

PAULINE JOHNSON and FELICE BOUDREAUX, sisters, were once slaves on the plantation of Dermat Martine, near Opelousas, Louisiana. As their owners were French, they are more inclined to use a Creole patois than English.

"Us was both slaves on de old plantation close to Opelousas," Pauline began. As the elder of the two sisters she carried most of the conversation, although often referring to Felice before making positive statements.

"I was 12 year old when freedom come and Felice was 'bout six. Us belonged to Massa Dermat Martine and the missy's name Mimi. They raise us both in the house and they love us so they spoil us. I never will forget that. The little white chillen was younger than me, 'bout Felice's age. They sho' had pretty li'l curly black hair.

"Us didn't have hard time. Never even knowed hard time. That old massa, he what you call a good man.

"Us daddy was Renee and he work in the field. The old massa give him a mud and log house and a plot of ground for he own. The rain sho' never get in that log house, it so tight. The furniture was homemake, but my daddy make it good and stout.

"Us daddy he work de ground he own on Sunday and sold the things to buy us shoes to put on us feet and clothes. The white folks didn't give us clothes byt they let him have all the money he made in his own plot to get them.

"Us mama name Marguerite and she a field hand, too, so us chillen growed up in the white folks house mostly. 'Fore Felice get big enough to leave I stay in the big house and take care of her.

"One day us papa fall sick in the bed, just 'fore freedom, and he kep' callin' for the priest. Old massa call the priest and just 'fore us papa die the priest marry him and my mama. 'fore dat they just married by the massa's word.

"Felice and me, us have two brothers what was born and die in slavery, and one sister still livin' in Bolivar now. Us three uncles, Bruno and Pophrey and Zaphrey, they goes to the war. Them three dies too young. The Yankees stole them and make them boys fight for them.

"I never done much work but wash the dishes. They wasn't poor people and they uses good dishes. The missy real particular 'bout us shinin' them dishes nice, and the silver spoons and knives, too.

"Then white people was good Christian people and they christen us both in the old brick Catholic church in Opelousas. They done torn it down now. Missy give me pretty dress to get christen in. My godmother, she Mileen Mesaseau, but I call her 'Miran'. My godfather called 'Paran.'

"On Sunday mornin' us fix our dress and hair and go up to the missy's looking-glass to see if us pretty enough go to church. Us goes to Mass every Sunday mornin' and church holiday, and when the cullud folks sick massa send for the priest same's for the white folks.

"We wears them things on the strings round the neck for the good of the heart. They's mitmeg.

"The plantation was a big, grand place and they have lots of orange

trees. The slaves pick them oranges and pack them down on the barrel with la mosse (Spanish moss) to keep them. They was plenty pecans and figs, too.

"In slavery time most everybody round Opelousas talk Creole. That make the words hard to come sometime. Us both talk that better way than English.

"Durin' the war, it were a sight. Every mornin' Capt. Jenrette Bank and he men go a hoss-back drillin' in the pasture and then have drill on foot. A white lady take all us chillen to the drill ground every mornin'. Us take the lunch food in the basket and stay till they done drill out.

"I can sing for you the song they used to sing:

"O, de Yankee come to put de nigger free,  
Says I, says I, pas bonne;  
In eighteen-sixty-three,  
De Yankee get out they gun and say,  
Hurrah! Let's put on the ball.

"When war over none the slaves wants leave the plantation. My mama and us chillen stays on till old massa and missy dies, and then goes live on the old Repridin place for a time.

"Both us get marry in that Catholic church in Opelousas. As for me, it most too long ago to talk about. His name Alfred Johnson and he dead 12 years. Our youngest boy, John, go to the World War. Two my nephews die in that war and one nephew can't walk now from that war.

"Felice marry Joseph Boudreaux and when he die she come here to stay with me. There's more hard time now than in the old day for us, but I hope things get better.