

Mary Wooldridge
Clarksville Pike
Christian County

Mary and her twin sister were slaves born in Washington County, Kentucky, near Lexington, belonging to Bob Eaglin. When Mary was about fourteen years old she and her sister were brought to the Lexington slave market and sold and a Mr. Lewis Burns of the same county purchased her. Mary doesn't know what became of her sister. Five or six youars later she was again put on the block and sold to a Negro Trader but Mary does not remember this trader's name. While here she was kept in a stockade and it was several years before she again was bought by a white man. Mr. Thomas McElroy near Lexington bought her and she remained his slave until the slaves were freed. Mary looks her age. She is a tall gaunt black Negro with white hair about one inch long and very kinky, and still she dresses as the older slave woman dressed in the past days. She wears an old bodice with a very full skirt that comes to her ankles and this skirt has very long deep pockets and when I asked her why she had such pockets in her skirt her answer was, "Well you see honey, I just am used to this dress and there is no way for you to have me get shed of it. These pockets are powerful convenient, when I go into someone's house, I turn the pockets wrong side out and that always brings me good luck."

Mary contends that she always wears three petticoats.

Master Thamos lived in a big log house with a big plantation all around it. He had three hundred slaves on the two plantations. Master Thamos sure was good to us niggers. No nigger must whoop his stock with a switch. I've heard him say many times don't you niggers whoop these mules. How would you like to have me whoop you that way? And he sure would whoop them them niggers if he caught them.

Lord have mercy who would have thought I'd be here all this time. I'd thought I'd be dead and gone. All these ole niggers try to be so uppity by just being raised in the house and because they was what they think is 'Quality'. Some of these nigger gals were raised in the house but most of them were made to work everywhere on the plantation. my master has his nigger gals to lay fence worms, make fences, shuck corn, hoe corn and torbacco, wash, iron, and the

missus tried to teach the nigger gals to sew and knit. But shucks, niggers ain't got sense enough to do fancy things. Sometimes I tended to the children.

Yah, yah, I sure do remember Abraham Lincoln. my missus and master did not like Mr. Lincoln but, pshaw, all the niggers did. I remember him, I saw him once, soon after I was freed.

They were hard times during the war, my missus and some of the nigger gals and the children had to stay in the woods several days to keep way from the soldiers. They ate all the chickens and killed the cows and took the horses and we were sure scared out there with those varmints roving around.

Nigger ain't got no business being set free, niggers still ought to be slaves. We niggers did not have to bother about the victuals or anything

When my missis called us niggers together and told us we were free I was as happy as a skinned frog, but you see I didn't have any sense. All niggers are fools. Now she said, she did, 'You can all stay here and work and we will pay you for your work, or you can work for somebody else, but I have raised you honest, and don't you steal, and work for enough money so you won't have to steal it if you get hungry and ain't got no money to buy vittles, just you ask the white folks for it and they will give it to you.' Oh how I miss my missus and master so much. Wish I had them now.

Shucks on these niggers and their ways now. I left the plantation, my old Missus and Master home, and got on a steam boat on the Ohio River and nursed the children for the Captain and his wife on that boat for about two years. A nigger don't have much sense, Miss Fannie, and Mr. Harry Campbell, who paid me for my work on the boat, gave five dollars for the work and I didn't have sense enough to know what to do with this money. So I went to the store and bought myself a cedar tub and filled it with candy. Miss Fannie gave me back the money for the tub and then I ate enough candy to get sick. And then Miss Fannie took the candy back to the store and she got my money back, she did.

But shucks, I did not know what to do with the money. When I left Miss Fannie I rode to Henderson on a log raft and when I got there, there was a big circus and someone was saying, the parade would be here directly. I didn't know what they meant, big ignorant fool that I was and still am, and when I saw the elephants and the other varmints, I ran like a big pop-eyed fool nigger because I never saw such things. That day on the road in town I met my ole Missus

McElroy and she had me to help her with the children and took me to the circus and when I got in the tent and saw all the cages and things I was sure scared of everything, till I saw the baboons, then I felt alright and at home because I just knew they were my first cousins. I stayed in Henderson for sometime working for first one and the other, and then Mr. Henry Shackelford hired me and brought me to Christian County. Not long before I was married to Albert Wooldridge - we sure had a big wedding. Zack Major, a nigger preacher of the Baptist faith did the ceremony right here in Hopkinsville.

Yes, sure I have been a midwife or granny. All these high falutin things they are doing now in childbirth is tommy-rot - they ought to have just grannies now. I delivered more babies than most doctors. Sometimes the white folks had doctors but I don't take no stock in these doctors. The first thing you do when a new baby is born is to let it lay twenty minutes then cut the cord and grease a scorched rag with lard, just hog lard, and then put the belly band on, then grease the baby all over. Never wash the baby till it's over a week old. When the babies had colic, I'd take a dirt dobber nest and make a tea, then give it to the baby. Sometimes If I couldn't find a dirt dobber nest, I would get a spider web and make a tea then give this, or else just shake the baby by the heels. If folks would tend to babies like they used to, why, these people now wouldn't have heart trouble.

Sure I saw a ghost once, I saw Miss Annie Wooldridge after she died up here on Main St. I was just sitting on the back porch steps just looking while the white folks were eating supper. Miss Annie always got the eggs, and I saw her that day. She just came through the hen house door and it was locked and then through the pantry door and it was locked and I just called her daughter and I know I saw her, sure, I did, it was Miss Annie.

Of course there are haunted houses. The old Sharp house was that way and all the Sharps were dead, but this house was empty. You never did see anything, but I sure had heard the doors slam and the silver rattle, and at night in my cabin near to it I'd see lights bob up and down. Anybody in this town can tell you that's so, for they tore this house down to run the haunts away.

People don't bother about the moon much now, but if they would listen to the old timers they would always have good crops. Now if you plant potatoes by the dark of the moon you will always have good crops and if you plant them on the light of the moon then you have all vine. Corn planted on the light the moon, then you have a good crop. I know because I can remember

before the niggers were freed you could just plant by the moon and plant anything in God's ground and by the moon and the crops would grow. Now they just butther up God's ground and put ole stinky messy fertilizer on it and the crops just burn up. Nobody ought to mess with God's ground.

I'm a Republican - who ever heared of a Democrat nigger? Nigger never did own anything so they cant be Democrats, and if they vote a Democrat ticket they are just voting a lie. Because no nigger never did own slaves, only the old nigger slavetraders and they weren't but varmints anyway. You just have to have owned slaves to vote a Democrat ticket, and then no nigger ever did own slaves or had anything.

(Mary lives in Clarksville, Pike R.R. #1, Hopkinsville, Kentucky)