

**BACKGROUND:** Harry Smith was born in the village of Fairfield, Nelson County, Kentucky on October 1, 1819. His grandfather, a native of Virginia, was forced to migrate west to Kentucky with his enslaver, a man named Higby. After emancipation, Smith settled in Osceola County, Michigan.

In 1891, Smith recorded his recollections. He wrote about his family history, his birth, boyhood, early life, and experiences of enslavement. Although many of his remembrances include anecdotes about others enslaved in Kentucky, his narrative focuses largely on enslaved family life on large plantations. His reflections include some humorous and pleasant memories, but also instances of mistreatment and abuse—showing the full spectrum of his experiences.

The following excerpt comes directly from his book, *Fifty Years of Slavery in the United States of America*.

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**AN ACCOUNT OF TWO OF THE MOST WONDERFUL SLAVE BUYERS AND SELLERS IN THE WHOLE SOUTH.**

Atkinson and Richardson were two southern men, living in New Orleans. They made annual tours to Kentucky in the spring attending all the resorts of Tennessee and Kentucky buying all the slaves they could find, large and small, they could get. When the planters would learn of their presence in the vicinity they would



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tell their negroes who would not toe the line that they would sell them to go south and drink Mississippi water.

When the slaves were aware of the presence of these two slave buyers a number of them would run away to the hills and remain often a year before they returned. Some would reach Canada for fear of being sold.

Going to New Orleans was called the N----- Hell, few ever returning who went there. Usually those who ran away when caught were sold. As fast as they were brought back by Richardson and Atkins, they were taken to Louisville and placed in the negro pen and guarded until fall, when they were fettered, chained together and started on their long journey South.

Mr. Smith's old Massa Midcalf, as the reader is aware, kept a large hotel and when they were on their way with droves of negroes every negro that would stop there that night would be ordered not to leave the plantation under penalty of death. All night long chains would rattle. Some were crying for a mother left behind, some for an only child, and altogether it made a scene almost indescribable; and all the consolation they could hear would be the crack of the bull-whip of some watchman and floods of profanity. Some were tired out by their bloody feet walking on the frozen ground, and were compelled to dry up. "I will take you where it is warm enough—where you d--m backs will crack instead of your feet." Many were so crippled they could not walk and were thrown into some old wagon and conveyed in this manner to their journey's end. Water and mud made no difference; they were compelled to move right along.

At that time there were no turnpikes. The roads were

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all dirt and rock roads. After reaching Louisville they were put in a negro pen—barracks where they could not get away. Then these traders had them all washed and each one had a new suit of clothes, consisting of hard time cotton, this was for the man's breeches and shirts; and then cheap calico for the woman and a hard-time shirt constituted the woman's clothing. No shoes on any of them. There were two negro pens in Louisville. Nat Garrison owned one of them and Artiburn owned the other. They were marched out hundreds at a time after dressing and put on the steam boats and taken down the river.

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### ***A SHORT HISTORY OF YOUNG BRYANT SALONE.***

After the children Smith had taken care of had all become of age and old Bryant Salone had died, Smith then fell to his son, young Bryant. The reader has already had a short history of his old Massa.

The children having reached the age when they were their own bosses if Smith's master chose to he could sell him. The negroes were divided up on their becoming of age and Smith fell to young Bryant Salone. There was a number of slave owners who intended to sell slaves to go to New Orleans, as they could get good prices for them. Massa Salone, among the rest, intended to sell some, and Smith being extra shrewd he thought he could get a good price for him, as Smith would make a good overseer for he was such a great worker himself, and Massa Salone mentioned this to him. Smith informed him that he did not want to go south and leave his wife and family. Massa Salone still insisted upon his going, and used very smooth language, telling him he wanted to make an overseer of him. He said that he did not want to, neither should he go. Smith, determined not to go down in the cotton picking, began to arrange to go to Canada. A white woman

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by the name of Jennie Hartman, who used to be his misses, offered to take her uncle's horse and buggy and go to Louisville, cross the Ohio river and drive through to Canada, and pay all expenses. Massa Salone hearing of this scheme, and knowing Smith's perseverance and cunning, told him he had changed his mind. If he would find some one to buy him and pay eleven hundred dollars for him he might stay.

Smith, not wishing to go Canada and leave his family, started out and at once made his way to Massa Hays, a planter, whom he was acquainted with, and who had the reputation of being good to his slaves. On reaching Massa Hays' he informed him of his mission. Massa Hays seemed to be pleased to learn that he could get Smith, and at once told him to go back and tell his master he would pay the amount asked in gold. Massa Salone being informed of this went over and received the money. Taking Harry by the hand, and speaking to him, said, "Now, Harry, you have been a good negro, continue, and obey your master." This was all the satisfaction he received after being under the Salones management for forty years, never receiving a penny for his services while there.

A large number of slaves were sent away south, and among the number not one ever returned among Smith's acquaintances. At the expiration of two years Massa Salone, who went with them, was taken with the Yellow fever which resulted in his death and he was brought back and buried on his father's plantation.