

Interviewer Beulah Sherwood HaggPerson interviewed Mrs. Cora Gillem Age 86

1023 Arch Street, Little Rock, Arkansas

----- [Scratching Pacified Master.] -----

I have never been entirely sure of my age. I have kept it since I was married and they called me fifteen. That was in '66 or '67. Anyhow, I'm about 86, and what difference does one year make, one way or another. I lived with master and mistress in Greenville, Mississippi. They didn't have children and kept me in the house with them all the time. Master was always having a bad spell and take to his bed. It always made him sick to hear that freedom was coming closer. He just couldn't stand to hear about that. I always remember the day he died. It was the fall of Vicksburg. When he took a spell, I had to stand by the bed and scratch his head for him, and fan him with the other hand. He said that scratching pacified him.

No ma'am, oh no indeedy, my father was not a slave. Can't you tell by me that he was white? My brother and one sister were free folks because their white father claimed them. Brother was in college in Cincinnati and sister was in Oberlin college. My father was Mr. McCarroll from Ohio. He came to Mississippi to be overseer on the plantation of the Warren family where my mother lived. My grandmother - on mother's side, was full blood Cherokee. She came from North Carolina. In early days my mother and her brothers and sisters were stolen from their home in North Carolina and taken to Mississippi and sold for slaves. You know the Indians could follow trails

better than other kind of folks, and she tracked her children down and stayed in the south. My mother was only part Negro; so was her brother, my uncle Tom. He seemed all Indian. You know, the Cherokees were peaceable Indians, until you got them mad. Then they was the fiercest fighters of any tribes.

Wait a minute, lady. I want to tell you first why I didn't get educated up north like my white brother and sister. Just about time for me to be born my papa went to see how they was getting along in school. He left my education money with mama. He sure did want all his children educated. I never saw my father. He died that trip. After awhile mama married a colored man name Lee. He took my school money and put me in the cotton patch. It was still during the war time when my white folks moved to Arkansas; it was Desha county where they settle. Now I want to tell you about my uncle Tom. Like I said, he was half Indian. But the Negro part didn't show hardly any. There was something about uncle Tom that made both white and black be afraid of him. His master was young, like him. He was name Tom Johnson, too.

You see, the Warrens, what own my mother, and the Johnsons, were all sort of one family. Mistress Warren and Mistress Johnson were sisters, and owned everything together. The Johnsons lived in Kentucky, but came to Arkansas to farm. Master Tom taught his slaves to read. They say uncle Tom was the best reader, white or black, for miles. That was what got him in trouble. Slaves was not allowed to read. They didn't want them to know that freedom was coming. No ma'am! Any time a crowd of slaves gathered, overseers and bushwhackers came and chased them; broke up the crowd.