

Jenny Proctor, 87, was born in Alabama in 1850. She was enslaved by the Proctor family and was forced to begin working as a young girl. As soon as she was old enough, she was forced to labor in the cotton fields alongside adults. She and her husband John Proctor moved to Texas after emancipation and settled in Leon County near the old town of Buffalo. They worked as sharecroppers. After her husband's death, she moved to San Angelo with her son.

“Sometimes he would sell some of de slaves off of dat big auction block to de highest bidder when he could git enough fer one.

“When he go to sell a slave he feed dat one good for a few days, den when he goes to put ‘em up on de auction block he takes a meat skin and greases all ‘round dat n-----’s mouth and makes ‘em look like dey been eatin’ plenty meat and sich like and was good and strong and able to work. Sometimes he sell de babes from de breas’ and den again he sell de mothers from de babes and de husbands and de wives, and so on. He wouldn’t let ‘em holler much when de folks be sold away. He say, ‘I have you whooped if you don’t hush.’ Dey sho’ loved dere six chillun though. Dey wouldn’ want no body buyin’ dem.



Jenny Proctor, Age 87

SOURCE: *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 16, Texas, Part 3, Lewis-Ryles*. 1936. Manuscript/Mixed Material.
Image: *Jennie Proctor, Age 87*. United States Texas, 1936. Between 1936 and 1938. Photograph.
<https://www.loc.gov/item/mesnp163208b/>.

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/>