

Name:

Date:

Chapter 8

Excerpt from *My Folks Don't Want Me to Talk About Slavery*

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the federal government hired teachers and journalists to interview former slaves, as a way to get their perspectives on the actual experience of bondage. The “slave narratives” told by the elderly African Americans varied widely in quality and length. This is one of the more vivid memoirs. How would you describe Mary Anderson’s experience?

I was born on a plantation near Franklinton, North Carolina, May 10, 1851. I was a slave belonging to Sam Brody. My missus’s name was Evaline.

The plantation was very large, and there were about 200 acres of cleared land that was farmed each year. We had good food, plenty of warm, homemade clothes, and comfortable houses. The slave houses were called the quarters, and the marster’s house was called the great house. Our houses had two rooms each, and Marster’s house had twelve rooms. Both the slave and the white folks’ houses were located in a large grove one mile square covered with oak and hickory trees. Marster’s house was exactly one mile from the main Louisburg Road. Many of the things we used were made on the place. There was a grist mill, tannery, shoe shop, blacksmith shop, and looms for weaving cloth.

Marster had a large apple orchard on the Tar River . . . and nearer the plantation house was an orchard of peaches, cherries, quinces, and grapes. . . . Marster and Missus believed in giving the slaves plenty of fruit, especially the children. . . .

There were 162 slaves on the plantation, and every Sunday morning all the children had to be bathed, dressed, and their hair combed, and carried down to Marster’s for breakfast. It was a rule that all the little colored children eat at the great house every Sunday morning in order that Master and Missus could watch them eat, so they would know which ones were sick and have them doctored.

The slave children all carried a mussel shell to eat in. The food was put on large trays, and the children gathered around and ate, dipping up their food with the mussel shells, which they used for spoons. Those who refused to eat or those who were ailing in any way had to come back to the to the great house for meals and medicine until they were well. Sunday was a great day on the plantation. Everyone got biscuits Sunday. The slave women went down to the great house to get flour.

. . . We were allowed to have prayer meeting in our homes, and we also went to the white folks’ church. They would not teach any of us to read and write. Books and papers were forbidden.

Marster . . . had four white overseers, but they were not allowed to whip a slave. If there was any whipping to be done, he always said he would do it. He didn’t believe in whipping, so when a slave got so bad that he could not manage him, he sold him. Slaves were carried off in two-horse wagons to be sold. I have seen several loads leave. They were the unruly ones.

Source: Belinda Hurmence, ed., *My Folks Don't Want Me to Talk About Slavery* (Winston-Salem: John F. Blair, 1985), pp. 44-47.