

ORELIA ALEXIE FRANKS was born on the plantation of Valerian Martin, near Opelousas, Louisiana. She does not know her age, but thinks she is near ninety. Her voice has the musical accent of the French Negro. She has lived in Beaumont, Texas, many years.

"I's born on Mr. George Washington's birthday, the twenty-second of February but I don't know what year. My old massa was Valerian Martin and he come from foreign country. He come from Canada and he Canada French. He wife name Malite Guidry. Old massa a good Catholic and he taken all the li'l slave chillen to be christen. Oh, he's a Christian massa and I used to be a Catholic but now I's a Apostolic, but I's christen in St. Johns Catholic Church, what am cloas to Lafayette, where I's born.

"My pa name Alexis Franks and he was American and Creole. My ma name Fanire Martin and I's raise where everybody talk French. I talks American but I talks French goodest.

"Old massa he big cane and cotton farmer and have big plantation and raise everything. and us all well treat. Dey feed us right, too. Raise big hawg in de pen and raise lots of beef. All jes' for to feed he cullud folks.

"Us quarters out behind de big house and old massa come round through de quarters every mornin' and see how us niggers is. If us sick he call nuss. She old slavery woman. She come look at 'em. If dey bad sick dey send for de doctor. Us house all log house. Dey all dab with dirt 'tween de logs. Dey have dirt chimney make out of sticks and dab with mud. Dey

"Lots of time we eat coosh-coosh. Dat make out of meal and water. You bile de water and salt it, den put in de cornmeal and stir it and bile it. Den you puts milk or clabber or syrup on it and eat it.

"Old massa have de graveyard a purpose to bury de cullud folks in. Dey have cullud preacher. Dey have funeral in de graveyard. Dat nigger preacher he a Mef'dist.

"Old massa son-in-law, he overseer. He 'lew nobody to beat de slaves. Us li'l ones git spank when we bad. Dey put us 'cross de knee and spank us where dey allus spank chillen.

"Christmas time dey give big dianer. Dey give all de old men whiskey. Everybody have big time.

"Dey make lots of sugar. After dey finish cookin' de sugar dey draw off what left from de pots and give it to us chillen. Us have candy pullin'.

"Dey weave dey own cloth. Us have good clothes. Dey weave de cloth for make mattress and stuff 'em with moss. Massa sho' believe to serve he niggers good. I see old massa when he die. Us see old folks cry and us cry, too. Dey have de priest and burn de candles. Us sho' miss old massa.

"I see lots of sojers. Dey so many like hair on your head. Dey Yankees. Dey call 'em bluejackets. Dey a fight up near massa's house. Us climb in tree for to see. Us hear bullets go 'zoom' through de air 'round dat tree but us didn't know it was bullets. A man rid up on a hoss and tell massa to git us pickaninnies out dat tree or dey git kilt. De Yankees have dat battle and den sot us niggers free.

"Old massa, he de kind man what let de niggers have dey prayer-meetin'. He give 'em a big cabin for dat. Shout? Yes, Lawd! Sing like dis:

"'Mourner, fare you well,
Gawd 'Mighty bless you,
Till we meets again.'

"Us sings 'nother song:

"'Sinner blind,
Johnnie, can't you ride no more?
Sinner blind,
Your feets, may be slippin'
Your soul git lost.
Johnnie, can't you ride no more?
Yes, Lawd,
Day by day you can't see,
Johnnie, can't you ride no more?
Yes, Lawd.'"
