

Rev. John R. Cox
BOYD CO.
Interviewed by Carl F. Hall

[Editor's note: please take all editorializing in this piece with a grain of salt, not to be construed as historical fact. Many of the things he states are easily proven wrong just from the other oral histories in this collection--such as slaves not being allowed to marry other slaves, which clearly happened regularly, though it is also true that some enslavers did actively direct certain female slaves to mate with certain male slaves. Other assertions are just his opinion. Also, his number for the costs of slaves in Kentucky are inaccurate. At the height of the slave trade in Kentucky in 1860, a young adult male might have commanded as much as \$1500-2000. The only reports of slaves selling in the \$5,000 range were for so-called "Fancy Girl" that were sold as concubines. A two-year-old child would have fetched no more than \$500 in Kentucky. This piece is only useful where it presents data about the life of Rev. Cox.]

It is probable that slave labor was more expensive to the white masters than free labor would have been. Besides having cost quite a sum a two-year-old negro child brought about \$1,500 in the slave market, an adult negro, sound and strong cost from \$5,000 up to as high as \$25,000, or more. The master had to furnish the servant with his living. The free employee is paid only while working; when sick, disabled, or when too old to work, his employer is no longer responsible.

A slave owner, in West Virginia, bought a thirteen-year-old black girl at an auction. When this girl was taken to his home she escaped, and after searching everywhere, without finding her, he decided that she had been helped to escape and gave her up as lost. About two years after that a neighbor, on a close farm, was in the woods feeding his cattle, he saw what he first thought was a bear, running into the thicket from among his cows. Getting help, he rounded up the cattle and searching the thick woodland, finally found that what he had supposed was a wild animal, was the long lost fugitive black girl. She had lived all this time in caves, feeding on nuts, berries, wild apples, and milk from cows, that she could catch and milk. Returned to her master she was sold to a Mr. Morgan Whittaker who lived near where Prestonsburg, Kentucky now is.

Dr. David Cox, a physician from Scott County, Virginia, who treated Mr. Whitaker for cancer, saw this slave girl, who had become a strong healthy young woman, and Mr. Whitaker unable to otherwise pay his doctor bill, let Dr. Davis have her for the debt.

At this time the slave girl was about twenty-one years of age, and Dr. Davis took her home to Scott County, Virginia where he married her to his only other slave, George Cox, by the ceremony of laying a broom on the floor and having the two young negroes step over the broomstick.

Among the children of George Cox and his wife was Rev. John R. Cox, Col. who now lives in Catlettsburg, Kentucky, and is probably the only living ex-slave in this county.

After the Emancipation Proclamation, by President Lincoln, in 1865, John managed to get four years of schooling where he learned to read and write and become very proficient in arithmetic.

He says that had he had the opportunity to study that we have today he could have been the smartest man in the United States. He also says, that before freedom, the negroes in his neighborhood were allowed no books, if found looking at a book a slave was whipped unmercifully.

John's master, in allowing his slaves to marry, was much more liberal than most other slave owners, who allowed their slaves no such liberty.

As a rule negro men were not allowed to marry at all, any attempt to mate with the negro women brought swift, sure horrible punishment and the species were propagated by selected male negroes, who were kept for that purpose, the owners of this privileged negro, charged a fee of one out of every four of his offspring for his services.

The employing class of Kentuckians, many of them descendants of slave owners, are prone to be reactionary in their attitude towards those who toil, this is reflected in low wages and inferior working conditions, a condition which affects both white and black labor alike, in many sections of the state.

(Bibliography: Rev. John R. Cox (colored) Catlettsburg, Kentucky. Born 1852 (does not know day and month), Minister A.M.E. Church. First truant officer Catlettsburg, Kentucky. Interviewed Dec. 23, 1936.)