

Laura Clark was interviewed by Ruby Pickens Tartt. At the time of the interview, Ms. Clark was eighty-six years old. According to the interviewer, she lived in a cabin on the outskirts of Livingston, Alabama.



Laura Clark, Age 87.

"I was born on Mr. Pleasant Powell's place in North Ca'lina, and when I was 'bout six or seven years ole, I reckon hit 'twas, Mr. Garret from right up yonder in de bend 'bout eight miles from Livingston gwine no'th on de Livingston and Epes road, bought ten of us chillun in North Ca'lina and sont two white men, and one was Mr. Skinner, to fotch us back in waggins. En he fotch ole Julie Powell and Henry to look atter us. Wa'n't none of dem ten chillun no kin to me, and he never bought my mammy, so I had to leave her behine.

"I recollect Mammy said to old Julie, 'Take keer my baby chile (dat was me) and iffen I never sees her no mo' raise her for God.' Den she fell off de waggin where us was all settin' and roll over on de groun' jes' acryin'. But us was eatin' candy what dey done give us for to keep us quite, and I didn't have sense 'nuff for to know what ailed Mammy, but I knows now and I never seed her no mo' in dis life.

When I heered from her atter S'render she done dead and buried.

Her name was

Rachel Powell. My

pappy's name I don't know ca'se he done been sole to somewhars else when I was too little to recollect. But my mammy was de mother of twenty-two chillun and she had twins in her lap when us driv' off. My gran' Mammy said when I lef' 'Pray, Laura, and be er good gal, and mine bofe white and black. Ev'body will lack you and iffen you never see me no mo' pray to meet me in heaven. Den she cried. Her name was Rose Powell.

"Us all started den for Mr. Garrett's plantation down yonder in de bend, ten chillun and two ole uns, and two white men, and us was travellin' solid a month. Fuss thing Ole Marsa say was 'Now be good ter dese motherless chillun.' Den he went to war, and de overseers forgot all 'bout dey promise. When Ole Marsa come back he done got his arm shot off, but he let bofe dem overseers go, ca'se dey done whupped dat ole 'oman what come wid us to deaf. She brought her two little boys, Colvin and 'Lias, but Joe, dey pappy, didn't come—he was sole 'fo Lias was bawn. Joe never seed 'Lias.



Laura Clark's House.

Source: Interview with Laura Clark, Works Progress Administration Slave Narratives, Alabama, vol. 1, (Washington D.C.: The Federal Writers Project, 1941), 72-75. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn010/>. Images: Laura Clark, Age 87. United States Alabama, 1936. Between 1936 and 1938. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesnp010072a/>. Bottom Right, Laura Clark's house. United States Alabama, 1936. Between 1936 and 1938. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesnp010072b/>.

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/>