Florida Slave Narratives: Jackson, Rev. Squires

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Lying comfortably in a bed encased with white sheets, Rev. Squires Jackson, former slave and minister of the gospel living at 706 Third Street cheerfully related the story of his life.

Born in a weather-beaten shanty in Madison, Fla. September 14, 1841 of a large family, he moved to Jacksonville at the age of three with the "Master" and his mother.

Very devoted to his mother, he would follow her into the cotton field as she picked or hoed cotton, urged by the thrashing of the overseer's lash. His master, a prominent political figure of that time was very kind to his slaves, but would not permit them to read and write. Relating an incident after having learned to read and write, one day as he was reading a newspaper, the master walked upon him unexpectingly and demanded to know what he was doing with a newspaper. He immediately turned the paper upside down and declared "Confederates done won the war." The master laughed and walked away without punishing him. It la interesting to know that slaves on this plantation were not allowed to sing when they were at work, but with all the vigilance of the overseers, nothing could stop those silent songs of labor and prayers for freedom.

On Sundays the boys on the plantation would play home ball and shoot marbles until church time. After church a hearty meal consisting of rice and salt picked pork was the usual Sunday fare cooked in large iron pots hung over indoor hearths. Sometimes coffee, made out of parched corn meal, was added as an extra treat.

He remembers the start of the Civil war with the laying of the Atlantic Cable by the "Great Eastern" being nineteen years of age at the time. Hearing threats of the War which was about to begin, he

ran away with his brother to Lake City, many times hiding in trees and groves from the posse that was looking for him. At night he would cover up his face and body with spanish moss to sleep. One night he hid in a tree near a creek, over-slept himself, in the morning a group of white women fishing near the creek saw him and ran to tell the men, fortunately however he escaped.

After four days of wearied travelling being guided by the north star and the Indian instinct inherited from his Indian grandmother, he finally reached Lake City. Later reporting to General Scott, he was informed that he was to act as orderly until further ordered. On Saturday morning, February 20, 1861, General Scott called him to his tent and said "Squire; I have just had you appraised for $1000 and you are to report to Col. Guist in Alachua County for service immediately." That very night he ran away to Wellborn where the Federals were camping. There in a horse stable were wounded colored soldiers stretched out on the filthy ground. The sight of these wounded men and the feeble medical attention given them by the Federals was so repulsive to him, that he decided that he didn't want to join the Federal Army. In the silent hours of the evening he stole away to Tallahassee, throughly convinced that War wasn't the place for him. While in the horse shed make-shift hospital, a white soldier asked one of the wounded colored soldiers to what regiment he belonged, the negro replied "54th Regiment, Massachusetts."

At that time, the only railroad was between Lake City and Tallahassee which he had worked on for awhile. At the close of the war he returned to Jacksonville to begin work as a bricklayer. During this period, Negro skilled help was very much in demand.

The first time he saw ice was in 1857 when a ship brought some into this port. Mr. Moody, a white man, opened an icehouse at the foot of Julia Street. This was the only icehouse in the city at that time.

On Sundays he would attend church. One day he thought he heard the call of God beseeching him to preach. He began to preach in 1868, and was ordained an elder in 1874.

Some of the interesting facts obtained from this slave of the fourth generation were: (1) Salt was obtained by evaporating sea water, (2) there were no regular stoves, (3) cooking was done by hanging iron pots on rails in the fireplaces, (4) an open well was used to obtain water, (5) flour was sold at $12.00 a barrell, (6) "shin-plasters" was used for money, (7) the first buggy was called "rockaways" due to the elasticity of the leather-springs, (8) Rev. Jackson saw his first buggy as described, in 1851.

During the Civil War, cloth as well as all other commodities were very high. Slaves were required to weave the cloth. The women would delight in dancing as they marched to and fro in weaving the cloth by hand. This was one kind of work the slaves enjoyed doing. Even Cotton seeds was picked by hand, hulling the seeds out with the fingers, there was no way of ginning it by machine at that time. Rev. Jackson vividly recalls the croker-sacks being used around bales of the finer cotton, known as short cotton. During this same period he made all of the shoes he wore by hand from cow hides. The women slaves at that time wore grass shirts woven very closely with hoops around on the inside to keep from contacting the body.

Gleefully he told of the Saturday night baths in big wooden washtubs with cut out holes for the fingers during his boyhood, of the castor oil, old fashion paragoric, calomel, and burmo chops used for medicine at that time. The herb doctors went from home to home during times of illness. Until many years after the Civil War there were no practicing Negro physicians. Soap was made by mixing bones and lard together, heating and then straining into a bucket containing alum, turpentine, and rosin. Lye soap was made by placing burnt ashes into straw with corn shucks placed into harper, water is poured over this mixture and a trough is used to sieze the liquid that drips into the tub and let stand for a day. Very little moss was used for mattresses, chicken feathers and goose feathers were the principal constituents during his boyhood. Soot mixed with water was the best medicine one could use for the stomach ache at that time.

Rev. Jackson married in 1882 and has seven sons and seven daughters. Owns his own home and plenty of other property around

the neighborhood. Ninety-six years of age and still feels as spry as a man of fifty, keen of wit, with a memory as good can be expected. This handsome bronze piece of humanity with snow-white beard over his beaming face ended the interview saying, "I am waiting now to hear the call of God to the promise land." He once was considered as a candidate for senator after the Civil war but declined to run. He says that the treatment during the time of slavery was very tough at times, but gathering himself up he said, "no storm lasts forever" and I had the faith and courage of Jesus to carry me on, continuing, "even the best masters in slavery couldn't be as good as the worst person in freedom, Oh, God, it is good to be free, and I am thankful."

Source:
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