

**Sarah Frances Shaw Graves**  
**R.F.D. #4, Skidmore, Missouri**



Still Carries Scars From Lashes

Sweet are the uses of Adversity,  
Which like a toad, ugly and venomous,  
Wears yet a Jewel in its head.

—Shakespeare.

My name is Sarah Frances Shaw Graves, or Aunt Sally as everybody calls me. Yes ma'am that's a lot of name and I came by it like this. My husband was owned by a man named Graves, and I was owned by a man named Shaw, so when we were freed we took the surnames of our masters.

I was born March 23, 1850 in Kentucky, somewhere near Louisville. I am going on 88 years right now. (1937). I was brought to Missouri when I was six months old, along with my mama, who was a slave owned by a man named Shaw, who had allotted her to a man named Jimmie Graves, who came to Missouri to live with his daughter Emily Graves Crowdes. I always lived with Emily Crowdes.

The matter of allotment was confusing to the interviewer and Aunt Sally endeavored to explain.

Yes ma'am. Allotted? Yes ma'am. I'm going to explain that, she replied. You see there were slave traders in those days, just like you got horse and mule and auto traders now. They bought and sold slaves and hired them out. Yes ma'am, rented them out. Allotted means something like hired out. But the slave never got any wages. That all went to the master. The man they were allotted to paid the master.

I never was sold. My mama was sold only once, but she was hired out many times. Yes ma'am when a slave was allotted, somebody made a down payment and gave a mortgage for the rest. A chattel mortgage. A down payment!! Times don't change, just the merchandise.

Allotments made a lot of grief for the slaves, Aunt Sally asserted.

We left my papa in Kentucky, because he was allotted to another man. My papa never knew where my mama went, and my mama never knew where papa went.

Aunt Sally paused a moment, then went on bitterly. They never wanted Mama to know, because they knew she would never marry so long as she knew where he was. Our master wanted her to marry again and raise more children to be slaves. They never wanted Mama to know where Papa was, and she never did, sighed Aunt Sally. Only those who have lost their mate, and never know the end of the tale, can understand such heart anguish.

Mama said she would never marry again to have children, continued Aunt Sally, so she married my step-father, Trattle Barber, because he was sick and could never be a father. He was so sick he couldn't work, so me and mama had to work hard.

We lived in a kitchen, a room in a log house joined on to the master's house. My mama worked in the field, even when I was a little baby. She would lay me down on a pallet near the fence while she plowed the corn or worked in the field. Stepfather and mama often tended their own tobacco and grain in the moonlight. This they could sell and have the money. We could go to church which was held in the school house. Sometimes they let us play with the other children after the noon dishes were washed and there wasn't anything else to do. There was most always something to do. Master never allowed nobody to be idle.

Mama worked in the house and the fields too. At night after she came home from the field, she had to grate corn for the family next day. We didn't have many grist mills those days, and we would punch holes in a piece of tin, and rub the ear of corn across it and make meal for our use.

Nowadays, when you all want a nice wool dress, all you've got to do is go to the store and get it, Aunt Sally commented, when asked to tell about their clothing.

When I was growing up and wanted a nice wool dress, we would shear the sheep, wash the wool, card it, spin it and weave it. If we wanted it striped, we used two threads. We would color one by using herbs or barks. Sometimes we had it carded at a mill, and sometimes we carded it ourselves. But when we did it, the threads were short, which caused us to have to tie the thread

often, making too many knots in the dress. I have gathered the wool off the fences where it had been caught off the sheep, and washed it, and used it to make mittens.

Yes ma'am. I worked in the fields, and I worked hard too. Planting and harvesting in those days was really work. They used oxen to break up the ground for corn, and for plowing it too. They hoed the corn with a hoe, and cut the stalks with a hoe and shocked them. They cut the grain with the cradle and bound it with their hands, and shocked it. They threshed the grain with a hickory stick. Beating it out. I carried water for the field hands. I've carried three big buckets of water from one field to another, from one place to another; one in each hand and one balanced on my head.

Yes ma'am. Some masters were good and some were bad. My mama's master whipped his slaves for pastime. My master was not so bad as some were to their slaves. I've had many a whipping, some I deserved, and some I got for being blamed for doing things the master's children did. My master whipped his slaves with a cat-o'-nine-tails. He'd say to me, 'You ain't had a currying down for some time. Come here!!!' Then he whipped me with the cat. The cat was made of nine strips of leather fastened onto the end of a whip. Lots of times when he hit me, the cat left nine stripes of blood on my back. Yes ma'am.

Aunt Sally brooded over the whipping memories, then under the influence of a brighter thought continued:

I belong to the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and I ain't never cussed but once in my life, and that was one time I nearly got two whippings for something I didn't do. Some of the master's kin folks had a wedding, and we walked to the church, and somebody kicked dust on the bride's clothes, and I got blamed but I never kicked it. The master's daughter Puss, she kicked it. Ole mistress she whipped me. Yes ma'am, she whipped me. It was the worst whipping I ever got. The worst whipping in my whole life, and I still got the marks on my body. Yes ma'am. I have them yet. When the master came home, he was going to whip me again, and I got mad and told him it was a lie, and if Puss said I kicked dust on the white folks she was a DAMNED LYIN' DEVIL. He took the switch and gave Puss a whipping for telling a lie. Yes ma'am. That's the only time I ever cussed in my life. Yes ma'am, and that's about all I know about slavery and folks' ways hereabouts.

I can tell you about after we were freed. When we were freed all the money my mama had was 50 cents. I never went to school till after I was freed. I went two winters and a little more to school near Burlington Junction. I never went a full term because I had to work.

I've known my husband all my life. He was brought here by that man Jimmie Graves, that mama was allotted to. My husband took that name. His full name was Joseph H. Graves. We had one child, a boy. His name is Arza Alexander Graves. He lives here with me. It's our farm. I have lived on this place ever since I was married. That was in the same year that Burlington Junction was started.

We first bought 40 acres for \$10.00, then two years later we bought the back 80 acres for \$15.00. Things have changed. We are working for ourselves now, and what we get is ours, and no more whippings. I worked in the fields and helped pay for this land.

I belong to the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Maryville.

The day her family was freed, they had 50 cents. Today these children of a transplanted race, once enslaved, have through years of steadfast courage overcome the handicap of race and poverty. They threshed grain with a hickory stick, and made their corn meal by grating the ears across a strip of tin with holes punched in it. With all her handicaps, this Negro woman has lived to an honorable old age, is self-supporting and has the respect of her neighbors. All this she has accomplished despite the fact she was once a chattel and was frequently carried down with a cat-o'-nine-tails.



**Sarah Frances Shaw Graves**  
**R.F.D. #4, Skidmore, Missouri**

Sarah Frances Shaw Graves (Aunt Sally) whose address is R.F.D. #4 Skidmore, Missouri is eighty-seven years of age. She lives with her bachelor son on their one-hundred-twenty acre farm. The home though small is moderately furnished and she enjoys the comforts of the rural telephone and radio and daily newspapers in her home. The house is surrounded by a nice yard containing many flowers and is enclosed with an iron fence, a cement walk leading from the front gate to the house. Aunt Sally had been informed that the reporter was intending to call on her the following day and she was eagerly awaiting the arrival of the visitor. The reporter was greatly impressed by the arrangement and cleanliness of Aunt Sally's modest home. Aunt Sally was immaculately dressed in a stiffly starched print dress and a fresh white apron. Her white hair was combed straight back off her forehead and held back with side combs. She was in a very excited talkative mood, and talked freely, and laughed heartily when the reporter explained the purpose of the interview and asked the privilege of taking her picture. Actual interview follows:

My name is Sarah Frances Shaw Graves or Aunt Sally, as everybody calls me. I am eighty-seven (87) years old and I was born March 23, 1850 in Kentucky somewhere near Louisville. I was brought to Missouri when I was six months old with my mama who was a slave owned by a man named Shaw who had allotted her to a man named Jimmie Graves who came to Missouri to live with his daughter, Emily Graves Crowdes. I always lived with Emily Crowdes.

We left my Papa in Kentucky as he belonged to another man. My Papa never knew where my mama and me went and my Mama and me never knew where my Papa went. They never wanted Mama to know where my Papa was because they knew Mama would never marry as long as she knew where he was. Our master wanted Mama to marry again and raise more children for slaves but Mama said she would never marry a man and have children, so she married my step-father, Trattle Barber, because she knew he had a disease and could not be a father. He was sick and not able to work so me and Mama had to work hard. We lived in a kitchen, a room in a log house joined on to the masters house. All I knew about that part was what they told me.

The Crowdes family we came here with settled near Possum Walk which is near the place that is now called Burlington Jct., Missouri. We were freed in 1863 but we heard so much about slavery coming back that we stayed with the Crowdes two years longer or until 1865 when we were sure that we were freed.

When we were freed we took the same name as our masters. We then lived about two miles north of them and worked for some of the neighbors who were poor and had children, and we lived on Lowell Livengood's grandfather's place for about two years. Mama had fifty (50¢) cents coming to her and that is all the money we had.

My Mama did the washing for that money for a lady, and the mistress told her that when the lady called for her washing that the fifty cents belonged to us. This was after we were freed.

I went to school near Burlington Jct., Missouri and my teacher's name was Rachel Libbey. I went to school two winters a little while, I never went a full term any time. I had to work. When the busiest time was over I would go to school when I didn't work.

I've known my husband all my life. He was owned by this man, Jimmie Graves, who Mama was allotted to, but was brought here by the man he was allotted to, named Nicholas. My husband's full name was Joe H. Graves. We had one child, a boy, whose name is Arza Alexander Graves. I have lived on this place I am on now ever since I was married, that was the same year Burlington Jct., Missouri, started.

We first bought forty (40) acres and paid twenty (\$20.00) dollars for that, then about two years later we bought the back eighty (80) acres and I think we paid fifteen (\$15.00) dollars for that. I worked in the fields and helped pay for this land.

I belong to the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Maryville, Missouri.

When I was growing up and wanted a nice wool dress we would shear the sheep, wash the wool, card it, spin it, and weave it. If we wanted it striped we used two threads, we would color one by using herbs and barks. We sometimes had it carded at a mill and sometimes we carded

it ourselves but when we did it the threads were short which caused us to have to tie the thread often making more knots in the dress.

In planting corn in those days they broke up the ground, one layed off the rows, one would go along and drop the corn or grain and if they wanted to plant beans in with the corn one would go along and drop the seed. They covered it over with a hoe and they cut the stalks with the hoe and stacked up the stalks. The way they raised the corn, after it came up they took one horse and went on each side of a row and in the middle of every row to plow the corn. It took three rounds on every row to get it plowed. They used oxen sometimes to plow and nearly always used oxen to plow up the ground. They cut the grain with the cradle and bound it with their hands and shocked it up. They thrashed the grain with a hickory stick by beating it out. Many times I have carried three big buckets of water from one place to another, one in each hand and one balanced on my head.

My master was not as bad as some masters were to their slaves. One time when I had over worked my master said, 'You have not had a currying down for a long time, come over here', and he whipped me with a cat-o'-nine-tails. This cat was made of nine small pieces of leather fastened on to the end of the whip. Lots of times when they hit with the cat it left nine stripes of blood.

Mama's master whipped his slaves for a pastime. I have got many whippings for being blamed for doing things the master's children did and I was blamed for it. One time when a couple was married, me and other members of the family were walking down the road and I was very careful not to kick up any dirt and to be very nice to the couple, but when we got home one of the master's daughters told that I was mean and that I kicked up dirt so that dust would get on the lady's dress. I got the worst whipping I ever got in my life by the mistress, and I still have the marks on my body. When the master came I was carrying the vittles from the kitchen to the dining room, which was the living and bedroom, and when I went in I took the bread and when I came back he was standing in the door and he told me what they told him about me. I said I did not do it. and if Puss said I did she is a 'Damned lying devil' and he dropped the switch and went and talked to his daughter and gave her a whipping for telling the untruth. That was the only time I ever swore. In a few days the bride came over visiting and told them they had the sweetest little colored girl she was so lovely and kind.

We were never allowed to be idle, always doing something and my work often was choring around to say I was doing something. I have gathered the wool off the fences where it had been caught off the sheep and washed it and used it to make mittens.

I never was sold and my mama was sold only once but she was hired out many times. We slept on what they called a bed, a tick filled with straw on the bed. My mama's master had a child near my age and my mama always left me at the house with the mistress and I nursed the mistress, Mrs. Crowdes, as well as her own child, until one day the curtain, which was used as a partition around a bed on which I lay near, caught on fire. And then my mama always took me to the field with her and would lay me on a pallet near the fence while she plowed the corn or worked in the field.

Stepfather and Mama often tended to their own tobacco and grain in the moonlight which they could sell and have the money. One thing we could do was go to church which was held in the school house. Sometimes they would let me go out and play with the other children after the noon dishes were washed and there wasn't anything else to do then. I often sewed strips of cloth together to make carpet rags, there was always something to do.

Mama worked in the field and in the house too. They nearly always kept a girl in the house. We did not have many mills and sometimes we could not get to the mill and we would punch holes in a piece of tin and rub the ear of corn across it to grate it for our use. Many times Mama would work in the field all day and in the evening she would grate enough corn for the family use the next day.

The masters had stores and you had to go to that store and get your needs, and when the month was up you had nothing, as it took all you earned to pay your bill.