



BACKGROUND: *Louisa Picquet was born in 1828 near Columbia, South Carolina. Her mother, Elizabeth Ramsey, was only fifteen when she gave birth to Louisa. Elizabeth was described as a “quadroon” slave, which means that only one of her grandparents was Black. Louisa’s father, a white man named John Randolph, enslaved her mother. This made Louisa an “octoroon,” or someone with one Black and seven white grandparents.*

In 1828, when Louisa was only two months old, Randolph sold Elizabeth and her daughter to David R. Cook who lived in Jasper County, Georgia. Years later, when Cook got into financial troubles, he fled his creditors taking the people he enslaved to Mobile, Alabama. In Mobile, young Louisa was hired out as a cook and domestic servant.

When Cook’s creditors caught up with him, they forced him to sell his property to pay his debts. Mother and daughter were sold separately. Cook sold Elizabeth to Colonel Albert Clinton Horton, of Wharton, Texas. John Williams, a man in his late forties, bought Louisa and took her to New Orleans. Louisa was thirteen years old when Williams purchased her.

The Reverend Hiram Mattison, an ardent abolitionist, interviewed Picquet. Much of the published narrative focuses on Mattison’s questions and Picquet’s answers, which many historians think were transcribed verbatim, alongside Mattison’s commentary.

The following account, in which Louisa describes her sale and life with Williams, is from the published narrative.

Page 16

**CHAPTER VI.
THE FAMILY SOLD AT AUCTION—LOUISA BOUGHT BY A “NEW
ORLEANS GENTLEMAN,” AND WHAT CAME OF IT.**

Q.—“How did you say you come to be sold?”

A.—“Well, you see, Mr. Cook made great parties, and go off to watering-places, and get in debt, and had to break up [fail], and then he took us to Mobile, and hired the most of us out, so the men he owe should not find us, and sell us for the debt. Then, after a while, the sheriff came from Georgia after Mr. Cook’s debts, and found us all, and took us to auction, and sold us. My mother and brother was sold to Texas, and I was sold to New Orleans.”

Q.—“How old were you, then?”

A.—“Well, I don’t know exactly, but the auctioneer said I wasn’t quite fourteen. I didn’t know myself.”

Q.—“How old was your brother?”

A.—“I suppose he was about two months old. He was little bit of baby.”

Q.—“Where were you sold?”

A.—“In the city of Mobile.”

Q.—“In a yard? In the city?”

A.—“No. They put all the men in one room, and all the women in another; and then whoever want to buy come and examine, and ask you whole lot of questions. They began to take the clothes off of me, and a gentleman said they needn’t do that, and told them to take me out. He said he knew I was a virtuous girl, and he’d buy me, anyhow. He didn’t strip me only just under my shoulders.”

Q.—“Were there any others there white like you?”

A.—“Oh yes, plenty of them. There was only Lucy of our lot, but others!”

Q.—“Were others stripped and examined?”

A.—“Well, not quite naked, but just same.”

Q.—“You say the gentleman told them to ‘take you out.’ What did he mean by that?”

Page 17

A.—“Why, take me out of the room where the women and girls were kept; where they examine them—out where the auctioneer sold us.”

Q.—“Where was that? In the street, or in a yard?”

A.—“At the market, where the block is?”

Q.—“What block?”

A.—“My! don’t you know? The stand, where we have to get up?”

Q.—“Did *you* get up on the stand?”

A.—“Why, of course; we all have to get up to be seen.”

Q.—“What else do you remember about it?”

A.—“Well, they first begin at upward of six hundred for me, and then some bid fifty more, and some twenty-five more, and that way.”

Q.—“Do you remember any thing the auctioneer said about you when he sold you?”

A.—“Well, he said he could not recommend me for any thing else only that I was a good-lookin’ girl, and a good nurse, and kind and affectionate to children; but I was never used to any hard work. He told them they could see that. My hair was quite short, and the auctioneer spoke about it, but said, ‘You see it good quality, and give it a little time, it will grew out again. You see Mr. Cook had my hair cut off. My hair grew fast, and look so much better than Mr. Cook’s daughter, and he fancy I had better hair than his daughter, and so he had it cut off to make a difference.’”

Q.—“Well, how did they sell you and your mother? that is, which was sold first?”

A.—“Mother was put up the first of our folks. She was sold for splendid cook, and Mr. Horton, from Texas, bought her and the baby, my brother. Then Henry, the carriage-driver, was put up, and Mr. Horton bought him, and then two field-hands, Jim and Mary. The women there tend mills and drive ox wagons, and plough, just like men. Then I was sold next. Mr. Horton run me up to fourteen hundred dollars. He wanted I should go with my mother. Then some one said ‘fifty.’ Then Mr. Williams allowed that he did not care what they bid, he was going to have me anyhow. Then he bid fifteen hundred.

Page 18

Mr. Horton said 'twas no use to bid any more, and I was sold to Mr. Williams. I went right to New Orleans then."

Q.—"Who was Mr. Williams?"

A.—"I didn't know then, only he lived in New Orleans. Him and his wife had parted, some way—he had three children boys. When I was going away I heard some one cryin', and prayin' the Lord to go with her only daughter, and protect me. I felt pretty bad then, but hadn't no time only to say good-bye. I wanted to go back and get the dress I bought with the half-dollars, I thought a good deal of that; but Mr. Williams would not let me go back and get it. He said he'd get me plenty of nice dresses. Then I thought mother could cut it up and make dresses for my brother, the baby. I knew she could not wear it; and I had a thought, too, that she'd have it to remember me."

Q.—"It seems like a dream, don't it?"

A.—"No; it seems fresh in my memory when I think of it—no longer than yesterday. Mother was right on her knees, with her hands up, prayin' to the Lord for me. She didn't care who saw her: the people all lookin' at her. I often thought her prayers followed me, for I never could forget her. Whenever I wanted any thing real bad after that, my mother was always sure to appear to me in a dream that night, and have plenty to give me, always."

Q.—"Have you never seen her since?"

A.—"No, never since that time. I went to New Orleans, and she went to Texas. So I understood."

Q.—"Well, how was it with you after Mr. Williams bought you?"

A.—"Well, he took me right away to New Orleans."

Q.—"How did you go?"

A.—"In a boat, down the river. Mr. Williams told me what he bought me for, soon as we started for New Orleans. He said he was getting old, and when he saw me he thought he'd buy me, and end his days with me. He said if I behave myself he'd treat me well: but, if not, he'd whip me almost to death."

Q.—"How old was he?"

Page 19

A.—"He was over forty; I guess pretty near fifty. He was gray headed. That's the reason he was always so jealous. He never let me go out anywhere."

Q.—"Did you never go to church?"

A.—"No, sir; I never darken a church door from the time he bought me till after he died. I used to ask him to let me go to church. He would accuse me of some object, and said there was more rascality done there than anywhere else. He'd sometimes say, 'Go on, I guess you've made your arrangements; go on, I'll catch up with you.' But I never dare go once."

Q.—"Had you any children while in New Orleans?"

A.—"Yes; I had four."

Q.—"Who was their father?"

A.—“Mr. Williams.”

Q.—“Was it known that he was living with you?”

A.—“Every body knew I was housekeeper, but he never let on that he was the father of my children. I did all the work in his house—nobody there but me and the children.”

Q.—“What children?”

A.—“My children and his. You see he had three sons.”

Q.—“How old were his children when you went there?”

A.—“I guess the youngest was nine years old. When he had company, gentlemen folks, he took them to the hotel. He never have no gentlemen company home. Sometimes he would come and knock, if he stay out later than usual time; and if I did not let him in in a minute, when I would be asleep, he’d come in and take the light, and look under the bed, and in the wardrobe, and all over, and then ask me why I did not let him in sooner. I did not know what it meant till I learnt his ways.”

Q.—“Were your children mulattoes?”

A.—“No, sir! They were all white. They look just like him. The neighbors all see that. After a while he got so disagreeable that I told him, one day, I wished he would sell me, or ‘put me in his pocket’—that’s the way we say—because I had no peace at all. I rather die than live in that way. Then he got awful mad, and said nothin’ but death should separate

Page 20

us; and, if I run off, he’d blow my brains out. Then I thought, if that be the way, all I could do was just to pray for him to die.”

Q.—“Where did you learn to pray?”

A.—“I first begin to pray when I was in Georgia, about whippin’—that the Lord would make them forget it, and not whip me: and it seems if when I pray I did not get so hard whippin’.”