

Missouri

Ex-Slaves

Lula Chambers

LULA CHAMBERS

The subject of this sketch is Lula Chambers who is not certain of her age. However she knows she is past ninety and that she was born in Galatin County, Kentucky near Virginia. She lives with a granddaughter, ^{her} Genieve Holden, 2627 Thomas Street, *St. Louis*.

Lying ill in a threa_u quarter metal bed in the front hall room of her granddaughter's 4-room brick apartment, the old lady is a very cheerful person, with an exceptionally fair complexion. Her brown hair is mixed with gray and she wears it quite long. Her room is neatly furnished.

"I was born in Galatin County, Kentucky, more than ninety years ago, slaves didn't know dere age in them days when I come along. I do know I was born in July and my mammy's name was Pat-sy Lillard. I don't know nothing at all about no kind of father. Course, I had one but who he was I never knew. "I ain't never even seen my mother enough to really know her, cause she was sold off the plantation where I was raised, when I was too young to remember her, and I just grewed up in the house with the white folks

(Genieve Holden)
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dat owned me. Dere names was Dave Lillard. He owned more dan one hundred slaves. He told me dat my mother had seven children and I was de baby of 'em all and de onliest one living dat I knows anything about. They sold my mother down de river when I was too young to recollect a mother. I fared right well with my white masters. I done all de sewing in de house, wait on de table, clean up de house, knit and pick wool, and my old miss used to carry me to church with her whenever she went. She liked lots of water, and I had to bring her water to her in church. I had so much temper dey never bothered me none about nursing de children. But I did have a heap of nursing to do with de grown ups.

I used to get a whipping now and den but nothing like de other slaves got. I used to be scared to death of those old Ku Klux folks with all dem hoods on dere heads and faces. I never will forget, I saw a real old darkey woman slave down on her knees praying to God for his help. She had a bible in front of her. Course she couldn't read it, but she did know what it was, and she was prayin' out of her very heart, until she drewed the attention of them old Ku Klux and one of 'em just walked in her babin and lashed her un-

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merciful. He made her get up off her knees and dance, old as she was. Of course de old soul couldn't dance but he just made her hop around anyhow.

De slave owners in de county where I was raised-- de well-to-do ones I mean, did not abuse de slaves like de pore trash and other slave holders did. Of course dey whipped 'em plenty when dey didn't suit. But dey kind of taken care of 'em to sell. Dey had a great slave market dere dat didn't do nothing but sell slaves, and if dey wanted a good price for dem de slave would have to be in a purty good condition. Dat's what saved dere hides. My owners had a stock farm and raised de finest stock in Kentucky. Dey didn't raise any cotton at all, but dey shore did raise fine wheat, barley and corn, just acres and acres of it. De worse lashing our slaves ever got was when dey got caught away from home without a pass. Dey got whipped hot and heavy den.

In Arkansas many of de slave owners would tie dere slaves to a wagon and gallop 'em all over town and would dey be banged up. I saw a strange niggah come to town once and didn't know where he

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was going and stepped in the door of a white hotel. When he saw all white faces, he was scared most to death. He didn't even turn around he just backed out and don't you know dem white folks kilt him for stepping inside a white man's hotel by mistake, yes they did.

"I can't tell you any pleasure I had in my early days honey, cause I didn't have none. If I had my studyin' cap on, and hadn't just got over dis terrible sick spell, I could think of lots of things to tell you, but I can't now. Right after de war dey sent colored teachers through de South to teach colored people and child, do you know, dem white folks just crucified most of 'em. I don't know how to read or write. Never did know. I am de mother of five children, but dey is all dead now. I have two grandchilren living, and have been in St. Louis seven years. I come here from Helena, Arkansas. My husband was a saloon keeper and a barber. He died in 1880 in Brinkley, Arkansas. I nursed and cooked in Brinkley after he died for fifteen years for one family.

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"I wears glasses sometime. I have been a member of de church over fifty years. My membership is in Prince of Peace Baptist Church now and has been every since I been in St. Louis. God has been so good to me, to let me live all dese years. I just want to be ready to meet him when he is ready for me. My only trouble will be to love white folks, dey have treated my race so bad. My pastor, Rev. Fred McDonald always tells me I will have to forgive them and love dem if I wants to go to heaven. But honey, dat's goin to be a lifetime job. I don't care how long God lets me live, it will still be a hard job.

"I gets an old age pension. It is very little, but I thank God for dat. I have nothing left to do now in this world but to pray. Thank God for his goodness to me and be ready when He comes.

"Dis rhemotis serves me so bad I can't be happy much. Wish I could remember more to tell you but I can't."

The old woman is well preserved for her years. (Written by Grace E. White.)