

August 1936

Interview, Sara Ross and Alfred Farrell, Slave Interview, August 1936

Sarah Ross

Alfred Farrell

Federal Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration for the State of Florida

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Sarah Ross

Born in Benton County, Mississippi nearly eighty years ago, Sarah is the daughter of Harriet Elmore and William Donaldson, her white owner. Donaldson was a very cruel man and frequently beat Sarah's mother because she would not have sexual relations with the overseer, a colored man by the name of Randall. Sarah relates that the slaves did not marry, but were forced- in many cases against their will- to live together as man and wife. It was not until after slavery that they learned about the holy bonds of matrimony, and many of them actually married.

Cotton, corn, and rice were the chief products grown on the Donaldson plantation. Okra also was grown, and from this product coffee was made. The slaves arose with the sun to begin their tasks in the fields and worked until dusk. They were beaten by the overseer if they dared to rest themselves. No kind of punishment was too cruel or severe to be inflicted upon these souls in bondage. Frequently the thighs of the male slaves were gashed with a saw and salt put in the wound as a means of punishment for some misdemeanor. The female slaves often had their hair cut off, especially those who had long beautiful hair. If a female slave ~~was~~ pregnant and had to be punished, she was

whipped about the shoulders, not so much in pity as for the protection of the unborn child. Donaldson's wife committed suicide because of the cruelty not only to the slaves but to her as well.

The slaves were not permitted to hold any sort of meeting, not even to worship God. Their work consumed so much of their time that they had little opportunity to congregate. They had to wash their clothes on Sunday, the only day which they could call their own. On Sunday afternoon some of the slaves were sent for to entertain the family and its guests.

Sarah remembers the coming of the Yankees and the destruction wrought by their appearance. The soldiers stripped the plantation owners of their meats, vegetables, poultry and the like. Many plantation owners took their own lives in desperation. Donaldson kept his slaves several months after liberation and defied them to mention freedom to him. When he did give them freedom, they lost no time in leaving his plantation which held for them only unpleasant memories. Sarah came to Florida thirty-five years ago. She has been married twice, and is the mother of ten children, eight of whom are living.

FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT
American Guide, (Negro Writers' Unit
Live Oak, Florida

Alfred Farrell
Field Worker
Complete

Slave Interview
August 22, 1936
John A. Sings
Editor

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2. Personal interview with Charlotte Martin, living near Greater Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, in the Eastern section of Live Oak, Florida
3. Sarah Ross, living near Greater Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Live Oak, Florida