

William Ball Williams III
Forrest City, Arkansas
Interviewer: Miss Irene Robertson

My name is William Ball Williams III. I was born in Greensburg. My owner's were Robert and Mary Ball. They had four children I knew. Old man Ball bought Ma and two children for one thousand five hundred dollars. I never was sold. I want to live to be a hundred years old. I'm ninety-eight years old now.

Ma was Margaret Ball. Pa was William Anderson. Ma was a cook and Pa a field hand. They whooped a plenty on the place where I came up. Some of them ran off. Some they tied to a tree. Bob Ball didn't use any dogs. When they got starved out they'd come out into the woods. Of course they would.

Bob Ball raised fine tobacco, fine Negroes, fine horses. He made us go to church. Four or five of us would walk to the white folks' Baptist church. The master and his family rode. It was a good piece. We had dances in the cabins every once in a while. We danced more in wintertime so we could turn a pot down in the door to drown out the noise. We had plenty plain grub to eat.

I ran away to Louisville to join the Yankees one day. I was scared to death all the time. They put us in front to shield themselves. They said they were fighting for us--for our freedom. Piles of them were killed. I got a flesh wound. I'm scarred up some. We got plenty to eat. I was in two or three hot battles. I wanted to quit but they would catch them and shoot them if they left. I didn't know how to get out and get away. I mustered out at Jacksonville, Florida and walked every step of the way back. When I got back it was fall of the year. My folks were still at my master's. I was on picket guard at Jacksonville, Florida. We fought a little at Pensacola, Florida.

At the end of the War provisions got mighty scarce. If we didn't have enough to eat, we took it. They hadn't raised anything to eat the last two years. Before I got back to Kentucky, the Ku Klux was about and it was hard to get enough to eat to keep traveling on. I was scared nearly to death all the time. I'm not in favor of war. I didn't stay on with the master but my folks lived on. They didn't want to hire Negro soldiers. I traveled about hunting a good place and got to

Osceola, Arkansas. I've been here in Forrest City twenty odd years. The best people in the world live in Arkansas.

I'm going to try to go to the Yankee Reunion. They sent me a big letter (invitation). They are going to send me a ticket and pay all my expenses. It is at Gettysburg. It is from June 29th to July 6th. My grandson is going to take care of me.

I get one hundred dollars a month pension. It keeps us mighty well. I want to live to be a hundred years old.