

WAYMAN WILLIAMS does not know his age, but he was a small boy when the slaves were freed. He was born in Mississippi, but the first place he remembers is the Sanama plantation on the Trinity river, in Texas. He now lives on North Falls St., in Mart, Texas.

"I was one of four chillen of Calvin and Julia Williams, of de state of Mississippi, when they was first married, 'fere they come to Texas. But de earlies' 'lection I has, was livin' on a plantation belongin' to a Mr. Sanama. It was on de Trinity river, right down in de bottoms. My felks stayed on dere after freedom and I lived with dem till I was nearly growed. Dere massa give dem supplies and let dem work a piece of land and they give him half de crop.

"I 'member times us go huntin' and kill most anything we want, wild turkeys and wild hawks and deer. My father used to go out and kill deer and not git out of sight of de house. Livin' was easier dan now, fer we had all dem things without havin' to buy dem. I 'member de bear hunts. We had great big, brindle dogs fer de bears and dey surreun' him and stand him at bay till de men come and kill him.

"A man by name of Burton lived near us, and one day he sent one he boys to town on a little race hoss. On de way home dat boy crossin' de river bottem and a panther git after him, and he race he hoss and outrun dat panther. He jump off de hoss and run in de house and lock de deer. De panther try to git in and de men in de field hear he cries and sheets him. In dose days de men teok guns to de fields.

"They cotched wolves and bears in traps but de panther was de most dang'reous animal us have to fight. Us never know when he gein' to strike.

One our neighbors go to town after a turkey and on he way home a panther was sittin' in a tree by de read, and he make a lunge at de man and grab de turkey and tear de man's arm. Once my grandpa ridin' 'leng one night, crossin' de river, and a panther git after him. He had a fast hoss and outran dat panther, and got to de house, and two our bear dogs kep' it off till he shot it. I knows dese things am true, for they happen jes' like I tell it.

"Our house was close to de boat landin' on de river and my father halped unlead supplies from de boats, when he not workin' in de fields. Judge Beavers own de storehouse what kep' de supplies, and he ship he cotton by boat to de Gulf, mostly to Galveston.

"De 'Federate sojers pass our house and go to Judge for him to give dem something to eat and he allus did. Sometimes dey was men on hosses and he give dem feed for de hosses. Once a crowd young fellows comin' home from de war on hosses and dey got supplies, and de Judge give dem a little toddy for to make dem feel good. Dey feels so good dey gits some ribbon from de store and tie it to de hosses heads and rides off, with dat ribbon jes' a-streamin' from de hosses mane.

"De Judge enjoy all day. He felt like dey been fightin' for him and dey welcome to what he have. It was de common thing fer de sojers to stop at the house and ask for food er to sleep. Sometimes niggers come, what run away to de North 'fere freedom. Dey done got tired of dat cold weather up dere and when freedom come, dey ready to come back home.

"When de slaves set free, dey have big times, and feel like dey not work at all. But when old massa give dem a place to farm and tell dem iffen dey don't work dey won't eat, dey stays with him and works de crops en halves, mostly. De nigger do de work and massa feed him and give him team and toels, den massa git half de crop.

"De slaves what went up North and come back, tell how dey call 'Contrabands' up dere. Dey didn't know what it mean, but dey come back anyway.

"Some white school teachers from up North come to teach de chillen, but dey didn't talk like felks here and didn't understan' our talk. Dey didn't know what us mean when us say 'titty' for sister, and 'budder' for brother, and 'nanny' fer mammy. Jes' for fun us call ourselves big names to de teacher, some be named General Lee and some Stonewall Jackson. We be one name one day and 'nother name next day. Until she git to know us she couldn't tell de diff'rence, 'cause us all look alike to her. Us have good times tellin' her 'bout black magic and de conjure. Us tell her night birds full of magic and dere feathers roast in ashes work spells what kill evil conjure. If a rabbit run 'cross de path, turn your hat round and wear it hind part befo' to keep bad luck away. A buxard's claw tie round de baby's neck make teethin' easy. De teacher frem de North don't know what to think of all dat. But our old missy, who live here all de time, know all 'bout it. She lets us believe our magic and conjure, 'cause she partly believe it, too.

"I lives en dat place till I's a big boy and den works fer Mr. John Mergersen and a Mr. Porter. Dey come from Mississippi right after freedom and was jes' like homefolks. So I works for dem till I gits married and starts out fer myself.

"I 'member some songs my mammy and old missy larnt me. One go like dis:

"De top bolls ain' open,
De bottem bolls am rotten.
I can't git my number here,
I has to quit and go 'way.

"When de sun go down and de moon go up,
Iffen I can't git my number, I can't git my pay.'

"When I was little, my father split de rails out of trees to make fences,

and I have an aunt what was de big woman, and she help. She have a song what go like dis, and when she sing, she come down on a rail, 'biff'.

"Times are gittin' hard,' (biff)
Money's gittin scarce,' (biff)
Times don't git no better here,' (biff)
I bound to leave dis place.'

"But when de big meetin' goin' on, dis one de songs dey likes to sing:

"As I went down in de valley to pray,
I met de debbil on my way,
What you reckon he say to me?
You're too young to die,
And too young to pray,
I made him a lie, and kep' on my way.'

"We raised corn and cotton and potatoes and lots of vegetables and fruit. We didn't have no wheat, so we couldn't have flour and it too high to buy. All dem what could buy it, was de landowner.

"When de corn gathered, us pile it in piles and have corn shuckin' at night, cook our supper and all eat together and listen to de stories tell by de old folks. When dey git de piles of corn ready for shuckin', dey lay a rail in de middle and 'vide de piles, and de side what git through first git supper first. De song go like dis:

"Hits a mighty dry year, when de crab grass fail,
Oh, row, row, row, who laid dat rail?
Hit an mighty dark night when de nigger turn pale,
De big feet nigger what laid dat rail!
Oh, row, row, row, who laid dat rail?
Rinktum, ranktum, laid dat rail.
Show me de nigger what laid dat rail,
Oh, row, row, row, who laid dat rail?

"When de niggers fuss, de white folks fail,
Oh, row, row, row, who laid dat rail?
We're gittin' dere now, don't tell no tale,
Show me de nigger what laid dat rail.
I'll stick he head in a big tin pail,
Oh, turn me loose, let me tech dat rail,
Oh, row, row, row, who laid dat rail?

"First us have white preachers and den, after freedom, de niggers starts to git up in meetin' and talk to sinners, and dey call dem 'Exhorters.' De white folks larnt de exhorters to read de Bible and some songs, and de niggers all larn de songs, too. De exhorter git up and read de scripture and it 'bout King Neb'kudneezer, when he have a golden image with silver horns, and all de kings and rulers come and bow down 'fore dat image, 'cepting three. Dem was Shadrack and Maysack and A-Bad-Negro. Dey would not bow down, so de eld king throw dem in de furnace and dey not burn up, and dey say, 'De Gawd us worship am able to deliver us from de fiery furnace.'

"Den de exhorter say: 'New, you no ceunt niggers, what you mean stealin' de white folks chickens and watermilliens? Dey ain't safe no longer dan de white man back am turned. Do you think Gawd would save you? No, sir! You be turned into de pillar of salt iffen you don't stop you unrighteous ways, and den where you be? You won't see no dancin' or hear no chickens hollerin'. Come on into de pearly gates and live right. Leave your stealin' and cussin' and dancin' to de debbil, and come te de mourners' bench.

"Let de sun of salvation shine square on you face,
Fight de battles of de Lawd, fight soon and fight late,
And you'll allus find de latch te de golden gate.
No use for to wait till tomorrew,
De sun mustn't sot on you sorrow,
Sin's sharp as a bamboo briar,
Ask de Lawd for to fotch you up higher.'

"Dem songs was de gateway to enter, de pearly gateway. All de niggers git on de mourners' bench and git saved.