

April 1937

Interview, Clayborn Gantling and Rachel Austin, Slave Interview, April 16, 1937

Clayborn Gantling

Rachel Austin

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

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/formerly_enslaved_narratives

Recommended Citation

Gantling, Clayborn; Austin, Rachel; and Federal Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration for the State of Florida, "Interview, Clayborn Gantling and Rachel Austin, Slave Interview, April 16, 1937" (1937). *Narratives of Formerly Enslaved Floridians*. 20.
https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/formerly_enslaved_narratives/20

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Floridiana - General at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in Narratives of Formerly Enslaved Floridians by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usf.edu.

FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT
American Guide, (Negro Writers' Unit)
Jacksonville, Florida

Rachel Austin
Secretary
Complete
1,374 Words
6 Pages

Slave Interview
April 16, 1937

Clayborn Cantling

Clayborn Cantling was born in Dawson, Georgia, Terrell County, January 20, 1848 on the plantation of Judge Williams.

Judge Williams owned 102 heads of slaves and was known to be "tolable nice to 'em in some ways and pretty rough on 'em in other ways" says Mr. Cantling. "He would 'nt gi' us no coffee, 'cept on Sunday Mornings when we would have shorts or seconds of wheat, which is de leavins' of flour at mills, yu' know, but we had plenty bacon, corn bread, taters and peas.

"As a child I uster have to tote water to de old people on de farm and tend de cows an' feed de sheep. Now, I can't say right 'sackly' how things was during slavery 'cause its been a long time ago but we had cotton and corn fields and de hands plowed hard, picked cotton, grabbedbed peaders, gathered peas and done all the other hard work to be done on de plantations. I was not big 'nuff to do all of dem things but I seed plenty of it done.

"Dey made lye soap on de farms and used indigo from wood for dye. We niggers slept on hay piled on top of planks but de white folks had better beds.

"I dont 'member my grandparents but my ma was called Harriet Williams and my pa was called Henry Williams; dey was called Williams after my master. My ma and pa worked very hard and got some beatings but

I dont know what for. Dey was all kinds of money, five and ten dollar bills, and so on then, but I didn't ever see them with any.

"Then ~~was~~ came along and Sherman came through the old people was very skared on account of the white owners but there was no fighting close to me. My master's sons Lee and Fletcher joined the army and lots of de other masters went; de servants was sent along to wait on de young white men. Guess you'd like to know if any were killed. 'I should soile,' two I know were killed.

"During those days for medicine, the old people used such things as butterfly root and butterfly tea, sage tea, red oak bark, hipoccat - something that grow - was used for fevers and bathing children. They was white doctors and plenty of colored grannies.

"Then de Yankees came they acted diffunt and was naturally better to servants than our masters had been; we colored folks done the best we could but that was not so good right after freedom. Still it growed on and growed on getting better.

"Before freedom we always went to white churches on Sundays with passes but they never mentioned God; they always told us to be "good niggers and mind our missus and masters."

"Judge Williams had ten or twelve heads of children but I can't 'member the names of 'em now; his wife was called Mis' 'Manda and she was jes' 'bout lak Marse Williams. I had 'bout eighteen heads of boys and five girls myself; dere was so many, I can't 'member all of dem."

Mr. Gentling was asked to relate some incidents that he could remember of the lives of slaves, and he continued:

"Well, the horn would blow every morning for you to git up and go right to work; when the sun ris' if you were not in the field working, you would be whipped with whips and leather strops. I 'member Aunt Betsy was

beat until she could hardly get along, but I can't remember what for but do you know she had to work along till she got better. My ma had to work pretty hard but my oldest sister, Judy, was too young to work much.

"A heap o' de slaves would run away and hide in de woods to keep from working so hard but the white folks to keep them from running away so that they could not catch 'em would put a chain around the neck which would hang down the back and be fastened on to another 'round the waist and another 'round the feet so they could not run, still they had to work and sleep in 'em, too; sometimes they would wear these chains for three or four months.

"When a slave would die they had wooden boxes to put 'em in and dug holes and just put them in. A slave might go to a sister or brother's funeral.

"My recollection is very bad and so much is forgotten, but I have seen slaves sold in droves like cows; they called 'em 'ruffiges,' and white men was drivin' 'em like hogs and cows for sale. Mothers and fathers were sold and parted from their chillun; they was sold to white people in diffunt states. I tell you chile, it was pitiful, but God did not let it last always. I have heard slaves morning and night pray for deliverance. Some of 'em would stand up in de fields or bend over cotton and corn and pray out loud for God to help 'em and in time you see, He did.

"They had what you call "pattyrollers" who would catch you from home and 'wear you out' and send you back to your master. If a master had slaves he jes' could not rule (some of 'em was hard and jes' would not mind de boss), he would ask him if he wanted to go to another plantation and if he said he did, then, he would give him a pass and that pass would read: "Give this nigger hell." Of course when the "pa tyrollers" or other plan-

tation boss would read the pass he would beat him nearly to death and send him back. Of course the nigger could not read and did not know what the pass said. You see, dey did not 'leav no nigger to have a book or piece of paper of any kind and you know dey was not go teach any of 'em to read.

"De women had it hard too; women with little babies would have to go to work in de mornings with the rest, come back, nurse their chillun and go back to the field, stay two or three hours then go back and eat dinner; after dinner dey would have to go to de field and stay two or three more hours then go and nurse the chillun again, go back to the field and stay till night. One or maybe two old women would stay in a big house and keep all de chillun while their mothers worked in de fields.

"Now dey is a heap more I could tell maybe but I dont think of no more now."

Mr. Cantling came to Florida to Jennings Plantation near Lake Park and stayed two years, then went to Everett's Plantation and stayed one year. From there he went to a placed called High Hill and stayed two or three years. He left there and went to Jasper, farmed and stayed until he moved his family to Jacksonville. Here he worked on public works until he started raising hogs and chickens which he continued up to about fourteen years ago. Now, he is too old to do anything but just 'sit around and talk and eat."

He lives with his daughter, Mrs. Minnie Helly and her husband, Mr. Dan Helly on Lee Street.

Mr. Cantling cannot read or write, but is very interesting.

He has been a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church for more than fifty years.

He has a very good appetite and although has lost his teeth, he

has never worn a plate or had any dental work done. He is never sick and has had but little medical attention during his lifetime. His form is bent and he walks with a cane; although his going is confined to his home, it is from choice as he seldom wears shoes on account of bad feet. His eyesight is very good and his hobby is sewing. He threads his own needles without assistance of glasses as he has never worn them.

Mr. Cantling celebrated his 89th birthday on the 20th day of November 1936.

He is very small, also very short; quite active for his age and of a very genial disposition, always smiling.

FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT
American Guide, (Negro Writers' Unit)
Jacksonville, Florida

Rachel Austin
Secretary
Complete

Page 6
Slave Interview

REFERENCE

1. Interview with Mr. Clayborn Gantling, 1960 Lee Street, Jacksonville, Florida.