

VALMAR COEMIER was born a slave to Duplissent Dugat, a small slaveholder of Lafayette, Louisiana. He tells his story in a mixture of English and French. As far as he knows, he is nearly 90 years old. He now lives with his sister, Mary Moses, in the Pear Orchard Settlement, in Beaumont, Texas.

"I 'member de day my old marster go to de war. I kin 'member dat jes' like yesterday. He used to like to play de fiddle and make me dance when I was li'l, but he went to de war and got kilt. His name Duplissent Dugat. Mary, my sister, she don't 'member de old marster.

"De slaves did de work on dat farm. Dey was two growed-ups, my mama, Colaste, and my uncle, and dere was us two chillen. My father was a white man, a white Creole man. I never carry his name till after freedom.

"Marster was jes' a poor man and he have jes' a ordinary house. De slave house was jes' a old plank house 'bout twelve feet by twenty feet and have dirt floor. Us cook in de big fireplace and take a log 'bout four feet long and have a big iron pot with a iron lid. Dey put red hot coals under de pot and on top de lid and dey have a big iron poker with a hook on it what dey took de lid off with.

"Befo' dey have coal oil lamp dey used to use homemade candles. Dey'd kill de brutes and keep and save all de tallow and one day was set off to make de candles. All de neighbors come and dey have kind of party and eat and things. Sometime dey make three, four hunnerd candles in one day and lay dem in a big box, so dey won't git break.

"Us make soap on deplantation, too. Dey melt de tallow and cracklin's and git lye out de fireplace ash. We have cotton and corn

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"and potatoes growin', so we has plenty to eat. Us have coosh-coosh, dat cornbread and meat, and some fish to eat. Snails us jes' go through de woods and pick dem up and eat dem jes' like dat. Us eat plenty crawfish. De chillen git string and old piece fat meat and tie on de end, and us go to de bog and drap de string down dat crawfish hole. When de old man grab de meat with he pincher, den us jerk us up a crawfish, and bile him in hot water, or make de gumbo.

"Us drink French coffee befo' de war, but endurin' de war us couldn't git de good kind. Den us make coffee out of coffee weed. Dey parch dat weed in de iron oven, grind it and put it in de iron pot.

"I seed de sojers and I run under de house, I was so scared. Mary, she hide under de bed in de house. De Yankees come take de cattle and went 'way with dem. I kin sho' rec'lect when dose sojers come and de road was full goin' day and night. De Yankees find a lot of Confed'rate sojers close to Dason, de other side of Rayne and dey captures lots and brung dem back by dere.

"After while it all over and dey told us we free, but my mama kep' working for old missus after freedom, 'cause old marster, he kilt in dat war. Den old missus die and left three li'l chillen, but I don't know what happen to them, 'cause us go to another place and I plow and Mary she he'p pick cotton.

"I git marry at 20 and my first wife de French gal. We marry by de priest in de church. Us have so many chillen us have to keep a map to account for all dem, dere was 19 in all. We stays in Louisiana long time, den come to Texas.