

SLAVE NARRATIVES (PART 1)

EXCERPTS FROM THE DELIA GARLIC INTERVIEW (SLAVE NARRATIVE). SHE WAS BORN INTO SLAVERY IN VIRGINIA AND WAS 100 YEARS OLD AT THE TIME OF INTERVIEW (AL, pp.102-104)

This is a good example of a narrative by an ex-slave who experienced very harsh conditions during bondage. Delia was born at Powhatan, Virginia and was the youngest of thirteen children.

Dem days was hell. . . .

I was growed up when de war come, . . . an' I was a mother befo' it closed. Babies was snatched from dere mother's breas' an' sold to speculators. Chilluns was separated from sisters an' brothers an' never saw each other ag'in.

Course dey cry; you think dey not cry when dey was sold lak cattle? I could tell you 'bout it all day, but even den you couldn't guess de awfulness of it.

It's bad to belong to folks dat own you soul an' body; dat can tie you up a tree, wid yo' face to de tree an' yo' arms fastened tight aroun' it; who take a long curlin' whip an' cut de blood ever' lick.

Folks a mile away could hear dem awful whippings. Dey was a turrible part of livin' . . .

I never seed none of my brothers an' sisters 'cept brother William. . . . Him an' my mother an' me was brought in a speculator's drove to Richmon' an' put in a warehouse wid a drove of other niggers. Den we was all put on a block an' sol' to de highes' bidder.

I never seed brother William ag'in. Mammy an' me was sold to a man by de name of Carter, who was de sheriff of de county.

No'm, dey warn't no good times at his house. He was a widower an' his daughter kept house for him. I nursed for her, an' one day I was playin' wid de baby. It hurt its li'l han' an' commenced to cry, an' she whirl on me, pick up a hot iron an' run it all down my arm an' han'. It took off de flesh when she done it.

After awhile, marster married ag'in; but things warn't no better. I seed his wife blackin' her eyebrows wid smud one day, so I thought I'd black mine jes' for fun. I rubbed some smut on my eyebrows an' forgot to rub it off, an' she kitched me. She was powerful mad an' yelled: "You black devil, I'll show you how to mock your betters."

Den she pick up a stick of stovewood an' flails it ag'in' my head. I didn't know nothin' more 'till I come to, lying on de floor. I heard de mistus say to one of de girls: "I thought her thick skull and cap of wool could take it better than that."

I kept on stayin' dere, an' one night de marster come in drunk an' set at de table wid his head lollin' aroun'. I was waitin' on de table, an' he look up an' see me. I was skeered, an' dat made him awful mad. He called an overseer an' tol' him: "Take her out an' beat some sense in her."

I began to cry an' run an' run in de night; but finally I run back by de quarters an' heard mammy callin' me. I went in, an' right away dey come for me. A horse was standin' in front of de house, an' I was took dat very night to Richmon' an' sold to a speculator ag'in. I never seed my mammy any more.

I has thought many time through all dese years how mammy looked dat night. She pressed my han' in bofe of hers an' said: "Be good an' trus' in de Lawd."

Trustin' was de only hope of de pore black critters in dem days. Us just prayed fer strength to endure it to de end. We didn't 'spect nothin' but to stay in bondage 'till we died.

I was sol' by de speculator to a man in McDonough, Ga. I don't recollect his name, but he was openin' a big hotel at McDonough an' bought me to wait on tables. But when de time come aroun' to pay for me, his hotel done fail. Den de Atlanta man dat bought de hotel bought me, too. 'Fo' long, dough, I was sol' to a man by de name of Garlic, down in Louisiana, an' I stayed wid him 'till I was freed. I was a regular fiel' han', plowin' an' hoein' an' choppin' cotton.

Us heard talk 'bout de war, but us didn't pay no 'tention. Us never dreamed dat freedom would ever come.

(Delia was asked if the slaves ever had any parties or dances on her plantation.)

No'm...us didn't have no parties; nothin' lak dat. Us didn't have no clothes for goin' 'roun. I never had a undershirt until just befo' my first chil' was borned. I never had nothin' but a shimmy an' a slip for a dress, an' it was made out'en de cheapes' cloth dat could be bought; unbleached cloth, coarse, but made to las'.

Us didn't know nothin' 'cept to work. Us was up by three or four in de mornin' an' everybody got dey somethin' to eat in de kitchen. Dey didn't give us no way to cook, nor nothin' to cook in our cabins. Soon as us dressed us went by de kitchen an' got our piece of cornbread. Dey wasn't even no salt in dem las' years. Dat piece of cornbread was all us had for breakfus', an' for supper [mid-day meal], us had de same.

For dinner us had boiled vittles; greens, peas an' sometimes beans. Coffee? No'm, us never knowed nothin' bout coffee. . . .

. . . Jus' befo' de war I married a man named Chatfield from another plantation; but he was took off to war an' I never seed him ag'in. After awhile I married a boy on de plantation named Miles Garlic. . . .

. . . After Miles died . . . [I] come to Montgomery to live wid my son. I'se eatin' white bread now an' havin' de best time of my life. But when de Lawd say, 'Delia, well done' come up higher,' I'll be glad to go.

SLAVE FOOD

In most cases, this appears to have been sufficient. In some situations the slaves ate what the master did, in other situations slaves were considerably underfed. Some masters let their slaves hunt and fish and even have their own gardens. Good nutrition was lacking at

times due to an absence of knowledge about that subject. In reading the following entries, keep in mind that some relate to plantations with large numbers of slaves, while others relate to situations with only a few slaves. Examples of the worst situations precede examples of the best situations. (References: Slave narratives I studied; Escott, *Slavery Remembered*, 38-39 [regarding diet being sufficient]; Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 113 [regarding nutrition]. George Rawick's *Sundown to Sunup*, 55, gives a more negative view of the amount of food slaves were fed, contending that they were fed "poorly.")

Mammy said sometimes [slaves] were fed well and others dey almost starved. – Lizzie Baker, ex-slave from Duplin County, North Carolina (NC1, p.36)

We were so hungry we were bound to steal or perish. . . . Our food wuz bad. Master worked us hard and gave us nuthin. – Louisa Adams, ex-slave from Richmond County, North Carolina (NC1, p.7)

Us never got 'nough to eat, so us keeps stealin' stuff. Us has to. Dey give us de peck of meal to last de week and two, three pound bacon in chunk. Us never have flour or sugar, jus' cornmeal and de meat and 'taters. De niggers has de big box under de fireplace, where dey kep' all de pig and chickens what dey steal, down in salt. – Sarah Ashley, ex-slave from Mississippi (TX1, p.31)

Talkin' 'bout victuals, our eatin' was good. Can't say the same for all places. Some of the plantations half starved their niggers and 'lowanced out their eatin' till they wasn't fittin' for work. They had to slip about to niggers on other places to piece out their meals. They had field calls and other kinds of whoops and hollers, what had a meanin' to 'em. – Cato Carter, ex-slave from Wilcox County, Alabama (TX1, p.147)

Dey feeds us well sometimes, if dey warn't mad at us. Dey has a big trough jes' like de trough for de pigs and dey has a big gourd and dey totes de gourd full of milk and dey breaks de bread in de milk. Den my mammy takes a gourd and fills it and gives it to us chillun. How's we eat it? We had oyster shells for spoons and de slaves comes in from de fields and dey hands is all dirty, and dey is hungry. Dey dips de dirty hands right in de trough and we can't eat none of it. – Adeline Cunningham, ex-slave from Lavaca County, Texas (TX1, p.189)

When the white folks go off they writes on the meal and flour with they fingers. That the way they know if us steal meal. Sometimes they take a stick and write in front of the door so if anybody go out they step on that writin' and the massa know. That the way us larn how to write.

Old massa didn't give 'em much to eat. When they comes in out of the field they goes work for other folks for something to eat.

– Ellen Butler, ex-slave from Beauregard Parish, Louisiana (formerly named Calcasieu Parish) (TX1, p.129)

You know in slave time they had an old woman to cook for the chillen. One day they were gong to have company. This woman that was the boss of the place where the chillen was kept told the old cullud woman to take a piece of bacon and grease the mouths of all the chillen. Then she told a boy to bring them up to these people, and the woman [the guest] said: “Oh, you must feed these chillen good, just look at their mouths!” and the woman [boss] said, “Oh, that’s the way they eat.” They didn’t get meat often. That was just to make them believe they had lots to eat. – Julia Banks, ex-slave from San Antonio, Texas (TX1, p.73)

We mos’ly lived on corn pone and salt bacon de marster give us. We didn’t have no gardens ourselves, ‘cause we wouldn’t have time to work in dem. We worked all day in de fields and den was so tired we couldn’t do nothin’ more. – Green Cumby, ex-slave from Henderson, Texas (TX1, p.186)

The food in many cases that was given the slaves was not given them for their pleasure or by a cheerful giver, but for the simple and practical reason that children would not grow into a large healthy slave unless they were well fed and clothed; and given good warm places in which to live. – Thomas Hall, ex-slave from Orange County, North Carolina (NC1, p.172)

(Interviewer:) There was always enough feed for everyone on the Moore plantation. Mrs. Moore once told Jennie’s mother to always see that her children had sufficient to eat so that they would not have to steal and would therefore grow up to be honorable. As the Grandmother did all the cooking, none of the other servants ever had to cook, not even on Sundays or other holidays such as the Fourth of July. There was no stove in this plantation kitchen, all the cooking was done at the large fireplace where there were a number of hooks called pottracks. The pots, in which the cooking was done, hung from these hooks directly over the fire.

The meals served during the week consisted of vegetables, salt bacon, corn bread, pot liquor, and milk. On Sunday they were served milk, biscuits, vegetables, and sometimes chicken. Jennie Kendricks ate all of her food in the master’s house and says that her food was even better. She was also permitted to go to the kitchen and get food at any time during the day. Sometimes when the [master’s] boys went hunting everyone was given roast ‘possum and other small game. The two male slaves were often permitted to accompany them but were not allowed to handle the guns. None of the slaves had individual gardens of their own as food sufficient for their needs was raised in the master’s garden.

– Jennie Kendricks, ex-slave from Sheram, Georgia (GA3, p.6)

We allus have plenty for to eat, plenty co'nmeal, 'lasses and heavy, brown sugar. We gits flour bread once de week, but lots of butter and milk. For de coffee, we roasts meal bran and for de tea, de sassafras. Den we has veg'tables and fruit dat am raised on de place. De meat mostly am de wil' game, deer and de turkey, but sometimes hawg meat. – Fred Brown, ex-slave from Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana (TX1, p.115)

(Interviewer:) Mr. Lewis states that he and his fellow slaves always had “pretty fair” food. Before they moved to Georgia the rations were issued daily, for the most part an issue consisted of vegetables, rice, beans, meat (pork), all kinds of fish, grits, etc. . . .

(George Lewis:) . . . “After we moved to Georgia . . . [we got] corn bread an' biscuits sometimes – an' it was sometimes too – bacon, milk, all kinds of vegetables an' sicha stuff like dat. De flour dat we made de biscuits out of was de third grade shorts.

The food on Sunday was almost identical with that eaten during the week. However, those who desired to were allowed to hunt as much as they pleased to at night. They were not permitted to carry guns and so when the game was treed the tree had to be cut down in order to get it. It was in this way that the family larder was increased.”

– George Lewis, ex-slave from Pensacola, Florida (GA3, pp.27-28)

Us got provisions 'lowanced to us every Saturday night. If you had two in the family, they 'lowanced you one-half gallon 'lasses and 12 to 15 pounds bacon, and a peck of meal. We have to take the meal and parch it and make coffee out of it. We had our flours. One of them we called biscuit flour and we called it 'shorts.' We had rye and wheat and buck grain.

If they didn't provision you 'nough, you jus' had to slip 'round and git a chicken. That easy 'nough, but grabbin' a pig a sho' 'nough problem. You have to cotch him by the snoot so he won't squeal [so the white folks won't hear], and clomp him tight while you knife him. That ain't stealin', is it? You has to keep right on workin' in the field, if you ain't 'lowanced 'nough, and no nigger like to work with his belly groaning.

– Richard Carruthers, ex-slave from Memphis, Tennessee and Bastrop County, Texas (TX1, pp.143-144)

'Bout dem eatments . . . it was lek dis, dere warn't no fancy victuals lak us thinks us got to have now, but what dere was, dere was plenty of. Most times dere was poke sallet, turnip greens, old blue head collards, cabbages, peas, and 'taters by de wholesale for de slaves to eat and, onct a week, dey rationed us out wheat bread, syrup, brown sugar, and ginger cakes. What dey give chillun de most of was potlicker poured over cornbread curmb in a long trough. For fresh meat, outside of killin' a shoat, a lamb, or a kid [goat] now and den, slaves was 'lowed to go

huntin' a right smart and dey fotch in a good many turkles [turtles], 'possums, rabbits, and fish. Folks didn't know what iron cookstoves was dem days. . . . All our cookin' was done in open fireplaces in big old pots and pans. . . . Was sho' mighty good. – Ed McCree, ex-slave from Oconee County, Georgia (GA3, p.34)

Food was distributed on Sunday morning. Two-and-a-half pounds of meat, a quantity of syrup, and a peck of meal were given each adult for the week. A special ration for Sunday alone was potatoes, buttermilk, and material for biscuits. Each family had its own garden from which a supply of vegetables could always be obtained in season. The smaller children had additional delicacies, for they early learned that the house where produce was kept had holes in the floor which yielded peanuts, etc., when punched with a stick. – Matilda McKinney, ex-slave from near Albany, Georgia (GA3, pp.51-52)

We was allowed three pounds o' meat, one quart o' molasses, grits and other things each week – plenty for us to eat. – William Ballard, ex-slave from near Winnsboro, South Carolina (SC1, p.23)

All food on the colonel's plantation was issued daily from the corn house. Each person was given enough corn to make a sufficient amount of bread for the day when ground. Then they went out and dug their potatoes from the colonel's garden. No meat whatsoever was issued. It was up to the slaves to catch fish, oysters, and other sea food for their meat supply. All those who desired to were permitted to raise chickens, watermelons and vegetables. There was no restriction on any as to what must be done with the produce so raised. It could be sold or kept for personal consumption. – Julia Rush, ex-slave from Saint Simons Island, Georgia (GA3, p.126)

Mammy used ter bake ash-cakes; dey wuz made wid meal, wid a little salt and mixed wid water; den mammy would rake up de ashes in de fire-place; den she would make up de meal in round cakes, and put dem on de hot bricks ter bake; wen dey hed cooked roun' de edges, she would put ashes on de top ob dem, and wen dey wuz nice and brown she took dem out and washed dem off wid water. – Susan Kelly, ex-slave from Virginia (?) (VA, p.37)

Dey fed us beef and veg'tables – any kind, jus' name it – and 'low us sop bread in potlicker till de world look level. Dat good eatin' and all my life I ain't have no better. – Campbell Davis, ex-slave from Harrison County, Texas (TX1, p.201)

SLAVE CLOTHING

In most cases, this appears to have been sufficient. In some situations the slaves were clothed well, in other situations slaves were considerably underdressed. Examples of the worst situations precede examples of the best situations. (References: Slave narratives I studied; Escott, *Slavery Remembered*, 38-39 [regarding clothing being sufficient]. George Rawick's *Sundown to Sunup*, 55, gives a more negative view of the amount of clothes slaves were given, contending that they were clothed "poorly.")

Our clothes were bad. . . . We went barefooted in a way. What I mean by that is, that we had shoes part of the time. We got one pair o' shoes a year. When dey wore out we went barefooted. Sometimes we tied them up with strings, and they were so ragged de tracks looked like bird tracks, where we walked in the road. . . . My brother wore his shoes out, and had none all thu winter. His feet cracked open and bled so bad you could track him by the blood. – Louisa Adams, ex-slave from Richmond County, North Carolina (NC1, p.7)

We ain't had much . . . clothes. – Cornelia Andrews, ex-slave from North Carolina (?) (NC1, p.20)

I slep' on a pallet on the floor [of the Big House?]. They give me a homespun dress onct a year at Christmas time. When company come I had to run and slip on that dress. At other time I wore white chillens' cast-off clothes so wore they was ready to throw away. I had to pin them up with red horse thorns to hide my nakedness. My dress was usually split from hem to neck and I had to wear them till they was strings. Went barefoot summer and winter till the feets crack open. – Temple Cummins, ex-slave from Brookeland, Texas (TX1, p.187)

** We never had much clothes 'ceptin' what was give us by the marster or the mistis. Winter time we never had 'nough to wear nor 'nough to eat. . . . The marster didn't think we needed anything, but jus' a little. – Charlie Moses, ex-slave from Marion County, MS (MS, p.115)

Us half naked all de time. Grown boys went 'round bare footed and in dey shirt tail all de summer. – Savilla Burrell, ex-slave from Jackson Creek, South Carolina (SC1, p.100)

The clothes I wore was some master's old ones. They allus had holes in them. Master he stay drunk nearly all time and was mean. . . . – Frank Bell, ex-slave for a saloon owner in Madisonville, Texas (TX1, p.49)

Old massa give us plenty clothes to keep us good and warm. He sho' did. – Clara Brim, ex-slave from Branch, Louisiana (TX1, p.107)

How'd us slaves git de clothes? We carded de cotton, den de women spin it on a spinnin' wheel. After dat dey sew de gahment togeddah on a sewin' machine. . . .

Dat's how we git de clothes for de 75 slaves. Marster's clothes? We makes dem for de whole fam'ly. De missis send de pattern and de slaves makes de clothes.

– William Branch, ex-slave from Lunenburg County, Virginia (TX1, p.104)

(**) (Interviewer:) She stated that they all wore good clothing and that all of it was made on the plantation with one exception. The servants spun the thread and Mrs. Moore and her daughters did all of the weaving as well as the making of the dresses that were worn on this particular plantation. . . . (Jennie Kendricks:) “This cloth was colored with a dye made from the bark of trees or with a dye that was made from the indigo berry cultivated on the plantation. The dresses that the women wore on working days were made of striped or checked materials while those worn on Sunday were usually white.”

(Interviewer:) She does not know what the men wore on work days as she never came in contact with them. Stockings for all were knitted on the place. The shoes, which were the one exception mentioned above, were made by one Bill Jacobs, an elderly white man who made the shoes for all the plantations in the community. The grown people wore heavy shoes called ‘Brogans’ while those worn by the children were not so heavy and were called ‘Pekers’ because of their narrow appearance. For Sunday wear, all had shoes bought for this purpose. Mr. Moore’s mother was a tailoress and at times, when the men were able to get the necessary material, she made their suits.

– Jennie Kendricks, ex-slave from Sheram, Georgia (GA3, p.5)

Everything us needed was raised on dat plantation ‘cept cotton. Nary a stalk of cotton was growed dar, but jus’ de same our clothes was made out of cloth dat Mistress and her mammy wove out of thread us chillum spun, and Mistess tuk a heap of pains makin’ up our dresses. Durin’ de war, evvybody had to wear homespun, but dere didn’t nobody have no better or prettier dresses den ours, ‘cause Mistress knowed more’n anybody ‘bout dyein’ cloth. – John N. Booth, ex-slave from Jackson County, Georgia (GA3, p.18) (See this reference for the specific dyes used.)

We got good clothes too. . . . All of ‘em was bought. All de chillun wore a long shirt until dey wus too big an’ den dey was given pants an’ dresses. De shoes wus made out of red leather an’ was called brogans. After we moved to Georgia our new marster bought de cloth an’ had all de clothes made on de plantation. – George Lewis, ex-slave from Pensacola, Florida (GA3, p. 28)

De cotton, flax, and wool that our clothes was made out of was growed, spun, wove, and sewed right dar on our plantation. Marse John had a reg'lar seamster what didn't do nothin' else but sew. Summertime us chillun wore shirts that looked lak nightgowns. You jus' pulled one of dem slips over your haid and went on 'cause you was done dressed for de whole week, day and night. Wintertime our clothes was a heap better. Dey give us thick jeans pants, heavy shirts, and brogan shoes wid brass toes. Summertime us all went bar' foots. – Ed McCree, ex-slave from Oconee County, Georgia (GA3, p. 34)

(Interviewer:) On the Hale plantation clothing was issued two times a year, once at the beginning of summer and again at the beginning of the winter season. . . . None of the clothing that was worn on this plantation was bought as everything necessary for the manufacture of clothing was available on the premises. – Amanda McDaniel, ex-slave from Watsonville, Georgia (GA3, p.41)

(Interviewer:) Colonel De Binien always saw that his slaves had sufficient clothing. In the summer months the men were given two shirts, two pairs of pants, and two pairs of underwear. All of these clothes were made of cotton and all were sewed on the plantation. No shoes were worn in the summer. The women were given two dresses, two underskirts, and two pairs of underwear. When the winter season approached another issue of clothes was given. At this time shoes were given. They were made of heavy red leather and were known as 'brogans'. – Julia Rush, ex-slave from Saint Simons Island, Georgia (GA3, pp.126-127)

All of de cloth during slavery time was made on de loom. My mastah had three slaves who worked in de loom house. After de cloth was made, mastah sent hit over town to a white woman who made hit in clothes. We had to knit all our stockings and gloves. We'd plait blades of wheat to make us bonnets. We had to wear wooden bottom shoes. Dere won't no stores, so we growed everything we et, an' we'd make everything we'd wear. – Georgina Giwbs, ex-slave from Virginia (?) (VA, p.17)

SLAVE HOUSING

The hundreds of slave narratives I studied indicate that slave housing may have been at least adequate in most cases. In some situations housing was very substandard. Examples of the worst situations precede examples of the best situations. (Reference: Slave narratives I studied. George Rawick's *Sundown to Sunup*, 55, gives a more negative view of slave housing. Rawick indicates that it was often poor. Escott, in *Slavery Remembered*, 38-39, states that slave descriptions indicate that life's necessities were adequate. He does not assess housing specifically.)

s lived in a log cabin wid a stick chimney. One time de sticks got afire and burnt a big hole in de back of de chimney in cold winter time wid the wind blowin, and dat house was filled wid fire-sparks, ashes, and smoke for weeks 'fore dey tore dat chimney down and built another just like the old one. De bed was nailed to de side of de walls. . . . Jest one room. – Savilla Burrell, ex-slave from Jackson Creek, South Carolina (SC1, p.100)

In them days the boss men had good houses but the niggers had log cabins and they burned down oftentimes. The chimney would cotch fire, 'cause it was made out of sticks and clay and moss. Many the time we have to git up at midnight and push the chimney 'way from the house to keep the house from burnin' up. – Richard Carruthers, ex-slave from Memphis, Tennessee and Bastrop County, Texas (TX1, p.143)

Us live in a log house wid a plank floor and a wooden chimney, dat was always ketchin' afire and de wind comin' through and fillin' de room wid smoke and cinders. It was just one of many others, just lak it, dat made up de quarters. Us had peg beds for de old folks and just pallets on de floor for de chillun. Mattresses was made of wheat straw but de pillows on de bed was cotton. I does 'member dat mammy had a chicken feather pillow she made from de feathers she saved at de kitchen. – Peter Clifton, ex-slave from near Kershaw and Camden, South Carolina (SC1, p.135)

Us slaves lived in shabby houses. Dey builded of logs and have dirt floor. We have a four foot bench. We pull it to a table and set on it. De bed a platform with planks and moss. – Agatha Babino, ex-slave from near Carenco, Louisiana (TX1, p.33)

I worked 'round master's saloon, kep' everything cleaned up after they'd have all night drinkin' parties, men and women. . . .

The law say he done stole me when I'm small child. Master kept me in chains sometimes. He shot several men. . . .

I didn't have no quarters but stays 'round the place and throw old sack down and lay there and sleep. I'm afraid to run, 'cause master say he'd hunt me and kill nigger.

– Frank Bell, ex-slave at a saloon in New Orleans, Louisiana (TX1, p.49)

We live in de quarter bout ½ mile from de white folks house in a one room pole house what was daubed wid dirt. Dere was bout 20 other colored people house dere in de quarter dat was close together en far apart too. De ground been us floor en us fireplace been down on de ground. Take sticks en make chimney cause dere won' no bricks en won' no saw mills to make lumber when I come along. . . . Us just had some kind of

home-made bedstead wid pine straw bed what to sleep on in dem days. Sew croaker sack together en stuff em wid pine straw. Dat how dey made dey mattress. – Sylvia Cannon, ex-slave from South Carolina (SC1, p.125)

Some de houses log house and some plank, but dey all good. Dey well built and had brick chimneys. Dey houses what de wind didn't blow in. Us had beds, too, not dem built in de wall. – Clara Brim, ex-slave from Branch, Louisiana (TX1, p.107)

Our log house was built of logs, trimmed, and had six rooms. It was long, like a cowbarn or chicken house, and my room was third. We had one door to each room, covered over with hides. We dug out one corner for the bed and fenced it up and gathered straw and moss and tore-up corn shucks, and put in the corner to sleep on. . . . It was a warm bed. – Eli Coleman, ex-slave from Kentucky (TX1, p.168)

(Interviewer:) The houses that they lived in were one-roomed structures made of heavy plank instead of logs, with planer floors. At one end of this one-roomed cabin there was a large chimney and fireplace made of rocks, mud, and dirt. In addition to the one door, there was a window at the back. Only one family could live in a cabin as the space was so limited. The furnishings of each cabin consisted of a bed and one or two chairs. The beds were well constructed, a great deal better than some of the beds the ex-slave saw during these days. Regarding mattresses she said, “We took some tick and stuffed it with cotton and corn husks, which had been torn into small pieces and when we got through sewing it looked like a mattress that was bought in a store.”

Light was furnished by lightwood torches and sometimes by the homemade tallow candles. The hot tallow was poured into a candle mold, which was then dipped into a pan of cold water, when the tallow had hardened, the finished product was removed.

– Jennie Kendricks, ex-slave from Sheram, Georgia (GA3, p.6)

Mammy lived in de old kitchen close by de big house 'till dere got to be too many of us; den Marse Gerald built us a house jus' a little piece off from de big house. It was jus' a log house, but Marster had all dem cracks chinked tight wid red mud, and he even had one of dem franklin-back chimblies built to keep our little cabin nice and warm. . . . Deir backs sloped out in de middle to throw out de heat into de room and keep too much of it from gwine straight up de flue. Our beds in our cabin was corded jus' lak dem up at de big house, but us slept on straw ticks and, let me tell you, dey sho slept good atter a hard day's wuk. – John N. Booth, ex-slave from Jackson County, Georgia (GA3, p.17)

De house we stay in a two room house wid one of dese end chimney. All sleep in de same room en cook en eat in de other room. My

bed on one side en Sue bed on de other side. Put chillum on quilts down on de floor in de other end of de room. – Sara Brown, ex-slave from near Catfish Swamp, South Carolina (SC1, p.96)

(Interviewer:) The slave living quarters were located in the rear of the ‘big house’. . . . All were made of logs and, according to Mr. Lewis, all were substantially built. Wooden pegs were used in the place of nails and the cracks left in the walls were sealed with mud and sticks. These cabins were very comfortable and only one family was allowed to a cabin. All floors were made of wood. The only furnishings were the beds and one or two benches or bales which served as chairs. In some respects these beds resembled a scaffold nailed to the side of a house. Others were made of heavy wood and had four legs to stand upon. For the most part, however, one end of the bed was nailed to the wall. The mattresses were made out of any kind of material a slave could secure, burlap sacks, ausenberg, etc. After a large bag had been made with this material it was stuffed with straw. Heavy cord running from side to side was used for the bed springs. The end of the cord was tied to a handle at the end of the bed. This permitted the occupant to tighten the cord when it became loosened. A few cooking utensils completed the furnishings. All illumination was secured by means of the door and the open fire place. – George Lewis, ex-slave from Pensacola, Florida (GA3, p.28)

SLAVE OWNER HOUSING

The style of these houses seemed to vary to some extent. Some owners had mansions with high columns, others had large but more modest structures. The owner’s house was usually called “the Big House” or in some cases “the Great House.”

Marse Gerald had a nice four-room house wid a hall, all de way through it. It even had two big old fireplaces on one chimbly. . . . Dat chimbly was made out of home-made bricks. Marster’s fambly had deir cookin’ done in a open fireplace lak evvybody else for a long time and den jus’ ‘fore de big war he bought a stove. . . and us felt plum rich ‘cause dere warn’t many folks dat had stoves back in dem days. – Nicey Kinney, ex-slave from Jackson County, Georgia (GA3, p.17)

(Interviewer:) [The master’s house was] the usual two-story white house finished with high columns and surrounded by trees. – Matilda McKinney, ex-slave from near Albany, Georgia (GA3, pp.51-52)

Marster have a lovely house, all ceiled and plastered. It was a log house but it was make all beautiful inside with mirrors and on the board was lots of silver and china and silver spoons with the gol’ linin’s and part of my job was to keep ‘em sparklin’. – Charlotte Beverly, an ex-slave from Montgomery County, Texas (TX1, p.66)

The plantation house was a large brick house over-looking the river from a hill, a porch on three sides, two-stories and attic. In the attic slept the house servants and coachman. – Mary James, an ex-slave from a plantation on the James River in Virginia (MD, p.39)