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Interview, D. Davis and Paul Diggs, Slave story of D. Davis, Ninty [sic] Years Old, October 28, 1938

D. Davis

Paul Diggs

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

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SLAVE STORY OF D. DAVIS, NINTY YEARS OLD

D. Davis- alias- "Sap-Sucker" and " Parson Davis," born in Quitman, Georgia, 3-10-48. His parents were Harry and Mary Smith, they lived at Hickory Heard near Quitman, Georgia. Davis said: " I was 17 years old when freedom was declared." He has been married seven times and is the father of 32 children, 9 of them illegitimate children. The oldest child was born in 1867 and is 70 years old. He is now living on a farm at Brooksville, Florida. His father, who was a freeman, came from Baltimore, Maryland, and his mother was an Indian, from Oklahoma. His father died in 1886, and his mother in 1880.

Davis came to Brooksville in 1898 from Quitman, Georgia. There he settled on a farm which today comprises 40 acres. This farm is being operated by his children.

Davis is very jolly and looks robust. He wears a small flat top derby with a fancy sash around it. He had on a sailor blouse, his trousers were blue and patched with his shoes shined black. His teeth in front are very irregular, and one unusually long. He said that his hair shows his mixture, that is ,the grade on his right side was like Indian hair and that of the left was unruly like the African's hair. This he said applied to his mustache. The right side growing faster than the left and of better grade.

During his early life as a slave he recalled some of his duties as a slave: Davis said " I plowed in what was known as the government field raising potatoes. This was on the plantation owned by my master Mr. John McMullin, near Quitman, Georgia. " The custom of dressing for the young men of that time was to wear long tail shirts and the married men wore breeches. In this make up I plowed behind

a mule all day long." With a hearty laugh he told of how they had to have a pass to go from one plantation to another.

Davis said, " When my masters son returned from the war, I was in the field plowing, and he died the second week following his returned. One day while I was in the field plowing, I tied the mule to the fence and mule like he became caught in the traces and fell. At this moment the boss came along and looked at the mule, and said that he was going to whip me for tying the mule. This he did. " Davis said that this event happened in 1864. He said, " My master had another mule that when the horn blew, would stop, and when unloosed from the plow he would run staright for the house and stand near the fence until some one would turn him in to be fed. Another instance was that his master had two slaves who would run away. " Fenton Small"and " Big Boy." They had an overseer by the name of Herman Morris. He had two dogs out on their trail and soon captured them. After capturing them they were hung up by their thumbs and whipped good with a catt-o-line whip.

He recalled, " one night when I was coming back to the slave quarters with a jug of cane beer, I had it tied to my shoulders, and had to pass a grave yard . Along with me I had an accordian which I was playing. Saying, suddenly I saw something kicking up sand in the road, and I got scared. I broke and ran, and I had the jug on my back too,,I thought the haunt was catching me. Of all the hollering you ever heard! When I got home, my mother asked me what was the matter. I told her what happened. She laughed and said, " that was nothing but the jug tied to your back hitting you as you ran. I was so scared Davis said that I was wet wid sweat."

" she made me take the jug from my back and go out in the yard and out some wood, I was kinder slow about moving, and she slapped me a plenty. I soon fetched her the wood."

Davis said, " after freedom while living on a plantation he remembered there was a woman who had a gold ring on her hand whose husband owned a grite mill on the creek near the plantation. His wife died and later her husband died. Another man bought the mill from his son, and every time he started to grind at the mill something went wrong with the mill. A man came along and told him that the mill was haunted. He told the owner that he could catch that haunt if he would give him \$ 500.00. This he agreed to do. It was said every time he would run the mill the dead wife of the deceased owner of the mill would return, and would put out her hand with a diamond ring on it. She would ask the man in charge what he was doing there. He told her that he owned the mill, she suddenly slapped him and disappeared. In order to win the money, the man who was anxious to catch the haunt and win the money, discovered that the deceased owners wife was buried with the diamond rings. He set out to unearth the body, chops off the ring finger with the ring on it and shows it as a proof of capturing the haunt. This ended up in a lawsuit to recover the amount of money promised for capturing the haunt.

He remembered soldiers coming on the plantation during the war and that his master had built corn cribs in the hiameock to keep the soldiers from stealing his corn. But they stole other things. In describing the mode of living during slavery time he said that the houses were built out of mud bricks, the floor was bare clay, and the beds were built out of fence rails covered

with boards on top of which was moss that was covered with home spun covering.

Davis said, " ever since he was 18 years old he has tried to preach and follow the ministry until they retired him as a " superannuated preacher." His connection is with the African M. Church. He has built 7 churches. His knowledge of the Bible was very good. He knew all of the chapters and recited many verses from memory. His educational training, he said, was from Morris Brown College, Atlanta, Georgia.

Davis was asked about signs and superstitions during slavery period: " My mother said that when your left eye jumps you will get angry, and when the right one jumped you would cry for joy. Another, it is bad luck to sweep after sundown; bad luck to buy a woman a pair of stocking; bad luck for a child to be born on Friday for all of the children would be girls; a boy born March third will prosper; One born on Saturday will have bad luck."

Davis demonstrated how they acted when their mother gave them anything. This was their response in courtesy. The boys he said, curtsied when they were handed anything. The girls would have to bend their knees in bowing in thanks for anything handed them.

Davis was asked what became of the many wives. He stated, "that he quit them for " broadcasting". This he further explained for flirting."

He received his freedom while working in the field when his boss came to the field to inform the slaves that they were free. Davis asked for the old mule, and this request was granted him. He remained he said on the plantation and worked for his master. He wishes to live to be 125 years old. He now receives a pension from the Florida State Board of Social Welfare.