

WILLIAM EMMONS

Clark County, District #6

Age 93 1-15-41

I was born near Carlisle, in Nicholas County, Kentucky. My mother was owned by a family named Riggs, and I lived on the Riggs plantation until I was seven years old. Then I was sold to Roy Emmons, and Mother was sold to Banaster in Moorfield, Kentucky. Father's real name was Boyd, but Hiram Norton owned him.

After Mother and I were separated, I went to see her once in a while. I had four sisters and three brothers but I never knew much about them. One of my brothers and I went to war together. The plantation of Emmons was 1500 acres of good land. The house was big and just had everything. There were aabout15 slaves on the place, and they had several cabins with three rooms and big fireplaces five feet withe. We had straw mattresses for our beds, and a few chairs, but mostly stools and benches.

My white folks treated us well, considering what some others had to take. We never had beatings; that was one thing my folks didn't allow. We weren't ever paid for our work, nor allowed to be found reading. White folks said, that's one thing we won't allow; learning for these darkies.

They gave us three pairs of shoes a year, and jeans and cotton clothes. All the goods for the clothes were woven at home then. My mother was a weaver and could weave 12 quirks of yarn in no time.

I've done lots of work all my life, but now I ain't able to do anything but just sit and think of things. I used to drive the stock to the creek when the ponds got low in the summer, and I milked when I was knee-high to a duck. As soon as I was big enough to follow a plow I helped plow and tend the farms. I stayed on the Emmons plantation until I went off to war.

Ole man Emmons had asked his family to never sell off any of the darkies if they could help it, and never to sell any of them to darkie traders. The traders were looked on as low, and they treated folks badly. Why I've seen slave traders buy up women and men for the purpose of

breeding them just like animals, and they'd beat them if they didn't do what they expected of them. The slave traders wanted strong children for work hands and they were all the time figuring to get a strong woman to carry out the plan for raising children that would sell really good. They would keep them and feed them for a few years and then sell them off to the highest bidder. There is no decency in such folks as them.

Slavery was worse than most people could imagine, at best. The Darkie traders used to travel all over the country sometimes and buy up slaves from plantation owners who were almost ready to go down in debt. I've seen men chained together, and women being carried in wagons with their babies. Just taking them to market for sale like cattle.

We used the church the white folks used in Carlisle. It was a log church. The first preacher I was a remember of was Uncle Milliard. He used to have some the white children read the Bible for him, and then he'd try remember what he could, and preach that way.

We didn't work in the fields on Sunday, but the women had to get the mail and make the beds just the same as any other day. The men had to tend the stock, and that took most of the day and lots of the evening because the folks were always going more on Sunday. If there was a death in the family we didn't do any regular work in the fields.

We were allowed go to shows when they came to Carlisle. I remember going to see Dan Rice's Circus that use to come to Carlisle ever year.

When we had baptisms we used a big pond or pool, and sometimes the creek. I can't remember any songs, but I use to hear, "Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Seen"; "The Gospel Train is Coming".

There were doctors in those days, but not as many as now. Folks doctored with home remedies; mullen, catnip, and elder blossom tea, horehound, sassafras tea, yellow root and sasparilla. They, too, always mixed a jar of sorghum molasses and sulphur for a blood purifer to be taken in the spring of the year.

Folks use to, and still carry a rabbits foot for good luck. Breaking a looking glass was bad luck, but if it was thrown in a running stream the bad luck would flow away. Folks use to be awful

scared if dogs howled or owls hooted near the house. Some folks cut moles feet off, to make them cut teeth easy.

I left and joined the army when I was 18. But forty of us from the plantation around near Carlisle went at the same time. When we went off for the army, going down a dusty road, three white fellers we knew came a riding up, and said, "Where are you darkies goin?" We told them we were going to war and they tried to make us go back to the plantation. We told them we'd kill them sure if they kept on meddling with us, and they got scared and let us alone.

In one the battles I got shot in the left hand, and I tied it up myself. The captain he noticed it one day, and he asked to see it. Then he sent me to the hospital. They thought they'd have to take my hand off, but I didn't want them to that. So they kept me in the hospital for about thirty days and doctored it, and finally, I was back in the lines fighting.

The day we were emancipated we were at Petersburg, Virginia, and I never heard as much shouting and hollering in my life. When the war was over, I went back to Emmonds plantation, and they asked me what I was going to do now that I was free. I told them I was going to work, but they told me no free darkies could stay on the plantation.

I went to Mason County and hired to a Major Read. He was an abolitionist and went about the country trying to get the plantation owners to hire the free slaves and help make good citizens of them. Major Read paid me \$20.00 a month, and board and clothes. I was able to save a good little sum, and I left and went up to Ripley.

I married Sylvia Settles, and we had one boy who died when he was just a baby. Then in a year or so, Sylvia died. I finilly met and married Eliza Cowin, of Ripley, and we had twelve children - two girls and ten boys. All but one is dead. Guy, the one I make my home with. is the only one livin. I have three grandchildren and two great grandchildren .

All the slaves woshipped Abraam Lincoln, but they so did hate ole Jeff Davis. I know lots of the Rebels who were supposed to be strong for the South hated Jeff Davis, and wasn't true to the South like they pretended. The fact was they knew slavery was wrong.

I'm proud of my race, of Fred Douglas, and of any of the folks of my race what got to ge great men. Why, little as I've seen and know, I know more than most of those smart ones about big colored folks- about what they did and are doing now, and what they got.

After the war, the Ku Klux Klan burned homes and stirred up lots of folks. They were a dirty lot of low down trash. But the government soon put a stop to that.

I'm glad children today had education, better than we had when we were coming along.

Slavery was sure the worst thing I ever heard of, and I never could tell how some of the slaves were treated, but it sure was just awful.

I'll be 93 nex Monday May 10th, and I ain't much count for nothing but just sitting around. All the rest of my sisters and brothers are dead. The Lord has been good to me, and I'm sure happy to be living, and can sit here yet, and tell about what I went through.

Interviewed at the residence of his son, Guy L. Emmons, 1588 Charles St.

Editors notes: William Emmons is 93, small, bent and crippled by rheumatism and other infirmities of old age. He is bald, has a heavy gray mustache, and walks with the aid of a cane.