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## Interview, Margrett Nickerson and Rachel A. Austin, Slave Interview, December 5, 1936

Margarett Nickerson

Rachel A. Austin

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

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

Rachel A. Austin  
Field Worker  
Complete  
2,066 Words

Slave Interview  
December 5, 1936

MARGARETT NICKERSON

In her own vernacular, Margrett Nickerson was "born to William A. Carr, on his plantation near Jackson, Leon County, many years ago."

When questioned concerning her life on this plantation, she continues; "Now honey, its been so long ago, I don' 'member ev'ything, but I will tell you whut I kin as near right as possible; I kin 'member five uf Marse Carr's chillun; Florida, Susan, 'Lijah, Willie and Tom; cose Carr never 'lowed us to have a piece uf paper in our hands."

"Mr. Kilgo was de fust overseer I 'member; I was big enough to tote meat an' stuff frum de smokehouse to de kitchen and to tote water in and git wood for granny to cook de dinner and fur de sucklers who nu'sed de babies, an' I carried dinners back to de hands."

"On dis plantation dere was 'bout a hunnerd head;

cookin' was done in de fireplace in iron pots and de meals was plenty of peas, greens, cornbread burnt co'n for coffee - often de marster bought some coffee fur us; we got water frum de open well. Jes 'fore de big gun fiahed dey fatched my pa frum de bay whar he was makin' salt; he had heerd dem say 'de Yankees is coming and wuz so glad."

"Dere wuz rice, cotton, co'n, tatter fields to be tended to and cowhides to be tanned, thread to be spinned, and thread wuz made into ropes for plow lines."

"Ole Marse Carr fed us, but he did not care what an' whar, jes so you made dat money and when you made five and six bales o' cotton, said: 'Yo' ain don' nuthin'."

"When de big gun fiahed on a Sattidy me and Cabe and Minnie Howard wuz settin' up co'n fur de plowers to come 'long and put dirt to 'em; Carr read de free papers to us on Sunday and de co'n and cotton had to be tended to - he tole us he wuz goin' to gi' us de net proceeds (here she chuckles), what turned out to be de co'n and cotton stalks. Den he asked dem whut would stay wid him to step off on de right and dem dat wuz leavin' to step off on de left."

"My pa made soap frum ashes when cleaning new ground. - he took a hopper to put de ashes in, made a little stool side de house put de ashes in and po' red water on it to drin; at night after gittin' off frum work he'd put in de grease and make

de soap - I made it sometime and I make it now, myself."

"My step-pa useter make shoes frum cowhides fur de farm-han's on de plantation and fur eve'ybody on de plantation 'cept ole Marse and his fambly; dey's wuz diffunt, fine."

My grandma wus Pheobie Austin - my mother wuz name Rachel Jackson and my pay wuz name Edmund Jackson; my mother and uncle Robert and Joe wus stol' frum Virginia and fetched here. I don' know no niggers dat 'listed in de war; I don' 'member much 'bout de war only when de started talking 'bout drillin' men fur de war, Joe Sanders was a Lieutenant. Marse Carr's sons, Tom and Willie went to de war."

"We didn' had no doctors, only de grannies; we mos'ly used hippecat (ipecac) fur medicine."

"As I said, Kilgo wus de fust overseer I ricollec', then Sanders wuz nex' and Joe Sanders after him; John C. Haywood came in after Sanders and when de big gun flahed old man Brockington wus dere. I never saw a nigger sold, but dey carried dem frum our house and I never seen 'em no mo'."

"We had church wid de white preachers and dey tole us to mind our masters and missus and we would be saved; if not, dey said we wouldn'. Dey never tole us nuthin 'bout Jesus. On Sunday after workin' hard all de week dey would lay down to sleep and be so tired; soon ez yo' git sleep, de overseer would come an'

wake you up an' make you go to church."

"When de big gun fiahed old man Carr had six sacks of confederate money whut he wuz carrying wid him to Athens, Georgia an' all de time if any of us gals whar he wuz an' ax him 'Marse, please gi us some money' (here she raises her voice to a high, pitiful tone) he says 'I aint got a cent' and right den he would have a ohis so full it would take a whol' passle of slaves to move it. He had plenty corn, taters, pum'kins, hogs, cows ev'ything, but he didn' gi us nuthin but strong plain close and plenty to eat; we slept in ole common beds and my pa made up little cribs and put hay in dem fur de chillun."

"Now ef you wanted to keep in wid Marster Carr don' drap you shoes in de field an' leave 'em - he'd beat you; you mus' tote you' shoes from one field to de other, didn' a dog ud be bettern you. He'd say 'you gun-haided devil, drappin' you' shoes and eve'thin' over de field."

"Now jes lis'en, I wanna tell you all I kin, but I wants to tell it right; wait now, I don' wanna make no mistakes and I don' wanna lie on nobody - I ain' mad now and I know taint no use to lie, I takin' my time. I don' prayed an' got all de malice out o' my heart and I ain' gonna tell no lie fer um and I ain' gonna tell no lie on um. I ain' never seed no slaves sold by Marster Carr, he wuz allus tellin' me he wuz gonna sell me but he never did - he sold my pa's fust wife though."

"Dere wuz Uncle George Bull, he could read and write and chile de white folks didn' lak no nigger whut could read and write. Carr's wife Miss Jane useter teach us Sunday School but she did not 'low us to tech a book wid us hands. So dey useter jes take uncle George Bull and beat him fur nuthin; dey would beat him and take him to de lake and put him on a log and shov him in de lake, but he always swimmied out, when dey didn' do dat dey would beat him tel de blood run outen him and den trow him in de ditch in de field and kivver him up wid dirt, head and years and den stick a stick up at his haid. I wiz a water toter and had stood and seen um do him dat way more'n once and I stood and looked at um tel dey went 'way to de other rows and den I grabbed de dirt ofen him and he'd bresh de dirt off and say 'tank yo', git his hoe and go on back to work. Dey beat him lak dat and he didn' do a thin' to git dat sort of treatment."

"I had a sister name Lytie Holly who didn' stand back on non' uv em; when dey'd git behin' her, she'd git behin' dem; she wuz dat stubbo'n and when dey would beat her she wouldn' holler but jes take it and go on. I got some whuppin's wid strops but I wanter tell you why I am crippel today:

"I had to tote tatter vines on my haid, me and Fred' rick and de han's would be 'a callin' fur em all over de field. but you know honey, de two uv us could' git to all uv em at once, so Joe Sanders would hurry us up by beatin' us with strops and stocks and run us all over de tater ridge; he cripple us both up and den we couldn' git to all uv em. At night my pa would

try to fix me up cuse I had to go back to work nex' day. I never walked straight frum dat day to dis and I have to set here in dis chair now, but I 'don' feel mad none now. I feels good and wants to go to he'ven - I ain' gonna tel no lie on white nor black cose taint no use."

"Some uv de slaves run away, lots uv em. Some would be cot and when dey ketched em dey put bells on em; fust dey would put a iron ban' 'round dey neck and anuder one 'round de waist and rivet um together down de back; de bell would hang on de ban' round de neck so dat it would ring when de slave walked and den dey wouldn' git 'way. Some uv dem wore dese bells three and four mont'n and when dey time wuz up dey would take em off 'em. Jake Overstreet, George Bull, John Green, Ruben Golder, Jim Bradley and a hos' uv others woere dem bells. Dis is whut I know, not whut somebody else say. I seen dis myself. En missus, when de big gun fiahed, de runerway slaves comed out de woods frum all directions. We wuz in de field when it fiahed, but I 'members dey wuz all very glad."

"After de war, we worked but we got pay fur it."

"Ole man Pierce and others would call some kin' of a peraltical (political) meetin' but I could never understan' whut dey wuz talkin' 'bout. We didn' had no kin' uv schools and all I knows but dem is dat I sent my chillums in Leon and Gadsden Counties."

"I had lots uv sisters and brothers but I can't 'member

de names of none by Lytie, Mary, Patsy and Ella; my brothers, is Edmond and Cornelius Jackson. Cornelius is livin' now somewhere I think but I don' never see him."

"When de big gun fiahed I was a young missy totin' cotton to de scales at de ginhouse; ef de ginhouse wuz close by, you had to tote de cotton to it, but ef it wuz fur 'way wagins ud come to de fields and weigh it up and take it to de ginhouse. I was still livin' near Lake Jackson and we went to Abram Bailey's place near Tallahassee. Carr turned us out without nuthin and Bailey gi'd us his hammoc' and we went dere fur a home. Fust we cut down saplin's fur we didn' had no house, and took de tops uv pines and put on de top; den we put dirt on top uv dese saplin's and slep' under dem. When de rain would come, it would wash all de dirt right down in our face and we'd hafter buil' us a house all over ag'in. We didn' had no body to buil' a house fur us, cose pa was gone and ma jes had us gals and we cut de saplin's fer de man who would buil' de house fer us. We live on Bailey's place a long time and fin'ly buil' us a log cabin and den we went frum dis cabin to Gadsden County to a plac name Concord and dere I stay tel I come here 'fore de fiah."

"I had twelve chillun but right now missus, I can only 'member dese names: Robert, 'Lijah, Edward, Cornelius, Little, Rachel and Sophie."

"I was converted in Leon County and after freedom I



joined de Meth'dist church and my membership is now in Mount Zion A.M.E. Church in Jacksonville, Florida."

"My fust husban' was Nelson Walker and de las' one was name Dave Nickerson. I don' think I was 20 years old when de big gun fiahed, but I was more' 17 - I reckon I wuz a little older den Flossie May (a niece who is 17 years of age) is now."(1)

Mrs. Nickerson, according to her information must be about 89 or 90 years of age, sees without glasses having never used them; she does not read or write but speaks in a convincing manner. She has most of her teeth and a splendid appetite. She spends her time sitting in a wheel-chair sewing on quilts. She has several quilts that she has pieced, some from very small scraps which she has cut without the use of any particular pattern.

She has a full head of beautiful snowy white hair and has the use of her limbs, except her legs, and is able to do most things for herself. (2)

She lives with her daughter at 1600 Myrtle Avenue, Jacksonville, Florida.

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REFERENCES

1. Personal interview with Margrett Nickerson, 1600 Myrtle Avenue, Jacksonville, Florida.
2. Sophia Nickerson Starke, 1600 Myrtle Avenue, daughter of Margrett Nickerson, Jacksonville, Florida.