

Walter Rimm

913 E. Second St., Fort Worth, TX

Walter Rimm, 80, was born a slave to Captain Hatch in San Patricio County, Texas. After Walter was freed, he helped his father farm for several years, then worked as a cook for fifteen years on the King Ranch. He moved to Fort Worth and cooked for Mrs. Arthur Goetz for twenty-five years. He lives at 913 E. Second St., Fort Worth.



You want to know about slavery? Well, a great deal happened besides that, but I was born on Captain Hatch's plantation, across the bay from Corpus Christie. He had somewhere near fifty slaves, and Mammy told me he bought her in Tennessee, and Pappy in South Carolina.

Master Hatch buys and sells niggers some in those days, but he ain't a nigger trader. Those sales are one thing that made an impression on me. I heard old folks whisper about going to a sale, and about noon there was a crowd of white folks in the front yard and a nigger trader with the slaves. They set up a platform in the middle of the yard and one white man gets on that and another white man comes up and has a white woman with him. She appears to be about fifteen years old and has long, black hair down her back. They put her on the platform and then I heard a scream and a woman who looked like the gal cried out, 'I'll cut my throat if my daughter is sold.' The white man goes and talks to her, and finally allows her to take the young gal away with her. That sure stirs up some emotion amongst the white folks, but they say that gal has just a little nigger blood and can be sold as a slave, but she looks as white as anybody I've ever seen.

I used to pull weeds and run errands when I was a child. We had some good eats but had to steal the best things from the white folks. They never gave us any of them. We have roasting ears better than they cook them now. We put them, shucks and all, in the hot ashes. Mammy makes good ashcake, with salt, cornmeal and bacon grease, and flats it out with her hands.

Master and Missus took goodness by spells, like. Sometimes they were hard to get along with and sometimes they were easy to get along with. I don't know the cause, but it is so. The most trouble is about the work. They wanted you to work if you can or can't.

Pappy had the back misery and many times I saw him crawl to the grist mill. He was bought because he was a good millhand. He told us his pappy was white, and that's one reason he is a runaway. I was scared all the time, because he ran away. I saw him get one whipping and there was nothing I could do except stand there and cry.

They get whippings every time Master feels cross. One slave named Bob Love, when Master started to whip him, cut his throat and dived into the river. He was so scared of whipping that he killed himself.

My Pappy wasn't afraid of anything. He is light colored from the white blood, and he ran away several times. There are big woods all around and we saw lots of runaways. One old fellow named John has been a runaway for four years and the patterroller tries all their tricks, but they can't catch him. They wanted him badly, because it inspired other slaves to run away if he stays a-loose. Dey sots the trap for him. Dey knows he likes good food, so dey 'ranges for a quilting and gives him chitlins and lye hominy. John came and was inside when the patterrollers rode up to the door. Everybody gets quiet and John stands near the door, and when he starts to come in he grabs the shovel full of hot ashes and throws it into the patterrollers' faces. He gets through and runs off, hollerin', 'Bird in the air!' A woman named Rhodie ran off for a long spell. De hounds won't hunt her. She steals hot light bread when she puts it in the window to cool, and lives on it. She told my Mammy how to keep the hounds from following you is to take black pepper and put it in your socks and run without your shoes. It makes the hounds sneeze. One day I was in the woods and met a nigger run-awayer. He came to the cabin and Mammy made him a bacon and egg sandwich and we never saw him again. Maybe he did get clear to Mexico, where a lot of the slaves ran to. We first learned about the war when some Union ships came into the Bay and shot at Corpus Christi. When that shooting started, all the folks around us took to the woods and several are still gone. Dey am shaking all over. 'Bout the third year of the war Master moves up to Clinton, but he moves back because he can't make any money there. Then he had all the quarters move up close to the big house, so if we try to make a run for it at night he can catch us. That's no use, because the ones that are still with him won't run anyway. One day I saw Master sitting in the gallery and his face all screwed up. He said, 'Go get you mammy and everybody.' I went flying'. My shirt tail didn't hit my back till I told everybody. Master am crying and he reads the paper and says, 'You are free as I am. What are you going to do?' Mammy says, 'We are staying right here.' But the next morning Pappy borrows an ox-team to tote our stuff away. We go 'about sixty miles and stay 'about six months, den takes a place

where we can make a crop. Then Master tells us we can live in an old place without rent and have what we can make. So we moved back and stayed for two years. Then we moved several places and sometimes the old missus came to see us and said, 'Ain't you ashamed? De Yankees are feeding you.' But they weren't, because we were making a crop. When I got up big enough to hire out, I worked for old man King on some drives, before Pappy and Mammy died of the fever. Then I married Minnie Bennett, a light colored gal, who is known as High Yaller. Her mammy am a white woman. She was kidnapped in Kentucky by some white men and they dyed her hair and skin and brought her to Texas with some slaves for sale. Master Means, in Corpus, bought her. She was so small all she remembered was her real name was Mary Schlous and her parents are white and she lived in Kentucky. Master Means comes in the next morning and busts out cussin', for there is black dye all over the pillow and his slave is getting blonde, but dem slave traders are gone, so he can't do nothin'. He 'cides to keep her and she grows up with the slaves jus' like she is a nigger. She gets used to being with dem and marries one. She has one child 'fore freedom, what am Minnie. She has to run away to get freedom, because Master Means won't let her have freedom. Lots of slaves had to do that. Well, after I married Minnie, we went to the famous King Ranch. It was only in two sections and I was hired as cook on the San Gertrudis section, but am sent to the other section, the Fuerta Agua Dulce, and worked there for fifteen years. Old man King had plenty of trouble in dem days. One time some Mexicans came to Brownsville and took everything as they went. Old man King had two cannons, and when they had the battle they finished with one cowboy dead and one Mexican dead. No cannons were fired, though. He has more trouble with rustlers and fellows who don't like the way he's getting all the land. They tried to kill him lots of times, but he fools him and dies in bed.

I came to Fort Worth and cooked. Minnie dies 'fore long of the stomach mis'ry. I worked for a Missus Goetz and married Agnes Skelton, who works there, too. We have five children and I worked there for twenty-five years, till I went blind. I was always a big, stout fellow, helping somebody, and after I was blind I had to 'pend on other people to help me. De white folks sho' been good to me since I been in this shape, and the state sends me \$13.00 a month to pay the bills. That's a big help, but I was about three, four weeks behind now. One old man, King's daughters, is here and looks me up, and leaves me a couple of dollars. I get along some way. I sit here and think about old times. One song we used to sing was 'Throw the Smokehouse Keys Down the Well.' That's because there are so many thieves in the country. Everybody has big locks on the smokehouse if they want to keep dey meat.