

Joseph Allen
Muncie, Indiana
Born in Cumberland County, Kentucky
Interviewed by Martha Freeman and William W. Tuttle

Joseph Allen was interviewed on separate occasions by two fieldworkers, Martha Freeman and William W. Tuttle, and some of the details of their interviews vary. Joseph was born May 4, 1851, three miles from Birchfield in the southeastern part of Cumberland County, Kentucky, on the plantation of Matt (or Met) and Eliza Allen. His father, Joe Smiley, lived on a different plantation and thus took the name of another slaveholder. Joseph told fieldworker Freeman that he remembered his birthday very well because Eliza Allen whipped him severely when he could not remember his age or his birthday. She cut switches and lashed him under his arms to make him remember. Sometimes she woke him at night and asked him when his birthday was, but he said he never forgot his birthday after that whipping. Joseph told of other times that Eliza Allen whipped him and said that she “sure was bad, but I expect I was bad, too.” Joseph also told Freeman that he did guard duty for the rebels, and when he was about thirteen years old, Union soldiers came by the plantation and wanted him to go with them as a drummer boy. But he did not go.

According to Freeman, after the war, Matt Allen told his slaves with tears in his eyes, “Boys, do you know what is up this morning?” They answered, “No, sir.” “Well, you are as free as I am; Abe Lincoln set you free,” he told them. Joseph said, “Well, if I’m free, I guess I’ll get out.”

According to fieldworker Freeman, Joseph left the plantation around Christmas before he was thirteen years old. Freeman claims that Joseph went to Metcalfe County, Kentucky, and worked at whatever job he could get for about a year. Then for about five years he worked for a man named John Durr.

Joseph went to school for two three-month terms after he was eighteen years old. He said he could read print, though he had difficulty reading longhand.

He told Freeman that he always had plenty to eat when he was a slave and that he never forgot it. After he was set free, though, he “scratched like a hen with one chick” to get enough to eat. Fieldworker Tuttle reports, however, that though Joseph was freed in 1865, he did not leave the

plantation until two years later. The first year Allen offered him \$40 to stay, but never paid him. Toward the end of the second year, Joseph was offered \$150 and a horse; however, he no longer trusted Allen, so according to Tuttle, Joseph left the plantation and made his way to Glasgow, a town about forty-five miles away.

He married and lived there and in the adjoining county for about fifteen years. After his wife died, he married a second time in Carroll County, Kentucky. When Teddy Roosevelt was elected the second time, he came to Muncie.

In Muncie, according to Freeman, Joseph pushed a wheelbarrow and helped keep up the fires at the Muncie Foundry until he was eighty-three years old. He was said to be the oldest man doing manual labor in a factory in the state at that time.

When Joseph was interviewed, his second wife also had died, and he lived with his daughter, Celia Million, and her husband on East Kirk Street. Tuttle reports that Joseph, then in his late eighties, walked without a cane and seemed in excellent health. Freeman says that about ten years before the interview, Joseph was hit by an automobile, and thereafter his memory was no longer as good as it had once been. Here is Joseph's story, according to Tuttle's field report:

I was born on May 4th, exactly at 4 o'clock in the year 1851. This here happened on the plantation of Met Allen, but they called me Joe Allen instead of Met Allen. The plantation grew corn, tobacco, oats, and a little wheat. Maybe rye. My father's name was Joe Smiley; he was born somewhere on a Joe Smiley plantation. My mother, she was brought in from Virginia. Boss didn't put me into the field till I was seven years of age. Before this, I ran errands covering the plantation.

Ole Missus was cross and whipped us children a-plenty. A white man taught us in their slave room. I learned my A, B, Cs quick, and Ole Missus caught me studying and learning. I ain't forgot it. When she whipped, she stuck my head between her knees and clamped me tight. She slipped my garment aside and fanned me plenty with a shingle on my bare self. I was getting too big, and I studied how I'd break her. Next time, I bit her like a dog and held on with my teeth to her leg. Ol' Missus was lame for a spell; I broke her. I says, "I'll eat you up like a dog." After that, she buckled me up on the ground and lashed me.

When I was seven years old, I went to the field. I suckered the tobacco and wormed it. My boss was Bill Stiltz. We were glad when he joined the Union Army. We never saw him again.

The plantation was nigh the Cumberland River, and slaves passed through running away. I ran away two times. Older slaves caused me. Both times I came back. My mammy lay sick in bed. I got forty miles away and walked back. Flat Rock church, a schoolhouse, was near the plantation, but it was for the whites.

Joseph Allen

1714 E. Kirk Street, Muncie, Indiana

Born in Cumberland County, Kentucky

Interviewed by Martha Freeman and William W. Tuttle

Parker, Indiana

John Curd, 1714 E. Kirk Street, Muncie, Grandson of Joseph Allen

Joseph Allen was born May 4, 1851 at three o'clock in the afternoon, in Common County, Kentucky and on the plantation of his master and mistress, Matt and Eliza Allen.

The reason that he can remember his birthday so well is that his mistress gave him severe whipping because he wouldn't remember how old he was or when his birthday was. She cut some switches and lashed him up under his arms good, to make him remember. After that, she would sometimes wake him up at night and ask him the question. He says that he never forgot after that whipping.

His master told the boys with tears in his eyes, "Boys, do you know what is up this morning?" They answered, "No, Sir." "Well you are as free as I am, Abe Lincoln set you free," he told them. Mr. Allen said, "Well if I am free, I guess I'll get out." He left the plantation at Xmas time before he was fifteen years old. He went to Metcalf, Kentucky and worked around at whatever he could get to do for about a year then he went to work for a man by the name of John Duff, for whom he worked about five years.

Mr. Allen said that he always had plenty to eat when he was a slave and that he never forgot it, so when he was turned loose, he said that he "scratched like a hen with one chick", so I still had enough to eat.

He told of the times that the old Miss whipped him, said that she was "sure bad, but I expect I was bad too."

When he was fourteen years old he did Guard Duty for the Rebels and when he was about fifteen years old the Union soldiers came by and wanted him to go with them as a drummer boy. But he didn't go with them.

Mr. Allen's father's name was Joe Smiley; they were owned by different men and lived on different plantations.

Mr. Allen has lived in Muncie for about 34 years. At the present time he lives with his daughter and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Million and his grandson John Curd, at 1714 E. Kirk Street, Muncie.

About ten years ago Mr. Allen was hit by an automobile and since that time his remembrance isn't as good as it once was.

Mr. Allen worked at the Muncie Foundry until he was 83 years old, doing hard manual labor, pushing a wheel-barrow and helping keep up fires. He was said to be the oldest man working in a factory doing manual labor in the state at that time.

Mr. Allen is quite dark, with gray hair and a small gray mustache. He is a little hard to understand in his conversation.

He went to school for two terms of three months each, after he was eighteen years old. He can read any kind of print but is not so good at reading and writing in longhand.

Joseph Allen

1714 E. Kirk Street, Whitely Addition, Muncie, Indiana

Interviewed by William W. Tuttle

Joseph Allen was born in slavery on Met Allen's plantation three miles from Birchfield, in the southeastern part of Cumberland County in Kentucky. He says:

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The plantation was nigh the Cumberland River, and slaves passed through running away. I ran away two times. Older slaves caused me. Both times I came back. My mammy lay sick in bed. I got forty miles away and walked back. Flat Rock church, a schoolhouse, was near the plantation, but it was for the whites.

Joseph Allen whose story appears above was freed in 1865 but did not leave the plantation until two years later. His old master offered him \$40 the first year but never paid him. Toward the end of the second year he was offered \$150 and a horse but did not trust any more promises. He left the old plantation and made his way to Glasgow, a town about 45 miles away. He lived here and in the adjoining country for about 15 years and was married. His wife died and he was married the second time in Carroll County, Kentucky. When Teddy Roosevelt was elected the second time he came on to Muncie. His second wife has also gone and he now resides with his daughter Mrs. Celia Million and husband at 1704 Kirk Street. Joseph Allen will be 87 years of age next May and walks about without a cane. His health seems to be excellent.