also participated in several skirmishes with the cavalry troops commanded by the famous Nathan Bedford Forrest, and was a member of the Negro garrison at Fort Pillow, on the Mississippi which was assaulted and captured. This resulted in a massacre of the negro soldiers. John was in several other fights, but as he says, "Never once got a skin hurt."

At the present time, Mr. Eubanks is residing with his daughter, Mrs. Bertha Sloss and several grandchildren, in Gary, Indiana. He is badly crippled with rheumatism, has poor eyesight and his

memory is failing. Otherwise his health is good. Most of his teeth are good and they are a source of wonder to his dentist. He is ninety-eight years of age and his wish in life now, is to live to be a hundred. Since his brother and mother both died at ninety-eight and his paternal grandfather at one hundred-ten years of age, he has a good chance to realize this ambition.

Because of his condition most of this interview was had from his grandchildren, who have taken notes in recent years of any incidents that he relates. He is proud that most of his fifty grandchildren are high school graduates and that two are attending the University of Chicago.

In 1935, he enjoyed a motor trip, when his family took him back to Glasgow for a visit. He suffered no ill effects from the trip.

JOHN EUBANKS

Lake County, District #1, Gary, Indiana

Interviewed by Archie Koritz, Field Worker

816 Mound Street, Valparaiso, Indiana

John Eubanks, Gary's only negro Civil War survivor has lived to see the ninety-eighth anniversary of his birth and despite his advanced age, recalls with surprising clarity many interesting and sad events of his boyhood days when a slave on the Everett plantation.

He was born in Glasgow, Barron County, Kentucky, June 6, 1839, one of seven children of a chattel of the Everett family.

The old man retains most of his faculties, but bears the mark of his extreme age in an obvious feebleness and failing sight and memory. He is physically large, says he once was a husky, weighing over two hundred pounds, bears no scars or deformities and despite the hardships and deprivations of his youth, presents a kindly and tolerant attitude.

I remember well, us young'uns on the Everett plantation. I have worked since I can remember, hoeing, picking cotton and other chores around the farm. We didn't have many clothes, never underwear, no shoes, old overalls and a tattered shirt, winter and summer. Come the winter, it'd be so cold my feet were plumb numb most of the time, and many a time—when we got a chance—we drove the hogs from out in the bogs and put our feet in the warmed wet mud. They were cracked and the skin on the bottoms and in the toes were cracked and bleeding most of time, with bloody scabs, but the summer healed them again.

“Do you all remember, Grandpap,” [his daughter prompted] “your master—did he treat you mean?”

“No.” [His tolerant acceptance apparent in his answer] “It was done thataway. Slaves were whipped and punished and the young'uns belonged to the master to work for him or to sell.

When I was about six years old, Master Everett gave me to Tony Eubanks as a wedding present when he married master's daughter Becky. Becky wouldn't let Tony whip her slaves who came from her father's plantation. 'They are my property,' she says, 'and you can't whip them.' Tony whipped his other slaves but not Becky's.

I remember how they tied the slave around a post, with hands tied together around the post, then a husky lashed his back with a snakeskin lash until his back was cut and bloodened, the blood spattered [gesticulating with his unusually large hands] and his back all cut up. Then they'd pour salt water on him. That'd dry and then stick to him. He'd never take it off till it healed. Sometimes I'd see Master Everett hang a slave tip-toe. He'd tie him up so he stood tip-toe and left him thataway.

I was twenty-one when war broke out. Master Eubanks said to me, 'You all don't need to run away if you all want to join up with the army.' He'd say, 'There would be a fine if slaves ran off. You all don't have to run off, go right on and I do not pay that fine.' He said, 'Enlist in the army but don't run off.'

Now, I walk thirty-five miles from Glasgow to Bowling Green to this place—to the enlisting place—from home for miles—to Glasgow—to Bowling Green, thirty-five miles. On the road I meet up with two boys, so we go on. They ran away from Kentucky, and we go together.

Then some Bushwackers come down the road. We were scared and ran to the woods and hid. As we ran through the woods, pretty soon we heard chickens crowing. We filled our pockets with stones. We were going to kill chickens to eat. Pretty soon we heard a man holler, 'You come 'round outta there'—and I see a white man and come out. He said, 'What are you all doing here?' I turn around and say, 'Well boys, come on boys,' and the boys come out. The man said, 'I'm a Union Soldier. What are you all doing here?' I say, 'We're going to enlist in the army.' He says, 'That's fine' and he says, 'come along' He says, 'get right on white man's side'—we go to the station. Then he says, 'You go right down to the station and give your information.'

We keep on walking. Then we come to a white house with stone steps in front so we go in. And we got to the enlisting place and joined up with the army. Then we go training in the camp and we move on. Come to a little town ... a little town. We come to Bowling Green ... then to Louisville. We come to a river ... a river (painfully recalling) the Mississippi.

We were infantry and pretty soon we got into plenty of fights, but not a scratch hit me. We chased the cavalry. We ran them all night and next morning the Captain said, 'They broke down.' When we rest, he says 'See they don't trick you.' I say, 'We got all the army men together. We'll hold them back 'til help comes.'

We didn't have any tents, slept on naked ground in wet and cold and rain. Most of the time we were hungry, But we win the war and Master Eubanks tells us we are no more his property, we're free now.

The old man can talk only in short sentences and his voice dies to a whisper and soon the strain became evident. He was tired. What he does remember is with surprising clearness especially small details, but with a helpless gesture, he dismisses names and locations. He remembers the exact date of his discharge, March 20, 1866, which his daughter verified by producing his discharge papers. He remembers the place, Vicksburg, the Company—K, and the Regiment, 180th. Dropping back once more to his childhood he spoke of an incident which his daughter says makes them all cry when he relates it, although they have heard it many times.

Master Everett whipped me once, and Mother, she cried. Then Master Everett says, 'Why do you all cry?—You cry, I'll whip another of these young'uns. She tried to stop. He whipped another. He says, 'If you all don't stop, you will be whipped too!', and Mother, she's trying to stop but tears roll out, so Master Everett whips her too.

I wanted to visit Mother when I belonged to Master Eubanks, but Becky said, 'You all best not see your Mother, or you'll want to go all the time, then explaining that she wanted me to forget Mother, but I never could.

When I came back from the army, I went home to Mother and said 'Don't you know me?' She says, 'No, I don't know you.' I say, 'You don't know me?' She says, 'No, I don't know you.' I say, 'I'm John.' Then she cried, and said how I'd grown, and she thought I'd been dead this long time. I explained how the many fights I've been in with no scratch and she was happy.

Speaking of Abraham Lincoln's death, he remarked, "Sure now, I remember that well. We were all feeling sad and all the soldiers had wreaths on their guns."

Upon his return from the army he married a young negress he had seen some time previous at which time he had vowed some day to make her his wife. He was married Christmas day, 1866. For a number of years he lived on a farm of his own near Glasgow. Later he moved with his family to Louisville where he worked in a lumber yard. In 1923, two years after the death of his wife, he came to Gary, when he retired. He is now living with his daughter, Mrs. Sloss, 2713 Harrison Boulevard, Gary.