Florida Slave Narratives: Scott, Anna

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Anna Scott, an ex-slave who now lives in Jacksonville near the intersection of Moncrief and Edgewood Avenues, was a member of one of the first colonization groups that went to the West coast of Africa following the emancipation of the slaves in this country.

The former slave was born at Dove City, South Carolina, on Jan. 28, 1846, of a half-breed Cherokee-and-Negro mother and Anglo-Saxon father. Her father owned the plantation adjoining that of her master.

When she reached the adolescent age Anna was placed under the direct care of her mistress, by whom she was given direct charge of the dining-room and entrusted with the keys to the provisions and supplies of the household.

A kindred love grew between the slave girl and her mistress; she recalls that everywhere her mistress went she was taken also. She was kept in 'the big house'. She was not given any education, though, as some of the slaves on nearby plantations were.

Religion was not denied to the former slave and her fellows. Mrs. Abigail Dever[TR:?], her owner, permitted the slaves to attend revival and other services. The slaves were allowed to occupy the balcony of the church in Dove City, while the whites occupied the main floor. The slaves were forbidden to sing, talk, or make any other sound, however, under penalty of severe beatings.

Those of the slaves who 'felt the sperrit' during a service must keep silence until after the service, when they could 'tell it to the deacon', a colored man who would listen to the confessions or professions of religion of the slaves until late into the night. The Negro deacon would relay his converts to the white minister of the church, who would meet them in the vestry room at some specified time.

Some of the questions that would be asked at these meetings in the vestry room would be:

"What did you come up here for?"

"Because I got religion".

"How do you know you got religion?"

"Because I know my sins are forgive".

"How do you know your sins are forgiven?"

"Because I love Jesus and I love everybody".

"Do you want to be baptized?"

"Yes sir."

"Why do you want to be baptized?"

"Cause it will make me like Jesus wants me to be".

When several persons were 'ready', there would be a baptism in a nearby creek or river. After this, slaves would be permitted to hold occasional servives of their own in the log house that was sometimes used as a school.

Mrs. Scott remembers vividly the joy that she felt and other slaves expressed when first news of their emancipation was brought to them. Both she and her mistress were fearful, she says; her mistress because she did not know what she would do without her slaves, and Anna because she thought the Union soldiers would harm Mrs. Dove. When the chief officer of the soldiers came to the home of her mistress, she says, he demanded entrance in a gruff voice. Then he saw a ring upon Mrs. Dove's finger and asked: "Where did you get this?" When told that the ring belonged to her husband, who was dead, the officer turned to his soldiers and told them that they should "get back; she's alright!"

Provisions intended for the Confederate armies were broken open by the Union soldiers and their followers, and Anna's mother, to protect her master, organized groups of slaves to 'tote the meat from the box cars and hide it in dugouts under the mistress' house'. This meat was later divided between Negroes and whites.

A Provost Judge followed the advance of the army, and he obtained a list of all of the slaves held by each master. Mrs. Dove gave her list to the official, who called each slave by name and asked what that slave had done on the plantation. He asked, also, whether any payment had been made to them since the Emancipation Proclamation had been signed, and when answered in the negative told them that 'You are free now and must be paid for all of the work you have done since the Proclamation was signed and that you will do in the future. Don't you work for anybody without pay'.

The Provost Judge also told the slaves that they might leave if they liked, and Anna was among those who left. She went to visit the husband of her mother in Charleston. With her mother and five other children, Anna crossed rivers on log rafts and rode on trains to Charleston.

Elias Mumford was Anna's step-father in Charleston, and after spending a year there with him the entire family joined a colonizing expedition to West Africa. There were 650 in the expedition, and it left in 1867. Transportation was free.

The trip took several weeks, but finally the small ship landed at Grand Bassa. Mumford did not like the place, however, and continued on to Monrovia, Liberia. He did not like Monrovia, either, and tried several other ports before being told that he would have to get off, anyway. This was at Harper Cape, W. Africa.

Here he almost immediately began an industry that was to prove lucrative. Oysters were 'large as saucers', according to Anna, and while the family gathered these he would burn them and extract lime from them. This he mixed with the native clay and made brick. In addition to his brick-making Mumford cut trees for lumber, and with his own brick and lumber would construct houses and structures. One such structure brought him $1100.00.

Another manner in which Mumford added to his growing wealth was through the cashing of checks for the Missionaries of the section. Ordinarily they would have to send these back to the United States to be cashed, and when he offered to cash them--at a discount—they eagerly utilized the opportunity to save time; this was a convenience for them and more wealth for Mumford.

Anna found other things besides happiness in her eight years in Africa. There were death, sickness, and pestilences. She mentions among the latter the African ants, some of which reached huge proportions. Most dreaded were the Mission ants, which infested every house, building and structure. Sometimes buildings had to be burned to get rid of them. The bite of these ants was so serious that after sixty years Anna still exhibits places on her feet where the ants left their indelible traces. Another of the ant pests was the Driver ant, so large, powerful and stubborn that even bodies of water did not stop them. They would join themselves together above the surface of the water and serve as bridges for the passage of the other ants. The Driver ants moved in swarms and their approach could be seen at great distances. When they were seen to be coming toward a settlement the natives would close their doors and windows and build fires around their homes to avoid them. These fires had to be kept burning for weeks.

Eight and more persons died a day from the African fever during the early colonization attempts; three of these in Anna's family alone were victims of it. It was generally believed that if a victim of the fever became wet by dew he was sure to die.

After eight years Mumford and the remainder of his family returned to America, where the accrued checks he possessed for cashing made him reasonably wealthy. Anna married Robert Scott and moved to Jacksonville, where she has lived since.

At ninety-one she still occupies the little farm on the outskirts of Jacksonville that was purchased with the money left to her out of her mother's inheritance (from the African transactions of Mumford) and Robert's post-slavery savings, and in front of her picturesque little cottage spins yarns for the neighbors of her early experiences.

Source:

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