

JOSEPH RINGO
812 Diebert Avenue
86 years old

I was born in Mason County, Kentucky, my father and mother were Isaac and Ann Ringo. We belonged to John French, and he didn't have many slaves. He just had Eren Smith, and Mother and six of us children, me, Bill, Harriet, Henry, Eddie, and Milford. Father was given his freedom, and he tried to get us and slip us away, but they caught on to him, and wouldn't let him come near any more.

French had a fair plantation; I reckon there was 'bout 300 acres. He raised tobacco, wheat and corn, and all the vegetables we used, and hogs and some cattle. His house was an eight room, weather boarded log cabin. He had two girls and one boy.

Our cabin didn't set far from the house, and Eren's cabin was right close to ours. That cabin wasn't comfortable at all. I'd be up at four in the mornings, and when the weather was good for the cows to sleep out in the pasture, I'd go drive them in to milk. Many's the time I'd stand in the cow bed to warm my feet. We didn't get but one pair of shoes a year, and they had to last us when the winter set in.

I remember when the Yankee soldiers were camping' around Minerva, Kentucky six of them came up to the big house one day, and put their horses in the stable, fed them, and then they laid around on our grass. Finally, they got up off the ground and went to the house and asked for something to eat. Ole Miss saw that they were getting food, 'cause she was feared they'd do some damage if they didn't' get it.

I remember Master John calling us one morning and he sat on a stile and told us all we were free, and he said, "Now what are you all going to do?" He offered Eren \$130.00 a year and clothes and board. Bill and me he offers \$25.00 a year and board and keep, and Mother she is to get \$1.50 a week and a place for her and the children, and clothes and a home for them.

We all stayed for one year, then mother and all of them went away, except me. I stayed on for eleven years after that. Master John French, he raised my wages every year, and I saved all I earned, or most of it.

Mother and the children settled in Aberdeen, Ohio. I went up to Decater, Ohio, after quitting French's. I lived in Decater for a short time, and finally I married in 1899. My wife, she's been dead for years. I lived here in Springfield 25 years.

I know folks seem to believe lots of strange tales, but me, I never did believe that stuff. Brown County, Ohio, is a place where folks believe all kinds of superstitions.

They used to make all kinds of home remedies for ailments; red pepper tea for colds, and oak bark and hickory bark for stomach ails. Oh chile, I can't remember all such home doctoring.

I never went to church till after freedom, and never saw any baptizing till then. I suppose most folks heard of Lincoln and most all of the great men, 'cause folks do lots of reading. I've heard of lots of them, and I don't even know how to read.

I tell you it's great to see how my folks have progressed in the time since freedom; just starting off with no learning or nothing, and then accomplish things like they did. But they have lots more to do, yet.

Editor's note:

Joseph Ringo is 86, very dark in color, short and heavy set. He is bald, with a smooth plump face, has a hearty laugh and speaks with a slow Kentucky drawl. He walks with the aid of a cane.