

BILL HOMER, 87, was born a slave on June 17, 1850, to Mr. Jack Homer, who owned a large plantation near Shreveport, La. In 1860 Bill was given to Mr. Homer's daughter, who moved to Caldwell, Texas. Bill now lives at 3215 McKinley Ave., Fort Worth, Texas.

"I is 87 years old, 'cause I is born on June 17th, in 1850, and that's 'cording to de statement my missy give me. I was born on Massa Jack Homer's plantation, close to Shreveport. Him owned my mammy and my pappy and 'bout 100 other slaves. Him's plantation was a big un. I don't know how many acres him have, but it was miles long. Dere was so many buildings and sheds on dat place it was a small town. De massa's house was a big two-story building and dere was de spinnin' house, de smokehouse, de blacksmith shop and a nursery for de cullud chillens and a lot of sheds and sich. In de nigger quarters dere was 50 one-room cabins and dey was ten in a row and dere WAS five rows.

"De cabins was built of logs and had dirt floors and a hole whar a window should be and a stone fireplace for de cookin' and de neat. Dere was a cookhouse for de big house and all de cookin' for de white folks was 'tended to by four cooks. We has lots of food, too - cornmeal and vegetables and milk and 'lassas and meat. For mos' de meat dey kitched hawgs in de Miss'sippi River bottoms. Once a week, we have white flour biscuit.

"Some work was hard and some easy, but massa don' 'lieve in overworkin' his slaves. Sat'day afternoon and Sunday, dere was no work. Some whippin' done, but mos' reasonable. If de nigger stubborn,

deys whips 'nough for to change his mind. If de nigger runs out, dat calls de good ^Ushippin's. If any or de cullud folks has de misery, dey lets him res' in bed and if de misery bad de massa call de doctor.

"I larned to be coachman and drive for massa's family. But in de year of 1860, Missy Mary gits married to Bill Johnson and at dat weddin' massa Homer gives me and 49 other niggers to her for de weddin' present. Massa Johnson's father gives him 50 niggers too. Dey has a gran' weddin'. I helps take care of de hosses and dey jus' kep' a-comin'. I 'spect dere was more'n 100 peoples dere and dey have lots of music and dancin' and eats and, I 'spects, drinks, 'cause we'uns made peach brandy. You see, de massa had his own still.

"After de weddin' was over, dey gives de couple de intere. Dere's whar dis nigger comes in. I and de other niggers was lined up, all with de clean clothes on and den de massa say, 'For to give my lovin' daughter de start, I gives you dese 50 niggers. Massa Bill's father done de same for his son, and dere we'uns was, 100 niggers with a new massa.

"Dey loads 15 or 20 wagons and starts for Texas. We travels from daylight to dark, with mos' de niggers walkin'. Of course, it was hard, but we enjoys de trip. Dere was one nigger called Monk and him knows a song and larned it to us, like this:

" 'Walk, walk, you nigger, walk!
De road am dusty, de road am tough,
Dust in de eye, dust in de tuft;
Dust in de mouth, yous can't talk -
Walk, you niggers, don't you balk.

" 'Walk, walk, you nigger walk!
De road am dusty, de road am rough.
Walk 'til we reach dere, walk or bust -
De road am long, we be dere by and by.'

Now, we'uns was a-follerin' benin' de wagons and we'uns sings it to de slow steps of de ox. We'uns don't sing it many times 'til de missy come and sit in de back of de wagon, facin' we'uns and she begin to beat de slow time and sing wid we'uns. Dat please Missy Mary to sing with us and she laugh and laugh.

"After 'bout two weeks we comes to de place near Caldwell, in Texas, and dere was buildin's and land cleared, so we's soon settled. Massa plants mostly cotton and corn and clears more land. I larned to be a coacman, but on dat place I de ox driver or uses de noe.

"Yous never drive de ox, did you? De mule ain't stubborn side of de ox, de ox am stubborn and den some more. One time I's haulin' fence rails and de oxen starts to turn gee when I wants dem to go ahead. I calls for haw, but dey pays dis nigger no mind and keeps agwine gee. Den dey starts to run and de overseer hollers and asks me, 'Whar you gwine?' I hollers back, 'I's not gwine, I's bein' took.' Dem oxen takes me to de well for de water, 'cause if dey gits dry and is near water, dey goes in spite of de devil.

"De treatment from new massa am good, 'cause of Missy Mary. She say to Massa Bill, 'If you mus' 'buse de nigger, 'buse yous own.' He has music and parties. We plays de quill, make from willow stick when de sap am up. Yous takes de stick and pounds de bark loose and slips it off, den slit de wood in one end and down one side, puts noles in de bark and put it back on de stick. De quill plays like de flute.

"I never goes out without de pass, so I never has trouble with de patter rollers. Nigger Monk, nim have de 'sperience with 'em. Dey kotched

him twice and dey sho' makes him hump and holler. After dat he gits pass or stays to home.

"De War make no diff'rance with us, 'cept de soldiers comes and takes de rations. But we'uns never goes hungry, 'cause de massa puts some niggers hustlin' for wil' hawgs. After surrender, missy reads de paper and tells dat we'uns is free, but dat we'uns kin stay 'til we is 'justed to de change.

"De second year after de War, de massa sells de plantation and goes back to Louisiana and den we'uns all lef'. I goes to Laredo for seven year and works on a stock ranch, den I goes to farmin'. I gits married in 1879 to Mary Robinson and we'uns nas 14 chilluns. Four of dem lives nere.

"I works hard all my life 'til 1935 and den I's too old. My wire and I lives on de pensions we gits.
