Sensitive Data Contained

Monroe Brackins

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MONROE BRACKINS, born in Monroe Co., Mississippi, in 1853, was the property of George Reedes. He was broughtto Medina County, Texas, when two years old. Monroe learned to snare and break mustangs and became a cowpuncher. He lives in Hondo, Texas. He has an air of pride and self-respect, and explained that he used little dialect because he learned to talk from the "white folks" as he was growing up.

"I was bo'n in Mississippi, Monroe County. I'm 84 years old. My master, George Reedes, brought me, my father and mother and my two sisters to Texas when I was two years old. My father was Nelson Brackins and my mother was Rosanna.

"My master settled here at a place called Malone, on the Hondo River. He went into the stock business. Our house there was a little, old picket house with a grass roof over it out of the sage grass. The bed was made with a tick of shucks and the children slept on the floor. The boss had just a little lumber house. Later on he taken us about 20 miles fu'ther down on the Hondo, the Old Adams Ranch, and he had a rock house.

"I was about six years old then. I had some shoes, to keep the thorns outa my feet, and I had rawhide leggin's. We just had such clothes as we could get, old patched-up clothes. They just had that jeans cloth, homemade clothes.

"I was with George Reedes 10 or 12 years. It was my first trainin' learnin' the stock business and horse breakin.' He was tol'able good to us, to be slaves as we was. His brother had a[Pg 125] hired man that whipped me once, with a quirt. I've heard my father and mother tell how they whipped 'em. They'd tie 'em down on a log or up to a post and whip 'em till the blisters rose, then take a paddle and open 'em up and pour salt in 'em. Yes'm, they whipped the women. The most I remember about that, my father and sister was in the barn shuckin' co'n and the master come in there and whipped my sister with a cowhide whip. My father caught a lick in the face and he told the master to keep his whip offen him. So the master started on my father and he run away. When he finally come in he was so wild his master had to call him to get orders for work, and finally the boss shot at him, but they didn't whip him any more. Of course, some of 'em whipped with more mercy. They had a whippin' post and when they strapped 'em down on a log they called it a 'stroppin' log.'

"I remember they tasked the cotton pickers in Mississippi. They had to bring in so many pounds in the evenin' and if they didn't they got a whippin' for it. My sister there, she had to bring in 900 pounds a day. Well, cotton was heavier there. Most any of 'em could pick 900 pounds. It was heavier and fluffier. We left the cotton country in Mississippi, but nobody knew anything about cotton out here that I knew of.

"I've heard my parents say too, them men that had plantations and a great lot of slaves, they would speculate with 'em and would have a chain that run from the front ones to the back ones. Sometimes they would have 15 or 20 miles to make to get them to the sale place, but they couldn't make a break. Where they expected to make a sale, they[Pg 126] kept 'em in corrals and they had a block there to put 'em up on and bid 'em off. The average price was about $500, but some that had good practice, like a blacksmith, brought a good price, as high as $1,500.

"I heard my mother and father say they would go 15 or 20 miles to a dance, walkin', and get back before daylight, before the 'padderollers' got 'em. The slaves would go off when they had no permission and them that would ketch 'em and whip 'em was the 'padderollers.' Sometimes they would have an awful race.

"If they happened to be a slave on the plantation that could jes' read a little print, they would get rid of him right now. He would ruin the niggers, they would get too smart. The' was no such thing as school here for culluds in early days. The white folks we was raised up with had pretty good education. That's

why I don't talk like most cullud folks. I was about grown and the' was an English family settled close, about half a mile, I guess. They had a little boy, his name was Arthur Ederle, and he come over and learned me how to spell 'cat' and 'dog' and 'hen' and such like. I was right around about 20 years old. I couldn't sign my name when I was 18 years old.

"I can remember one time when I was young, I saw something I couldn't 'magine what it was, like a billygoat reared up on a tree. But I knew the' wasn't a billygoat round there near, nor no other kinds of goats. It was in the daytime and I was out in a horse pasture, I was jes' walkin' along, huntin', when I saw that sight. I guess I got within 50 steps of it, then I turned around and got away. I never did think much about a ghost, but I think it could be possible. [Pg 127]

"I don't remember scarcely anything about the war because I was so little and times was so different; the country wasn't settled up and everything was wild, no people, hardly. Of course, my life was in the woods, you might say, didn't hardly know when Sunday come.

"The northern soldiers never did get down in here that I know of. I know once, when they was enlisting men to go to battle a whole lot of 'em didn't want to fight and would run away and dodge out, and they would follow 'em and try to make 'em fight. They had a battle up here on the Nueces once and killed some of 'em. I know my boss was in the bunch that followed 'em and he got scared for fear this old case would be brought up after the war. The company that followed these men was called Old Duff Company. I think somewhere around 40 was in the bunch that they followed, but I don't know how many was killed. They was a big bluff and a big water hole and they said they was throwed in that big water hole.

"We had possums and 'coons to eat sometimes. My father, he gen'rally cooked the 'coons, he would dress 'em and stew 'em and then bake 'em. My mother wouldn't eat them. There was plenty of rabbits, too. Sometimes when they had potatoes they cooked 'em with 'em. I remember one time they had just a little patch of blackhead sugar cane. After the freedom, my mother had a kind of garden and she planted snap beans and watermelons pretty much every year.

"The master fed us tol'bly well. Everything was wild, beef was free, just had to bring one in and kill it. Once in awhile, of a Sunday mornin', we'd get biscuit flour bread to eat. It was a treat to us. They measured the flour out and it had to pan out just like they measured. He give us a little somethin' [Pg 128] ever' Christmas and somethin' good to eat. I heard my people say coffee was high, at times, and I know we didn't get no flour, only Sunday mornin'. We lived on co'nbread, mostly, and beef and game outta the woods. That was durin' the war and after the war, too.

"I was around about 6 or 7 years old when we was freed. We worked for George Reedes awhile, then drifted on down to the Frio river and stayed there about a year, then we come to Medina County and settled here close to where I was raised. We didn't think it hard times at all right after the war. The country was wild and unsettled, with ranches 15 or 20 miles apart. You never did see anybody and we didn't know really what was goin' on in the rest of the country. Sometimes something could happen in 5 miles of us and we didn't know it for a month.

"I was on the Adams Ranch on the Hondo when my master come out and told us we were as free as he was. He said we could stay on and work or could go if we wanted to. He gave my mother and father 50 cents apiece and 25 cents for the children. We stayed awhile and then went west to the Frio.

"I used to be along with old man Big-foot Wallace in my early days. He was a mighty fine man. I worked for the people that was gathering stock together there. Big Foot raised nice horses, old reg'lar Texas horses, and they was better than the reg'lar old Spanish bronco. I used to go to his camp down on the San Miguel. He lived in one part and his chickens in the rest of his house. His friends liked to hear him talk about his travels. He used to run stock horses and had a figger 7 on the left shoulder for his brand and the tip of each ear split was his earmark.

"The last man I broke horses for was Wilson Bailey. I was there about 12 years. He raised just cavi-yard—we called it a cavi-yard of horses, just the same thing as a remuda. We called 'em that later, but we got that from the Spanish. [Pg 129] We would get up in a tree with our loop till the horse come under and drop it down on him. When they were so spoilt, we got 'em in a sort of cavi-yard and drove 'em under trees and caught 'em in a snare. We had lots of wild horses, just this side of Pearsall. 'Bout the only way I'd get throwed was to get careless. We'd ketch 'im up, hackamore 'im up, saddle 'im up and get on 'im and let 'im go. Sometimes he'd be too wild to pitch, he'd break and run and you had to let 'im run himself down. I used to rather ketch up a wild horse and break 'im than to eat breakfast.

"When I first started farmin' I taken up some state land, about 80 acres, down on Black Creek, in Medina County. I stayed there ten or twelve years. Cotton hadn't got in this country and I raised some corn, sugar cane and watermelons. I commenced with horses, but 'long 'way down the line I used oxen some, too. I used one of those old walking plows.

"I sold that place and moved to a place on the Tywaukney Creek (Tonkawa). I come up to church and met my wife then. Her name was Ida Bradley and I was 38 years old. We lived down on the Tywaukney right about 23 years and raised our children there. We jes' had a little home weddin'. I wore a suit, dark suit. We got married about 8 o'clock in the evenin' and we had barbecue, cake and ice cream. You see, in them times I wasn't taught anything about years and dates, but I judge it was about 25 years after the war before I settled on the Tywaukney." [Pg 130]