JULIA BLANKS was born of a slave mother and a three-quarter Indian father, in San Antonio, in the second year of the Civil War. Her mother, part French and part Negro, was owned by Mrs. John G. Wilcox, formerly a Miss Donaldson, who had lived at the White House, and who gave Julia to her daughter. After the slaves were freed, Julia continued to live with her mother in San Antonio until, at fifteen, she married Henry Hall. Five years later her second marriage took place, at Leon Springs, Texas, where she lived until moving to the Adams ranch, on the Frio River. Here she raised her family. After leaving the Adams ranch, Julia and Henry bought two sections of state land, but after four years they let it go back because of Henry's ill health, and moved to Uvalde.

"I was born in San Antonio, in 1862. My mother's name was Rachael Miller. I don't know if she was born in Tennessee or Mississippi. I heard her talk of both places. I don't know nothing about my father, because he run off when I was about three months old. He was three-quarter Cherokee Indian. They were lots of Indians then, and my husband's people come from Savannah, Georgia, and he said they was lots of Indians there. I had two sisters and one brother and the sisters are dead but my brother lives somewhere in Arizona. My mother's master's name was John. G. Wilcox.

"When we was small chillen, they hired my sisters out, but not me. My grandfather bought my grandmother's time and they run a laundry house. They hired my mother out, too.

"You see, my grandmother was free born, but they stole her and sold her to Miss Donaldson. She was half French. She looked[Pg 94] jes' like a French woman. She wasn't a slave, but she and her brother were stolen and sold. She said the stage coach used to pass her aunt's house, and one day she and her brother went down to town to buy some buns, and when they were comin' back, the stage stopped and asked 'em to ride. She wanted to ride, but her brother didn't. But they kep' coaxin' 'em till they got 'em in. They set her down between the two women that was in there and set her brother between two men, and when they got close to the house, they threw cloaks over their heads and told the driver to drive as fast as he could, and he sure drove. They taken 'em to Washin'ton, to the White House, and made her a present to Mary Wilcox (Miss Donaldson) and her brother to somebody else. Then this woman married John C. Wilcox and they come to Texas.

"She saw a cousin of hers when they got to Washin'ton, and she knew, after that, he had somethin' to do with her and her brother bein' stolen. One day she found a piece of yellow money and took it to her cousin and he told her it wasn't no good and gave her a dime to go get her some candy. After that, she saw gold money and knew what it was.

"She said she had a good time, though, when she was growing up. They were pretty good to her, but after they came to San Antonio, Mrs. Wilcox began bein' mean. She kep' my mother hired out all the time and gave me to her daughter and my sister to her son. My mother was kep' hired out all the time, cooking; and after freedom, she just took to washin' and ironin'. My grandfather bought his time and my grandmother's time out. They didn't stay with her.[Pg 95]

"I've heard my mother talk about coffee. They roasted beans and made coffee. She says, out on the plantation, they would take bran and put it in a tub and have 'em stir it up with water in it and let all the white go to the bottom and dip it off and strain it and make starch. I have made starch out of flour over and often, myself. I had four or five little girls; and I had to keep 'em like pins. In them days they wore little calico dresses, wide and full and standin' out, and a bonnet to match every dress.

"I used to hear my grandmother tell about the good times they used to have. They would go from one plantation to another and have quiltin's and corn huskin's. And they would dance. They didn't have dances then like they do now. The white people would give them things to eat. They would have to hoof it five or six miles and didn't mind it.

"They had what they called patros, and if you didn't have a pass they would whip you and put you in jail. Old Man Burns was hired at the courthouse, and if the marsters had slaves that they didn't want to whip, they would send them to the courthouse to be whipped. Some of the marsters was good and some wasn't. There was a woman, oh, she was the meanest thing! I don't know if she had a husband—I never did hear anything about him. When she would get mad at one of her slave women, she would make the men tie her down, and she had what they called cat-o'-nine-tails, and after she got the blood to come, she would dip it in salt and pepper and whip her again. Oh, she was mean! My[Pg 96] mother's marster was good; he wouldn't whip any of his slaves. But his wife wasn't good. If she got mad at the women, when he would come home she would say: 'John, I want you to whip Liza.' Or Martha. And he would say, 'Them are your slaves. You whip them.' He was good and she was mean.

"When my aunt would go to clean house, she (Mrs. Wilcox) would turn all the pictures in the house but one, the meanest looking one—you know how it always looks like a picture is watching you everywhere you go—and she would tell her if she touched a thing or left a bit of dirt or if she didn't do it good, this picture would tell. And she believed it.

"My grandmother told a tale one time. You know in slave time they had an old woman to cook for the chillen. One day they were going to have company. This woman that was the boss of the place where the chillen was kept told the old cullud woman to take a piece of bacon and grease the mouths of all the chillen. Then she told a boy to bring them up to these people, and the woman said: 'Oh, you must feed these chillen good, just look at their mouths!' And the woman said, 'Oh, that's the way they eat.' They didn't get meat often. That was just to make them believe they had lots to eat.

"No. They were cut off from education. The way my stepfather got his learning was a cullud blacksmith would teach school at night, and us chillen taught our mother. She didn't know how to spell or read or nothin'. She didn't know B from bull's foot. Some of them were allowed to have church and some didn't. Mighty few read the Bible 'cause they couldn't read. As[Pg 97] my mother used to say, they were raised up as green as cucumbers. That old blacksmith was the onlyist man that knew how to read and write in slavery time that I knew of. My grandmother or none of them knew how to read; they could count, but that was all. That's what makes me mad. I tell my grandchillen they ought to learn all they can 'cause the old people never had a chance. My husband never did have any schooling, but he sure could figger. Now, if you want me to get tangled up, just give me a pencil and paper and I don't know nothing." She tapped her skull. "I figger in my head! The chillen, today, ought to appreciate an education.

"Oh, yes, they were good to the slaves when they were sick. They would have the doctor come out and wait on them. Most plantations had what they called an old granny cullud woman that treated the chillen with herbs and such things.

"Games? I don't know. We used to play rap jacket. We would get switches and whip one another. You know, after you was hit several times it didn't hurt much. I've played a many time. In slave time the men used to go huntin' at night, and hunt 'possums and 'coons. They would have a dog or two along. They used to go six or seven miles afoot to corn huskin's and quiltin's. And those off the other plantations

would come over and join in the work. And they would nearly always have a good dinner. Sometimes some of the owners would give 'em a hog or somethin' nice to eat, but some of 'em didn't.

"No'm, I don't know if they run off to the North, but[Pg 98] some of them runned off and stayed in the swamps, and they was mean. They called them runaways. If they saw you, they would tell you to bring them something to eat. And if you didn't do it, if they ever got you they sure would fix you.

"I don't know when my mother was set free. My husband's marster's name was King. He was from Savannah, Georgia, but at the time was living close to Boerne. My husband's father was killed in the war. When my husband was about ten years old, his marster hadn't told them they was free. You know some of them didn't tell the slaves they was free until they had to. After freedom was declared, lots of people didn't tell the slaves they were free. One morning, my husband said, he happended to look out and he saw a big bunch of men coming down the road, and he thought he never saw such pretty men in his life on them horses. They had so many brass buttons on their clothes it looked like gold. So he run and told his mama, and she looked and saw it was soldiers, and some of 'em told the boss, and he looked and saw them soldiers comin' in the big gate and he called 'em in quick, and told them they were free. So when the soldiers come, they asked him if he had told his slaves they were free, and he said yes. They asked the Negroes if they lived there, and they said yes. One said, 'He just told us we was free.' The soldiers asked him why he had just told them, and he said they wasn't all there and he was waiting for them all to be there.

"My husband said he thought them was the prettiest bunch of men he ever saw, and the prettiest horses. Of course, he[Pg 99] hadn't never saw any soldiers before. I know it looked pretty to me when I used to see the soldiers at the barracks and hear the band playin' and see them drillin' and ever'thing. You see, we lived on a little cross-street right back of St. Mary's Church in San Antonio, I don't know how that place is now. Where the post office is now, there used to be a blacksmith shop and my father worked there. I went back to San Antonio about fifteen years ago and jes' took it afoot and looked at the changes.

"I was fifteen years old the first time I married. It was almost a run-a-way marriage. I was married in San Antonio. My first husband's name was Henry Hall. My first wedding dress was as wide as a wagon sheet. It was white lawn, full of tucks, and had a big ruffle at the bottom. I had a wreath and a veil, too. The veil had lace all around it. We danced and had a supper. We danced all the dances they danced then; the waltz, square, quadrille, polka, and the gallopade—and that's what it was, all right; you shore galloped. You'd start from one end of the hall and run clear to the other end. In those days, the women with all them long trains—the man would hold it over his arm. No, Lord! Honeymoons wasn't thought of then. No'm, I never worked out a day in my life." Jokingly, "I guess they thought I was too good looking. I was about twenty years old when I married the second time. I was married in Leon Springs the second time.

"Before we come out to this country from Leon Springs, they was wild grapes, dewberries, plums and agaritas, black haws, [Pg 100] red haws. M-m-m! Them dewberries, I dearly love 'em! I never did see wild cherries out here. I didn't like the cherries much, but they make fine wine. We used to gather mustang grapes and make a barrel of wine.

"After I married the second time, we lived on the Adams ranch on the Frio and stayed on that ranch fifteen years. We raised all our chillen right on that ranch. I am taken for a Mexkin very often. I jes' talk Mexkin back to 'em. I learned to talk it on the ranch. As long as I have lived at this place, I have never

had a cross word about the chillen. All my neighbors here is Mexkins. They used to laugh at me when I tried to talk to the hands on the ranch, but I learned to talk like 'em.

"We used to have big round-ups out on the Adams ranch. They had fences then. The neighbors would all come over and get out and gather the cattle and bring 'em in. Up at Leon Springs at that time they didn't have any fences, and they would have big round-ups there. But after we come out here, it was different. He would notify his neighbors they were goin' to gather cattle on a certain day. The chuck wagon was right there at the ranch, that is, I was the chuck wagon. But if they were goin' to take the cattle off, they would have a chuck wagon. They would round up a pasture at a time and come in to the ranch for their meals. Now on the Wallace ranch, they would always take a chuck wagon. When they were gettin' ready to start brandin' at the ranch, my husband always kep' his brandin' irons all in the house, hangin' up right where he could get his hands on 'em. [Pg 101] Whenever they would go off to other ranches to gather cattle, you would see ever' man with his beddin' tied up behind him on his horse. He'd have jes' a small roll. They would always have a slicker if nothin' else. That slicker answered for ever'thing sometimes. My husband slep' many a night with his saddle under his head.

"He used to carry mail from San Antonio to Dog Town, horseback. That was the town they used to call Lodi (Lodo), but I don't know how to spell it, and don't know what it means. It was a pretty tough town. The jail house was made out of 'dobe and pickets. They had a big picket fence all around it. They had a ferry that went right across the San Antonio River from Floresville to Dog Town. I know he told me he come to a place and they had a big sign that said, 'Nigga, don't let the sun go down on you here.' They was awful bad down in there. He would leave Dog Town in the evenin' and he would get to a certain place up toward San Antonio to camp, and once he stopped before he got to the place he always camped at. He said he didn't know what made 'im stop there that time, but he stopped and took the saddle off his horse and let 'im graze while he lay down. After a while, he saw two cigarette fires in the dark right up the road a little piece, and he heard a Mexkin say, 'I don't see why he's so late tonight. He always gets here before night and camps right there.' He knew they was waylayin' 'im, so he picked his saddle up right easy and carried it fu'ther back down the road in the brush and then come got his horse and took him out there and saddled 'im up and went away 'round them Mexkins. He went on in [Pg 102] to San Antonio and didn't go back any more. A white man took the mail to carry then and the first trip he made, he never come back. He went down with the mail and they found the mail scattered somewhere on the road, but they never found the man, or the horse, either.

"On the Adams ranch, in the early days, we used to have to pack water up the bank. You might not believe it, but one of these sixty-pound lard cans full of water, I've a-carried it on my head many a time. We had steps cut into the bank, and it was a good ways down to the water, and I'd pack that can up to the first level and go back and get a couple a buckets of water, and carry a bucket in each hand and the can on my head up the next little slantin' hill before I got to level ground. I carried water that way till my chillen got big enough to carry water, then they took it up. When I was carryin' water in them big cans my head would sound like new leather—you know how it squeaks, and that was the way it sounded in my head. But, it never did hurt me. You see, the Mexkins carry loads on their heads, but they fix a rag around their heads some way to help balance it. But I never did. I jes' set it up on my head and carried it that way. Oh, we used to carry water! My goodness! My mother said it was the Indian in me—the way I could carry water.

"When we were first married and moved to the Adams ranch, we used to come here to Uvalde to dances. They had square dances then. They hadn't commenced all these frolicky dances they have now. They would have a supper, but they had it to sell. Every fellow would have to treat his girl he danced with. [Pg 103]

"I can remember when my grandfather lived in a house with a dirt floor, and they had a fireplace. And I can remember just as well how he used to bake hoecakes for us kids. He would rake back the coals and ashes real smooth and put a wet paper down on that and then lay his hoecake down on the paper and put another paper on top of that and the ashes on top. I used to think that was the best bread I ever ate. I tried it a few times, but I made such a mess I didn't try it any more. One thing I have seen 'em make, especially on the ranch. You take and clean a stick and you put on a piece of meat and piece of fat till you take and use up the heart and liver and sweetbread and other meat and put it on the stick and wrap it around with leaf fat and then put the milk gut, or marrow gut, around the whole thing. They call that macho (mule), and I tell you, it's good. They make it out of a goat and sheep, mostly.

"Another thing, we used to have big round-ups, and I have cooked great pans of steak and mountain orshters. Generally, at the brandin' and markin', I cooked up many a big pan of mountain orshters. I wish I had a nickel for ever' one I've cooked, and ate too! People from up North have come down there, and, when they were brandin' and cuttin' calves there, they sure did eat and enjoy that dinner.

"The men used to go up to the lake, fishin', and catch big trout, or bass, they call 'em now; and we'd take big buckets of butter—we didn't take a saucer of butter or a pound; we taken butter up there in buckets, for we sure had plenty of it—and[Pg 104] we'd take lard too, and cook our fish up there, and had corn bread or hoe cakes and plenty of butter for ever'thing, and it sure was good. I tell you—like my husband used to say—we was livin' ten days in the week, then.

"When we killed hogs, the meat from last winter was hung outside and then new meat, salted down and then smoked, put in there, and we would cook the old bacon for the dogs. We always kep' some good dogs there, and anybody'll tell you they was always fat. We had lots of wild turkeys and I raised turkeys, too, till I got sick of cookin' turkeys. Don't talk about deer! You know, it wasn't then like it is now. You could go kill venison any time you wanted to. But I don't blame 'em for passin' that law, for people used to go kill 'em and jes' take out the hams and tenderloin and leave the other layin' there. I have saved many a sack of dried meat to keep it from spoilin'.

"We would raise watermelons, too. We had a big field three mile from the house and a ninety-acre field right in the house. We used to go get loads of melons for the hogs and they got to where they didn't eat anything but the heart.

"I used to leave my babies at the house with the older girl and go out horseback with my husband. My oldest girl used to take the place of a cowboy, and put her hair up in her hat. And ride! My goodness, she loved to ride! They thought she was a boy. She wore pants and leggin's. And maybe you think she couldn't ride!

"After we left that ranch, we took up some state land. I couldn't tell you how big that place was. We had 640 in one place[Pg 105] and 640 in another place; it was a good big place. After my husband got sick, we had to let it go back. We couldn't pay it out. We only lived on it about four years.

"My husband has been dead about nineteen years. I had a pen full and a half of chillen. I have four livin' chillen, two girls and two boys. I have a girl, Carrie, in California, workin' in the fruit all the time; one boy, George, in Arizona, workin' in the mines; and a girl in Arizona, Lavinia, washes and irons and cooks and ever'thing else she can get at. And I have one boy here. I have ten grandchillen and I've got five great grandchillen.

"I belong to the Methodist Church. I joined about twenty-five years ago. My husband joined with me. But here, of late years, when I go to church, it makes me mad to see how the people do the preacher up there trying to do all the good he can do and them settin' back there laughin' and talkin'. I was baptized. There was about five or six of us baptized in the Leona down here.

"People tell that I've got plenty and don't need help. Even the Mexkins here and ever'body say I've got money. Jes' because we had that farm down there they think I come out with money. But what in the world would I want with money if I didn't use it? I can't take it with me when I die and I could be gettin' the use of it now while I need it. I could have what I want to eat, anyway. I'm gettin' a little pension, but it ain't near enough to keep us. I've got these two grandchillen here, and things is so high, too, so I don't have enough of anything without skimpin' all the time. [Pg 106]