K. Osthimer, Author
Folklore: Stories From Ex-Slaves
Lucas County, Dist. 9
Toledo, Ohio
The Story of MRS. JULIA KING of Toledo, Ohio.

Mrs. Julia King resides at 731 Oakwood Avenue, Toledo, Ohio. Although the records of the family births were destroyed by a fire years ago, Mrs. King places her age at about eighty years. Her husband, Albert King, who died two years ago, was the first Negro policeman employed on the Toledo police force. Mrs. King, whose hair is whitening with age, is a kind and motherly woman, small in stature, pleasing and quiet in conversation. She lives with her adopted daughter, Mrs. Elizabeth King Kimbrew, who works as an elevator operator at the Lasalle & Koch Co. Mrs. King walks with a limp and moves about with some difficulty. She was the first colored juvenile officer in Toledo, and worked for twenty years under Judges O'Donnell and Austin, the first three years as a volunteer without pay.

Before her marriage, Mrs. King was Julia Ward. She was born in Louisville, Kentucky. Her parents Samuel and Matilda Ward, were slaves. She had one sister, Mary Ward, a year and a half older than herself.

She related her story in her own way. "Mamma was keeping house. Papa paid the white people who owned them, for her time. He left before Momma did. He run away to Canada on the Underground Railroad.

"My mother's mistress—I don't remember her name—used to come and take Mary with her to market every day. The morning my mother ran away, her mistress decided she wouldn't take Mary with her to market. Mamma was glad, because she had almost made up her mind to go, even without Mary.

"Mamma went down to the boat. A man on the boat told Mamma not to answer the door for anybody, until he gave her the signal. The man was a Quaker, one of those people who says 'Thee' and 'Thou'. Mary kept on calling out the mistress's name and Mamma couldn't keep her still.

"When the boat docked, the man told Mamma he thought her master was about. He told Mamma to put a veil over her face, in case the master was coming. He told Mamma he would cut the master's heart out and give it to her, before he would ever let her be taken.

"She left the boat before reaching Canada, somewhere on the Underground Railroad—Detroit, I think—and a woman who took her in said: 'Come in, my child, you're safe now.' Then Mama met my father in Windsor. I think they were taken to Canada free.

"I don't remember anything about grandparents at all.

"Father was a cook.

"Mother's mistress was always good and kind to her.

"When I was born, mother's master said he was worth three hundred dollars more. I don't know if he ever would have sold me.

"I think our home was on the plantation. We lived in a cabin and there must have been at least six or eight cabins.

"Uncle Simon, who boarded with me in later years, was a kind of overseer. Whenever he told his master the slaves did something wrong, the slaves were whipped, and Uncle Simon was whipped, too. I asked him why he should be whipped, he hadn't done anything wrong. But Uncle Simon said he guessed he needed it anyway.

"I think there was a jail on the plantation, because Mamma said if the slaves weren't in at a certain hour at night, the watchman would lock them up if he found them out after hours without a pass.

"Uncle Simon used to tell me slaves were not allowed to read and write. If you ever got caught reading or writing, the white folks would punish you. Uncle Simon said they were beaten with a leather strap cut into strips at the end.

"I think the colored folks had a church, because Mamma was always a Baptist. Only colored people went to the church.

"Mamma used to sing a song:

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"Don't you remember the promise that you made,
To my old dying mother's request?
That I never should be sold,
Not for silver or for gold.
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While the sun rose from the East to the West?

"And it hadn't been a year,
The grass had not grown over her grave.
I was advertised for sale.
And I would have been in jail,
If I had not crossed the deep, dancing waves.

"I'm upon the Northern banks
And beneath the Lion's paw,
And he'll growl if you come near the shore.

"The slaves left the plantation because they were sold and their children were sold. Sometimes their masters were mean and cranky.

"The slaves used to get together in their cabins and tell one another the news in the evening. They visited, the same as anybody else. Evenings, Mamma did the washing and ironing and cooked for my father.

"When the slaves got sick, the other slaves generally looked after them. They had white doctors, who took care of the families, and they looked after the slaves, too, but the slaves looked after each other when they got sick.

"I remember in the Civil War, how the soldiers went away. I seen them all go to war. Lots of colored folks went. That was the time we were living in Detroit. The Negro people were tickled to death because it was to free the slaves.

"Mamma said the Ku Klux was against the Catholics, but not against the Negroes. The Nightriders would turn out at night. They were also called the Know-Nothings, that's what they always said. They were the same as the Nightriders. One night, the Nightriders in Louisville surrounded a block of buildings occupied by Catholic people. They permitted the women and children to exscape, but killed all the men. When they found out the men were putting on women's clothes, they killed everything, women and children, too. It was terrible. That must have been about eighty years ago, when I was a very little girl.

"There was no school for Negro children during slavery, but they have schools in Louisville, now, and they're doing fine.

"I had two little girls. One died when she was three years old, the other when she was thirteen. I had two children I adopted. One died just before she was to graduate from Scott High School.

"I think Lincoln was a grand man! He was the first president I heard of. Jeff Davis, I think he was tough. He was against the colored people. He was no friend of the colored people. Abe Lincoln was a real friend.

"I knew Booker T. Washington and his wife. I belonged to a society that his wife belonged to. I think it was called the National Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. I heard him speak here in Toledo. I think it was in the Methodist church. He wanted the colored people to educate themselves. Lots of them wanted to be teachers and doctors, but he wanted them to have farms. He wanted them to get an education and make something of themselves. All the prominent Negro women belonged to the Club. We met once a year. I went to quite a few cities where the meetings were held: Detroit, Cleveland, and Philadelphia.

"The only thing I had against Frederick Douglass was that he married a white woman. I never heard Douglass speak.

"I knew some others too. I think Paul Lawrence Dunbar was a fine young man. I heard him recite his poems. He visited with us right here several times.

"I knew Charles Cottrell, too. He was an engraver. There was a young fellow who went to Scott High. He was quite an artist; I can't remember his name. He was the one who did the fine picture of my daughter that hangs in the parlor.

"I think slavery is a terrible system. I think slavery is the cause of mixing. If people want to choose somebody, it should be their own color. Many masters had children from their Negro slaves, but the slaves weren't able to help themselves.

"I'm a member of the Third Baptist Church. None join unless they've been immersed. That's what I believe in. I don't believe in christening or pouring. When the bishop was here from Cleveland, I said I wanted to be immersed. He said, 'We'll take you under the water as far as you care to go.' I think the other churches are good, too. But I was born and raised a Baptist. Joining a church or not joining a church won't keep you out of heaven, but I think you should join a church."

(Interview, Thursday, June 10, 1937.)