

MRS. PRESTON

North Elm Street, Madison, Indiana.

Interviewed by G. Monroe

Dist. 4, Jefferson County

Mrs. Preston is an old lady, 83 years old, very charming and hospitable. She lives on North Elm Street, Madison, Indiana. Her first recollections of slavery were of sleeping on the foot of her mistress' bed, where she could get up during the night to "feed" the fire with chips she had gathered before dark, or to get a drink or anything else her mistress might want in the night.

Her 'Master Brown', resided in Frankfort, having taken his best horses and hogs, and leaving his family in the care of an overseer on a farm. He was afraid the Union soldiers would kill him, but thought his wife would be safe. This opinion proved to be true. The overseer called the slaves to work at four o'clock, and they worked until six in the evening.

When Mrs. Preston was a little older, part of her work was to drive about a dozen cows to and from the stable. Many a time she warmed her bare feet in the cattle bedding. She said they did not always go barefooted but their shoes were old or their feet wrapped in rags.

Her next promotion was to work in the fields hauling shocks of corn on a balky mule which was subject to bucking and throwing its rider over its head. She was aided by a little boy on another mule. There were men to tie the shocks and place them on the mule.

She remembered seeing Union and Confederate soldiers shooting across a river near her home. Her uncle fought two years, and returned safely at the end of the war. She did not feel that her master and mistress had mistreated their slaves.

At the close of the war, her father was given a house, land, team and enough to start farming for himself. Several years later the Ku Klux Klan gave them a ten days notice to leave, one of the masked band interceded for them by pointing out that they were quiet and peaceable, and a man with a crop and ten children couldn't possibly leave on so short a notice so the time was extended another ten days, when they took what the Klan paid them and came north. They remained in the north until they had to buy their groceries "a little piece of this and a little piece of that, like they do now", when her father returned to Kentucky. Mrs. Preston remained in Indiana. Her father was burned out, the family escaping to the woods in their night clothes, later

befriended by a white neighbor. Now they appealed to their former owner who built them a new house, provided necessities and guards for a few weeks until they were safe from the Ku Klux Klan.

Mrs. Preston said she was the mother of ten children, but now lives alone since the death of her husband three years ago. Her white neighbors say her house is so clean, one could almost eat off the floor.