

Sara Colquitt was born in Richmond, Virginia, and says that she is 100-years old. She was interviewed by Preston Klein in Opelika, Alabama in 1937.



Sara Colquitt, Age 100.

“Mr. Bill Slaughter and Miss Mary Slaughter was our marster and mistess and dey had two chilluns, Marsa Robert and Marsa Brat,” Sara said. “I had four brothers and sisters, Tate, Sam, Jennie, and Tenner. Us lived in log cabins wid dirt floors and dey was built in two long rows. Us beds was nailed to de wall at one end and us used corn shucks and pine straw for mattresses.

“Miss Mary was good to us, but us had to work hard and late. I worked in de fields every day from “fore daylight to almost plumb dark. I usta take my littlest baby wid me. I had two chilluns, and I’d tie hit up to a tree limb to keep off de ants and bugs whilst I hoed and worked de furrow. All us n----- was fed from de big kitchen and wasn’t hongry, but sometimes us would steal more food dan was give us anyhow.

“I was one of de spinners, too, and had to do six cuts to de reel at de time and do hit at night plenty times. Us clothes was homespun orsanburgs, [osnaburgs] what us would dye, sometimes solid and sometimes checked.

“Sides working de fields and spinning, sometimes I’d hope wid de cooking up at de Big House when de real cook was sick or us had a passel of company. Us cooked on a great, big fireplace what had arms hanging out over de coals to hang pots on to bile. Den us had three-legged skilletts what set right over de coals for frying and sech like. Us cooked sho’ ‘nuff bread in dem days, ash cakes, de best thing you ever et. Dey ain’t nothing like dat dese days.

“I was sold oncet before I left Virginia. Den I was brung down to Alabama and sold from de block for \$1,600 to Mr. Sam Rainey, at Camp Hill, Ala. I still worked in de fields, but I would cook for de white folks and hope around de Big House on special ‘casions. Our overseer was Mr. Green Ross, and he was a bad one, too. Mean, my goodness.’ He’d whup you in a minute. He’d put you in de buck, tie your feet and den set out to whup you right.

“He would get us slaves up ‘fore day blowing on his big horn and us would work ‘twell plumb dark. All de little n-----’d get up, too, and go up to de Big House to be fed from wooden bowls. Den dey’d be called ag’in ‘fore us come from de fields and put to bed by dark. I useta stop by de spring house to get de milk, it was good cold too, and tote it up to de Big House for dinner.

Source: Interview with Sara Colquitt, Works Progress Administration Slave Narratives, Alabama, vol. 1, (Washington D.C.: The Federal Writers Project, 1941), 87-89. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn010/>. Image: Sara Colquitt, Age 100, United States Alabama, 1936. Between 1936 and 1938. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesnp010087/>.

A Note on Language of the WPA Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938

These oral histories reflect both the experiences of formerly enslaved people and the historical moment in which the interviews were recorded. Interviewers often tried to record the interviewee’s spoken language as they heard it. But this process was not as straightforward as it seems. Historians recognize that “what most interviewers assumed to be ‘the usual’ patterns of speech of their informants’ speech was unavoidably influenced by preconceptions and stereotypes.” For more information: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/articles-and-essays/note-on-the-language-of-the-narratives/>