

John Patterson

Helena, Arkansas

Age: 74

Interviewer: Miss Irene Robertson

I was born near Paducah, Kentucky. Mother was never sold. She belonged to Master Arthur Patterson. Mother was what folks called black folks. I've never seen a father to know. I never heard mother say a thing about my father, if I had one. He never was no use to me nor her neither.

Mother brought me here in time of the Civil War. I was four years old. We came here to be kept from the Yankee soldiers. We were sent with some of the Pattersons. At the end of the war Mother cooked for Nick Rightor (?) and his wife here in North Helena. He was a farmer but his son is an ear, eye, nose specialist. I farmed, cleaned houses and yards for these Helena people. I was janitor at the Episcopal church in Helena sixteen years and four months. They paid me forty-five dollars a month.

Yes ma'am, I have heard about the Ku Klux. Heard talk but never seen one. I have never been in jail. I have never been drunk. Folks in Helena will tell you John Patterson can be trusted. I saved up one thousand dollars, just let it slip. The present times are hard. Times are hard. I get ten dollars and the commissary helps. I got one in the family. I think Mother said she was treated very good in slavery. She didn't tell me much about it. I own a home. It came through a will from my aunt. My uncle was a drayman here in Helena and a close liver. I want to hold to it if I can.

If you'd ask me what all ain't took place since I've been here I could come nigh telling you. We had colored officers here. Austin Barrer was sheriff. Half of the officers were colored at one time. John Jones was police. No, they weren't friends of mine.

I saw these levies built. One was here in 1897. It was rebuilt then.

It seems to me the country is going down. When they put in the Stock Law people had to sell so much stock. Milk cows sold for six dollars a head. People that want and need stock have no

place to raise it. People are not as industrious as they were and they accumulate more it seems to me. We used to make our living at home. I think that is the best way. I voted a Republican ticket years ago. I don't believe in women voting. The Lord doesn't believe in that. I belong to the Baptist church.

Young folks don't act on education principles. Folks used to fight with fists. Now one shoots the other down. Times are not improving morally. Folks don't even think it is wrong to take things; that is stealing. They drink up all the money they can get. I don't see no colored folks ever save a dollar. They did a long time ago. That's worse in some ways.

I forgot our plough songs: 'I Wonder Where my Darling is.' 'Nigger Makes the Cotton and the White Man Gets the Money.' Everybody used to sing. We worked from sun to sun; we courted and were happy. People are not happy now. They are craving now. About four o'clock we all start up singing. Sing till dark.