

ROBERT GLENN

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Interviewed by T. Pat Matthews

Editor: George L. Andrews

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I was a slave before and during the Civil War. I am 87 years old. I was born Sept. 16, 1850. I was born in Orange County, North Carolina near Hillsboro. At that time Durham was just a platform at the station and no house there whatsoever. The platform was lighted with a contraption shaped like a basket and burning coal that gave off a blaze. There were holes in this metal basket for the cinders to fall through.

I belonged to a man named Bob Hall, he was a widower. He had three sons, Thomas, Nelson, and Lambert. He died when I was eight years old and I was put on the block and sold in Nelson Hall's yard by the son of Bob Hall. I saw my brother and sister sold on this same plantation. My mother belonged to the Halls, and father belonged to the Glens. They sold me away from my father and mother and I was carried to the state of Kentucky. I was bought by a Negro speculator by the name of Henry Long who lived not far from Hurdles Mill in Person County. I was not allowed to tell my mother and father goodbye. I was bought and sold three times in one day.

My father's time was hired out, and as he knew a trade, he had by working overtime saved up a considerable amount of money. After the speculator, Henry Long, bought me, Mother went to Father and pleaded with him to buy me from him and let the white folks hire me out. No slave could own a slave. Father got the consent and help of his owners to buy me and they asked Long to put me on the block again. Long did so and named his price but when he learned who had bid me off he backed down. Later in the day he put me on the block and named another price much higher than the price formerly set. He was asked by the white folks to name his price for his bargain and he did so. I was again put on the auction block and Father bought me in, putting up the cash. Long then flew into a rage and cursed my father saying, 'You damn black son of a bitch, you think you are white do you? Now just to show you are black, I will not let you have your son at any price.' Father knew it was all off, Mother was frantic but there was nothing they could do about it. They had to stand and see the speculator put me on his horse behind him and ride away without allowing either of them to tell me goodbye. I figure I was sold three

times in one day, as the price asked was offered in each instance. Mother was told under threat of a whipping not to make any outcry when I was carried away.

He took me to his home, but on the way he stopped for refreshments, at a plantation, and while he was eating and drinking, he put me into a room where two white women were spinning flax. I was given a seat across the room from where they were working. After I had sat there a while wondering where I was going and thinking about Mother and home, I went to one of the women and asked, 'Missus when will I see my mother again?' She replied, 'I don't know, child, go and sit down'. I went back to my seat and as I did so both the women stopped spinning for a moment, looked at each other, and one of them remarked, "Almighty God, this slavery business is a horrible thing. Chances are this boy will never see his mother again." This remark nearly killed me, as I began to fully realize my situation. Long, the Negro trader, soon came back, put me on his horse and finished the trip to his home. He kept me at his home awhile and then traded me to a man named William Moore who lived in Person County. Moore at this time was planning to move to Kentucky, which he soon did, taking me with him.

My mother found out by the "Grapevine telegraph" that I was going to be carried to Kentucky. She got permission and came to see me before they carried me off. When she started home I was allowed to go part of the way with her but they sent two Negro girls with us to ensure my return. We were allowed to talk privately, but while we were doing so, the two girls stood a short distance away and watched as the master told them when they left that if I escaped they would be whipped every day until I was caught. When the time of parting came and I had to turn back, I burst out crying loud. I was so weak from sorrow I could not walk, and the two girls who were with me took me by each arm and led me along half carrying me.

This man Moore carried me and several other slaves to Kentucky. We traveled by train by way of Nashville, Tenn. My thoughts are not familiar with the happenings of this trip but I remember that we walked a long distance at one place on the trip from one depot to another. We finally reached Kentucky and Moore stopped at his brother's plantation until he could buy one, then we moved on it.

My master was named William Moore and my missus was named Martha Whitfield Moore. It was a big plantation and he hired a lot of help and had white tenants besides the land he worked with slaves. There were only six slaves used as regular field hands during his first year

in Kentucky. The food was generally common. Hog meat and cornbread most all the time. Slaves got biscuits only on Sunday morning. Our clothes were poor and I worked barefooted most of the time, winter and summer. No books, papers or anything concerning education was allowed the slaves by his rules and the customs of these times.

Master Moore had four children, among whom was one boy about my age. The girls were named Atona, Beulah, and Minnie, and the boy was named Crosby. He was mighty brilliant. We played together. He was the only white boy there, and he took a great liking to me, and we loved each devotedly. Once in an undertone he asked me how I would like to have an education. I was overjoyed at the suggestion and he at once began to teach me secretly. I studied hard and he soon had me so I could read and write well. I continued studying and he continued teaching me. He furnished me books and slipped all the papers he could get to me and I was the best educated Negro in the community without anyone except the slaves knowing what was going on.

All the slaves on Master's plantation lived the first year we spent in Kentucky in a one room house with one fireplace. There were a dozen or more who all lived in this one room house. Master built himself a large house having seven rooms. He worked his slaves himself and never had any overseers. We worked from sun to sun in the fields and then worked at the house after getting in from the fields as long as we could see.

I have never seen a pateroller but when I left the plantation in slavery time I got a pass. I have never seen a jail for slaves but I have seen slaves whipped and I was whipped myself. I was whipped particularly about a saddle I left out in the night after using it during the day. My flesh was cut up so bad that the scars are on me to this day.

We were not allowed to have prayer meetings, but we went to the white folks church to services sometimes. There were no looms, mills, or shops on the plantation at Master Moore's.

I kept the name of Glenn through all the years as Master Moore did not change his slaves names to his family name. My mother was named Martha Glenn and Father was named Bob Glenn.

I was in the field when I first heard of the Civil War. The woman who looked after Henry Hall and myself (both slaves) told me she heard master say old Abraham Lincoln was trying to free the niggers. Master finally pulled me up and went and joined the Confederate Army. Kentucky split and part joined the North and part the South. The war news kept slipping through of success for first one side then the other. Sometimes Master would come home, spend a few days and then go again to the war. It seemed he influenced a lot of men to join the southern army, among them was a man named Enoch Moorehead. Moorehead was killed a few days after he joined the southern army. Master Moore fell out with a lot of his associates in the army and some of them who were from the same community became his bitter enemies. Tom Foushee was one of them. Master became so alarmed over the threats on his life made by Foushee and others that he was afraid to stay in his own home at night, and he built a little camp one and one half miles from his home and he and missus spent their nights there on his visits home. Foushee finally came to the great house one night heavily armed, came right on into the house and inquired for Master. We told him Master was away. Foushee lay down on the floor and waited a long time for him. Master was at the little camp but we would not tell where he was. Foushee left after spending most of the night at master's. As he went out into the yard, when leaving, master's bull dog growled at him and he shot him dead.

Master went to Henderson, Kentucky, the County seat of Henderson County, and surrendered to the Federal Army and took the Oath of Allegiance. Up to that time I had seen a few Yankees. They stopped now and then at master's and got their breakfast. They always asked about buttermilk, they seemed to be very fond of it. They were also fond of ham, but we had the ham meat buried in the ground, this was about the close of the war. A big army of Yankees came through a few months later and soon we heard of the surrender. A few days after this master told me to catch two horses that we had to go to Dickenson which was the County seat of Webster County. On the way to Dickenson he said to me, 'Bob, did you know you are free and Lincoln has freed you? You are as free as I am.' We went to the Freedmen's Bureau and went into the office. A Yankee officer looked me over and asked Master my name, and informed me I was free, and asked me whether or not I wanted to keep living with Moore. I did not know what to do, so I told him yes. A fixed price of seventy-five dollars and board was then set as the salary I should receive per year for my work. The Yankees told me to let him know if I was not paid as agreed.

I went back home and stayed a year. During the year I hunted a lot at night and thoroughly enjoyed being free. I took my freedom by degrees and remained obedient and respectful, but still wondering and thinking of what the future held for me. After I retired at night I made plan after plan and built aircastles as to what I would do.

At this time I formed a great attachment for the white man, Mr. Atlas Chandler, with whom I hunted. He bought my part of the game we caught and favored me in other ways. Mr. Chandler had a friend, Mr. Dewitt Yarborough, who was an adventurer, and trader, and half brother to my ex-master, Mr. Moore, with whom I was then staying. He is responsible for me taking myself into my own hands and getting out of feeling I was still under obligations to ask my master or missus when I desired to leave the premises. Mr. Yarborough's son was off at school at a place called Kiloh, Kentucky, and he wanted to carry a horse to him and also take along some other animals for trading purposes. He offered me a new pair of pants to make the trip for him and I accepted the job. I delivered the horse to his son and started for home. On the way back I ran into Uncle Squire Yarborough who once belonged to Dewitt Yarborough. He persuaded me to go home with him and go with him to a wedding in Union County, Kentucky. The wedding was twenty miles away and we walked the entire distance. It was a double wedding, two couples were married. Georgianna Hawkins was married to George Ross and Steve Carter married a woman whose name I do not remember. This was in the winter during the Christmas Holidays and I stayed in the community until about the first of January, then I went back home.

I had been thinking for several days before I went back home as to just what I must tell Mr. Moore and as to how he felt about the matter, and what I would get when I got home. In my dilemma I almost forgot I was free. I got home at night and my mind and heart was full but I was surprised at the way he treated me. He acted kind and asked me if I was going to stay with him next year. I was pleased. I told him, 'Yes sir!', and then I lay down and went to sleep. He had a boss man on his plantation then and next morning he called me, but I just couldn't wake. I seemed to be in a trance or something, I had recently lost so much sleep. He called me the second time and still I did not get up. Then he came in and spanked my head. I jumped up and went to work feeding the stock and splitting wood for the day's cooking and fires. I then went in and ate my breakfast. Mr. Moore told me to hitch a team of horses to a wagon and go to a neighbors five miles away for a load of hogs. I refused to do so. They called me into the house and asked me what I was going to do about it. I said I do not know. As I said that I stepped out

of the door and left. I went straight to the county seat and hired to Dr. George Rasby in Webster County for one hundred dollars per year. I stayed there one year.

I got uneasy in Kentucky. The whites treated the blacks awful bad so I decided to go to Illinois as I thought a Negro might have a better chance there, it being a northern state. I was kindly treated and soon began to save money, but all through the years there was a thought that haunted me in my dreams and in my waking hours, and this thought was of my mother, whom I had not seen or heard of in many years. Finally one cold morning in early December I made a vow that I was going to North Carolina and see my mother if she was still living. I had plenty of money for the trip. I wrote the postmaster in Roxboro, North Carolina, asking him to inform my mother I was still living, and telling him the circumstances, mailing a letter at the same time telling her I was still alive but saying nothing of my intended visit to her.

I left Illinois bound for North Carolina on December 15th and in a few days I was at my mother's home. I tried to fool them. There were two men with me and they called me by a fictitious name, but when I shook my mother's hand I held it a little too long and she suspicioned something, still she held herself until she was more sure.

When she got a chance she came to me and said 'Ain't you my child? Tell me, ain't you my child whom I left on the road near Mr. Moore's before the war?' I broke down and began to cry. Mother and Father did not know me, but mother suspicioned I was her child. Father had a few days previously remarked that he did not want to die without seeing his son once more. I could not find language to express my feeling. I did not know before I came home whether my parents were dead or alive. This Christmas I spent in the county and state of my birth and childhood; with Mother, Father and freedom was the happiest period of my entire life, because those who were torn apart in bondage and sorrow several years previous were now united in freedom and happiness.