

Interview of Mrs. Louise Jones  
 501 Clinton Street  
 Petersburg, Virginia  
 By -- Susie Byrd  
 February 12, 1937

I couldn't tell you how long I been here, but I ~~was~~ here fo' dis here Petersburg Depot ~~was~~ built. Bread an' born in Dinwiddie County. I b'long to Louis Merriday. From dat I fell to his daughter, Mary Sydnor. All us slaves ~~was~~ 'vided up; yes, chil' some o' 'em sol' 'way fo' the ol' heads died. Lord! Lord! dem times ~~was~~ times! Um, um! Yes, Honey when ol' Massa an' Mistess pas' put, things change'. Dey start 'vidin' us slaves up 'mong' st de heirs.

I ~~ustev~~ set on a pallet, an' 'tend to de babies. Yes, some dem white babies an' nigger babies too would cry. An' do you know it ~~was~~ jest fo' meanness. I know some times 'twon' nothin' in dis wide worl' wrong wid 'em. I reckon reason colored folks love meat skins today is 'cause dey got it so much when dey's babies. Durin' slavery time us nurses ~~ustev~~ keep de babies from hollarin' by tying a string 'roun' a piece of skin an' stickin' it in dey mouth. You see if dey got chocked, we pull out de meat skin wid dis string. Lord, yes! I've done it many ~~uh~~ time. You don' hear talk of dat now aday. What is dat thing call dey use now? Nipple! Yes, yes. 'Taint nothin' but rubber an' win'. I b'lieve dat meat-skin-suckin' help babies. You all got a lot o' tom foolishness in bringin' up ~~uh~~ brats in dis day an' time.

No, I didn't have ~~uh~~ bit o' whippin' on my back; no more than my grandma ~~giver~~ ~~me~~. Mistess didn' 'low it.

Slaves ~~was~~ sol' like dis. Dey carry dem to de block. Dis block ~~was~~ where dey ~~was~~ put on an' sol' to the highes' bidder; you know like people sell cattle, horses an' cows. Dem ~~was~~ sad times. Some times we would hear de white folks plan de sale; an' call slave names dat dey want to carry to de block de day b'fo'. Den Honey, we prayed, sang an' call on my God dat we git ~~uh~~ good massa an' mistess.

You know, Honey, some mistess an' Massas ~~was~~ mean to dey slaves an' dey would beat 'em. Den de poor things would run away.

When I ~~was~~ ~~uh~~ slave I didn't know what church ~~was~~. We talk to God an' prayed

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by ourselves jes' ~~wherever~~ we ~~was~~ workin'; 'course de white folks didn't hear us. Chil', look like right now I can hear some o' dem mournful voices; 'specially brother John. He would always sing an' pray. Um! Um! He ~~was~~ sol', den I los' track o' him. De man dat bought him took his slaves 'way down South. Dat's right fer, ain't it?

Mistess hired me out to work on Washington Street. Lordy me! Honey, dat ~~was~~ de meanes' white 'oman in de world, I reckon. Dat 'oman treat me so mean dat I took an' run 'way from her. You know I jes' had to run 'cross de field to jinin' plantation, but 'tw~~as~~ three or four miles fo' I got to de house. I will always recollect' dat day going through de woods. I had to pass ~~at~~ spring. I got tired from runnin'. After I got out o' ev~~er~~ybody's sight, I start walkin' an' playin' 'long, as chillun will do. I got tired an' sat down on de bank near de spring. After gettin' ~~a~~ drink o' de nice cool water, I sat down to pick a splinter out my big toe. Wid dat same brass pin I pierced dese here holes in my ears, an' put straws in 'em. And do you know, Honey, I ain' never had no trouble wid dese brass-pin holes in my ears. By dat time 'twas late, so ~~we~~ went on back to my mistess.

My mistess slaves, like lan' an' property, went to de heirs. An' when things was settle up dey didn' give me "sweat off' de black cat's eye". No didn' gi ~~me~~ nottin'.

Slaves call demselves married when dey jump over uh broom stick. But I was married by uh preacher.

What I think o' de young folks o' today? Well, dem movin' pictures dey is runious to young folks. I jes' naturally think it bes' not to have movin' pictures. It causes 'em to spen' money dat dey could buy vituals an' rags wid to put on dey nacked backs. You done seen de little dirty an' ragged boys hangin' 'roun' picture places. Gal, I tell you some times dey will go ~~uh~~ stray doin' like dey see in dese here pictures; shootin', killin' an' goin' on. Yes, 'tis terrible! I went to one once an' seed it fo' myself. Nobody will 'suade me to go in ~~uh~~ another one. I don' b'lieve in no such carryin's on. Yes, dat "mov-ee" as you calls it keeps ~~uh~~ heap o' 'em in jail.

#### WAR

I 'member the very night de soldiers took Petersburg. I recollect 'twas jes' 'bout de breakin' o' day. We lived on Canal Street. I could hear de guns. All o' ~~uh~~ sudden three soldiers 'peared an' start knockin' an' beatin' on de door, askin'

if our white folks ~~was~~ good to us. If we had said "no" dem Yankees would ~~de~~ kill Mistess and Massa.

Dem soldiers dey kep' comin' to town 'til night. Mother made coffee an' I toted water from de spring. De soldiers would give me money. Man, sir, when dey lef' I had uh whole hat full o' money. Do you know my daddy took all my money. No, didn't give me one brass cent. Chil' like, I cried an' jes' bellowed 'til de olé lady spank me. Dat ~~was~~ ~~de~~ spankin' I 'member 'til dis day.

When Yankees come to ~~uh~~ store dey would break it open, an' give you all you could toat. Dey broke into smoke houses an' dey would throw de bigges' hams; whole meat sides, an' de lak. Flour, meal, corn an' everything ~~was~~ yours, an' if de niggers didn' git what dey want, 'twas dey own fault.