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Interview, Reminiscences of Old Aunt Sarah, A Former Slave of Grandmother's, circa 1937

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SLAVE INTERVIEW
TAMPA

REMINISCENCES OF OLD AUNT SARAH, A FORMER SLAVE OF GRANDMOTHER'S

Slaves of Major William T. Brown:

1. Mother, name not known. Her children: 2. Liza, 3. Julia, 4. Charlotte, 5. George, 6. Dick, and 7, Sam. Also Martha and her two children.

When the Browns lived on their plantation, what is now Ybor City, they owned a number of cows and operated what might be called the first dairy in Tampa. Mrs. Brown would have the slaves milk the cows and churn the butter, and then send the produce in by one of them to sell it from door to door. Liza, the eldest child, carried the great basket in which were the cans of milk and butter on her head, and would walk the 2 miles from where they lived to town in ankle deep sand. This heavy burden she carried on her head, walking through this sand, every day until she went crazy. (Sarah remarks that her mother had been light minded.) After this happened the Browns were forced to keep her chained to a tree in the yard; later it was necessary to put her in a room and the windows and doors were nailed up. A man by the name of Aman came there one day and told Mr. Brown that he could cure her. So he was given permission to try. He took her home with him and hitched her up to plow and made her pull it through the field whipping her as he would do 'a horse or mule. But fortunately the poor creature died from her affliction and this horrible treatment.

Uncle Jim Brown was in Havana when he caught the dreadful cold, which with the consumption he already suffered from, proved fatal and he died at the Hammock.

Sarah said that when she was brought to Florida the Indians were still on the warpath. Soon after her arrival here a girl, Julia Pippins, was caught by the Indians, a short piece out from the town of Tampa, and scalped. Her wrists were broken and one of her legs. She was rescued by Bascomb Sparkman and lived. She was related to that family, and later married a man named Allen.

Sarah remarked that of all the masters my great grandfather Lesley and his wife were the kindest to their slaves. The kitchen, like all at that time, was located a short distance from the house and joined to it by a covered passage. Here the food for both the family and the servants was cooked, and here it was distributed after grace had been said.

Lula Walker was the youngest of the Lesley's slaves. Sarah tells how great grandmother would have Lula's mother fix her up and bring

her to her in the evening and she would rock and sing her to sleep. Even to this day Sarah can sing the following two songs, that she often hears sung by great grandmother over seventy years ago, in a remarkably good and strong voice. (She is 88 this year.)

"Lula is my darling pride
Lula bright, Lula Gay,
Dances lightly by my side
All the live-long day."

"When I am gone weep not for me
When I am gone weep not for me
Plant me a tree that will wave over me
And look up to heaven and see if I am there."

Aunt Wennie belonged to the Hayes.

After great grandmother Brown died Major Brown sold all of the slaves.

The Browns for a short time during the war stayed at Dr. Branch's place near Six Mile creek.

When she came to Tampa there were only two churches, the Methodist and the Baptist. The Browns went to the Methodist.

The slaves would go to Sunday School on Sunday afternoon.

The road that led from town and passed the Brown's place (Ybor) was called the County Road.

The slaves called great grandmother Brown "Sukey"; and grandmother they called "Sugom" much to grandfather's disgust, and tried in every way to brake them from it.

Sarah said that when she came to Tampa there were all kind of nationalities represented here. There were Greeks, French, Germans, and Spanish. The Spanish lived in boats along the water front and sold sea food. There were several Minorcans called Turnbull negroes, living here. Very handsome people, some were very light and others were dark. Channing's wife was one but did not know it until after her death. Worked for them 5 years.

Old man Spencer lived on the Courthouse grounds when she came here in a little white house. It was between the courthouse and the jail. When they built the new courthouse he had to move.

Uncle Jim Brown was studying to be a dentist.

One day during the war Sarah went into the house and found grandmother rocking Aunt India and both of them crying. She asked them why they were crying, and grandmother replied that her husband and father of her child was away in the war and that he might be killed and they never would see him again, etc. Sarah then asked her if she remembered when she was first brought to Tampa she would cry for her mother and they would spank her. And for her not to cry as it would not do her any good.

The ground was very low in Tampa and when they would build they would haul sand from below Jackson Street to fill in. Often times when a house was completed the ground would sink under it and cause all the plaster to fall in the rooms.

Sarah was one in a family of 14 children but only four lived to reach the age of one year. The following is copied from a Bible in her possession that her mother had filled out by "one who could write". "Charlotte Calancy (Sarah called her last name Ancrum) born Jan. 1825. She married Robert Hayes, December 26, 1841.

Of the 14 children only the following are recorded: Virgin (Virgil) born the last week in August, 1842, and died Feb. 1844. Age one year and six months.

Richard, born 9th day of July, 1845.

Sara, born 9th day of November, 1847.

Robert, the twin, born 4th day of January, 1850.

All the children were born at Summerville, about twenty-five miles from Charleston, on the plantation of the Wearings, to whom the mother belonged. The father was owned by a Jew, named Montague.

From the family of Wearings, Sarah, her mother, and two brothers were sold to Charles F. Levy, of Charleston, S. C. The mother had pleaded with her former owner that the family not be broken up when sold and it was so done. They remained in Mr. Levy's possession, (Charlotte died Feb. 10, 1890, age 60 years, in Charleston.) until he became bankrupt, when they were then sold at public auction in Charleston to a man named Morgan from Tennessee. He took the family back to his home but soon sold them to a man named Alexander. It seems at this time, when slaves were sold that the owner guaranteed them to be strong and healthy. But Sarah's mother was not. She was afflicted with fainting spells. So Mr. Alexander returned

them to Morgan and made him return his money. Morgan then took the family back to Charleston where they passed into the hands of Dr. Rooth who lived on King Street, where he operated either a boarding house or a hotel. Sarah's mother was the pastry cook.

It was here that my great grandfather, Major Brown, boarded when he went to Charleston. He had been instructed by his daughter, Mrs. Margaret Tucker, to invest the money she received from her late husband's, William W. Tucker, estate in slaves, and he had gone to Charleston where was located the largest slave market in this part of the country. While at Dr. Rooth's he saw Sarah and decided to purchase her. He also bought another girl named Lucy. This was in 1856. The Major and his two slaves went from Charleston to Fernandina by boat. There he bought a horse and buggy in which to complete the journey to Tampa. In Jacksonville Major Brown bought three more slaves, a woman named Martha and her two children. In Fernandina they had met a man named Fannings, from Alabama, who with his slaves was traveling towards Tampa; so they made the trip together. Sarah said that in Brooksville they stopped and visited great grandaunt, Sally Ellis, and that when they left she filled the back of the buggy with his white turnips to bring home.

In 1858 when Mrs Tucker married John T. Lesley all these slaves passed into his hand.

Sarah was not one of the house servants, but was hired out to different people in town who needed help. The first person she was hired to was Col. R. B. Thomas and his first wife, Sara McKay. They operated the "Florida House" in the old Jim McKay home. Sarah was a chambermaid. She was next hired out to a man named Franklin, but as he was poor she only stayed about three months helping him with his crop. She was next hired out to Charles Brown and his family, where she nursed. (I think she meant the Channing family, one of whom Mr. Brown married.)

Sarah was next sent down on the Alafia River where grandfather, John T. Lesley, had his salt works. This was during the war. She was under a white man named Moore, who acted as the overseer. Sarah would carry the water from the mouth of the river and pour it into a long iron trough under which a fire was built. Then the water had to be stirred as it boiled to keep the salt from burning. When the overseer, Mr. Moore, was away Sarah would have to sell the salt to the people who would come from all over the country to buy it. As she did not know how

to count, grandfather had given her a peck measure, and as she sold a peck of salt she would put a grain of corn in a little bag, so when Mr. Moore returned he would know how much salt had been sold by counting the grains.

There was another man by the name of Turner, who with his slaves was also making salt on the other bank of the river. Sarah would tell how the slaves would wade out into the mouth of the river, when they heard the cannons firing, and they could see the Union gunboats, across the bay, bombarding Tampa in 1865.

After Saturday, when the work was finished for the week, Sarah said that she was allowed to boil the water and make salt and sell it herself, making money to do with as she pleased.

Grandfather Lesley exchanged Lucy for a negro named _____.