

Cornelia Andrews was interviewed by Mary A. Hicks. At the time of the interview, she lived in Smithfield, Johnston County, North Carolina. She was 87 years old.

“Yo’ know dat dar wuz a big slave market in Smithfield dem days, dar wuz also a Jail, an’ a whippin’ post. I ‘members a man named Rough somethin’ or other, what bought forty er fifty slaves at de time an’ carried ‘em ter Richmond to re-sell. He had four big black horses hooked ter a cart, an’ behind dis cart he chained de slaves, an’ dey had ter walk, or trot all de way ter Richmond. De little ones Mr. Rough would throw up in de cart an’ off dey’d go north. Dey said dat der wuz one day at Smithfield dat three hundret slaves wuz sold on de block. Dey said dat peoples came from fer an’ near, eben from New Orleans ter dem slave sales. Dey said dat way ‘fore I wuz borned dey uster strip dem n----- stark naked an’ gallop ‘em ober de square so dat de buyers could see dat dey warn’t scared nor deformed. “While I could ‘member dey’d sell de mammies ‘way from de babies, an’ dere wuzn’t no cryin’ about it whar de marster would know ‘bout it nother. Why? Well, dey’d git beat black an’ blue, dat’s why.

Source: Interview with Cornelia Andrews, Works Progress Administration Slave Narratives, North Carolina, vol. XI, part 1, (Washington D.C.: The Federal Writers Project, 1941), 27-31. <https://memory.loc.gov/mss/mesn/111/111.pdf>

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/>