

SAMUEL SUTTON

Born in Garrett County, Kentucky, in 1854

Interviewed by Miriam Logan

Lebanon, Ohio, Warren County, Dist. 2

July 2, 1937

Yes ma'am, I sure was born into slavery. My mother was a cook -there was none better- and she was sold four times to my knowledge. She was part white, because her father was a white man. She lived to be 79 years and nine months old.

I was born in Garrett County but was raised by Ole Master Ballinger in Knox County, and I don't remember anything about Garrett County. When Lincoln was elected, I was about 8 years old.

Ole Master owned about 400 acres and I don't know how many slaves, maybe 30. He'd get hard up for money and sell one or two; then he'd get a lot of work on hand, and maybe buy one or two for cheap - go along like that you see.

He was a good man, Ole Master Ballinger was - a preacher, and he worked himself too. Ole Miss was pretty cross sometimes. But Ole Master, he wasn't a mean man, and I don't remember he ever whipped us. Yes ma'am, that old house is still standing on the Lexington Lancaster Pike and last I know, Baby Master was still living.

Ole Master took us boys out to learn to work when we were both right little, me and Baby Master. I was to help him and do what he told me to, and the first thing I remember is learning to hoe the clods. Corn and wheat, Ole Master raised, and he set us boys out to learn to work. As soon as he left us, Baby Master would want to eat; he sent me over to the grocery for sardines and oysters. I've never seen anybody like oysters like he does! And does he like them. Ole Master would scold him, saying he was not only lazy, himself, but he was making me lazy, too.

The war? Yes ma'am, I saw soldiers, Union Calvary going by dressed fine with gold braid on blue and big boots. But the Rebels now, I recollect they had no uniforms because they were hard up and they came in just common clothes. Old master was a Rebel and he always helped them. Yes ma'am. A pitched battle started right on our place. It didn't last long, for they were

running on to fight in Perryville, where the one big battle to take place in the state of Kentucky took place.

Most likely story I remember to tell you about was something that made me mad and I always remembered because of that. I had the biggest, finest watermelon, and I was told to sit up on the fence with the watermelon and show them and sell them twenty cents. Along came a line of soldiers. 'Hey there boy, how much for the melon?', one hollered at me.

'Twenty cents sir!' I said, just like I had been told to say, and he took that melon right out of my arms and rode off without paying me. I ran after them trying to get my money but I couldn't keep up with those soldiers on horses, and all of the soldiers just laughed at me. Yes ma'am, they were the finest, biggest melons I ever saw. That was right mean of him, fine looking gentleman he was, at the head of the line.

Ole Master Ballinger, he was a Rebel, and he harbored Rebels. There were two men hanging around there named Buell and Bragg. Buell was a northerner, Bragg, he was a Rebel. Buell gave Bragg a chance to get away when he should have found out what the Rebs were doing and taken him prisoner. I heard tell about that.

There was a lot of spying and riding around there for one thing or another, but I don't know what it was all about. I do know I feel sorry for those Rebel soldiers I saw that were ragged and tired, all worn out. Master felt pretty bad about everything sometimes, but I reckon there were mean Rebels and southerners that had it coming to them. I always heard till they had it coming to them.

In some ways I recollect times were lots harder after the war , and in some ways they were better. But now a colored man ain't so much better off about voting and such some places yet, I hear that.

Yes ma'am, they came and wanted horses once in a while and it was a rearing tearing time trying to catch those horses because they would run into the Woods before he could get a hold of them. Morgan's men came for the horses once, and Ole Master got his horses because he was a Reb. Yes ma'am, but I think those horses got away from the rebels . It seems like I heard they did.

Horses? I wish I had a team right now and I'd make my own good living! No ma'am, I don't want a mule. They are set on having their own way and the contrariest critters! But a mule is a work

animal and eats little. Lots of work in a mule. My boy says 'Quit working and give us young'uns a chance.' Sure enough, there isn't the work there used to be and the young'un need it. I have a pension and a fine garden, ain't it fine now?

Yes ma'am, like I told you, the war was over and the colored folks had a big time, with speaking and everything over at Dick Robinson's camp on the 4th. Never have I seen such rejoicing on the 4th of July since, no ma'am, I ain't.

I've seen two presidents, Grant and Hayes. I voted for Hayes when I was 22 years old. General Grant was running against Greeley when I heard him speak in Louisville. He told what all Lincoln had done for the colored man. Yes ma'am, fine looking man he was, and he wore a fine suit. Yes ma'am. I haven't missed an election since I was 22 and voted for Hayes. I'm not going to miss any, and I vote like the white man read out of the Emancipation Proclamation. I vote for one of Abe Lincoln's men every time , I sure do.

Runaway slaves? No ma'am and never knew of any. Master Ballinger's neighbor, old Master Tye harbored colored folks that came and asked for something to eat in winter and he would get them to stay awhile and do a little work for him. Now, he did always have one or two around there that way, that I recollect, that he didn't own. Maybe they were runaways, maybe they were just tramps and didn't belong to anyone. I never heard of anybody claiming them. They would stay awhile and work then move on. Then more would come, work awhile and then move on. Master Tye, he got his work done that way, cheap.

No ma'am, I don't believe in anything like that much. We used to sprinkle salt in a thin line around Master Ballinger's house, clear around, to ward off quarrelling and arguing and Ole Miss Ballinger getting a cross spell, that I remember. And then, too, I don't believe in paying out money on a Monday. You are liable to be spending and losing all week if you do. Then I don't want to see a new moon, nor an old moon either, through the branches of trees. I know a man who saw the moon through the tree branches, and he was looking through the bars of a jail before a month was out - and for something he never did. Just enough bad luck seeing a moon through the bush.

I've been married twice and had three children. My oldest is Madge Hannah, and she is 60 years old and still teaching at the Indian school where she has been for 22 years now. She was trained at Maria high school, then Knoxville then she got more education in Nashville in some course.

My wife died way back Yonder in 1884. Then when I got married again my wife was 32 and I was 63. No ma'am, no more children. I live here and farm and take care of my sick girl and my boy. He lives across the lane there.

No ma'am. No church, no meeting house for us colored people in Kentucky before the war. There were praying folks, they started meeting at each other's houses when there was something pushing for prayer. No ma'am. No school in those days for us. Ole Master was a preacher and knew the Bible, and would tell out versus for us . That's all I remember. Yes , I am Baptist now And I sure do believe in having church.

I have worked on steamboats, and I have done railroad labor, and I have done a lot of farming, and I like to farm best, like to live in Ohio best. I can vote. If I get into trouble, the law gives us a chance for our property the same as if we were white. And we can vote like whites without any shooting or fighting about it - that's what I like. I've never known white men to be so mean about anything as they are about voting in some places. No ma'am I don't!

I came here in 1912. I was going to see my daughter Madge Hannah in Oklahoma, then this girl came to me paralyzed and I got work here in Lebanon tending cows and such at the Creamery , and I've been here ever since. Yes ma'am, and I don't want to go anywhere else.

No ma'am, no hunting anymore. I used to hunt rabbit until last year. They aren't worth the price of a license anymore. No ma'am, I've never fished in Ohio.

No ma'am, I never was a singer at any time. Not on steamboats nor anywhere. I don't remember any songs except maybe the holler we used to set up when they were late with the dinner when we worked on the steamboat. They would sing-song like this:

'Ole hen, she flew
Over the garden gate,
For' she was that hungry
She just couldn't wait.'

—But then that ain't no real song.

Kentucky River is the place to fish—big catfish. Catfish and greens are good eatin'. I saw a catfish come out of the Kentucky River as long as a man is tall, and those fins slapped my leg when I carried him over my shoulder and his tail dragging on my feet. Sure enough!

No ma'am, I just can't tell you all any crying sad story about beating and slave driving. And I don't know any ghost stories or anything. I'm just dumb that way. I'm sorry about that, but I just am.

Samuel Sutton lives in north lane Lebanon, just back of the French Creamery. He has one acre of land, a little unpainted, poorly furnished and poorly kept. His daughter is a huge fleshy colored woman who wears a turban on her head. She has a fixed smile; says not a word. Samuel talks easily; answers questions directly; is quick in his movements. He is stooped and may be 5'7 or 8 if standing straight. He wears an old fashioned Walrus mustache, and has a grey wooly fringe of hair about his smooth chocolate colored bald head. He is very dark in color, but his son is darker yet. His hearing is good. His sight is very poor. Being so young when the Civil War was over, he remembers little or nothing about what the colored people thought or expected from freedom. He just remembers what a big time there was on that first Free Fourth of July.