

Federal Writers' Project-1936-1938

In 1936-1938 former slaves were interviewed as part of the Federal Writers' Project. Some of these interviews involved residents of Winnsboro and Fairfield County. The following account of ex-slave Phillip Evans, who states that he was born April 1, 1852, was recorded by W. W. Dixon, who uses the local dialect in the narrative. Evans had lived on the plantation of CSA General John Bratton.

Philip Evans
Ex-slave 85 years old.

Phillip Evans, his wife, Janie, and their crippled son live together in a two-room frame house with one fireplace. The old woman has been a wet nurse for many white families in Winnsboro. Neither Phillip nor his boy can work. The wife nurses occasionally.

"I was born at de General Bratton Canaan place 'bout six miles, sort of up a little, on de sunrise side of Winnsboro. I hopes you're not contrary like, to think it too much against dis old slave when I tells you de day. Well sir, dat day was de fust day of April, but pray sir, don't write me down a fool 'cause I born on dat p'ticular April Fool day, 1852. When I gits through wid you, I wants you to say if dat birthday have any 'fect on dis old man's sensibility."

"My pappy was name Dick. Him was bought by General Bratton from de sale of de Evans estate. My pappy often tell mammy and us chillun, dat his pappy was ketched in Africa and fetched to America on a big ship in a iron cage, 'long wide a whole heap of other black folks, and dat he was powerful sick at de stomach de time he was on de ship."

"My mammy was name Charlotte. Her say her know nothin' 'bout her daddy or where he come from. One of my brothers is de Reverend Jackson C Evans, age 72. Richard, another brother, is 65 years old. All of us born on de Canaan Bratton place. General Bratton love dat place; so him named it proud, like de land of Canaan."

"I help to bring my brother Richard, us calls him Dick, into de world. Dat is, when mammy got in de pains, I run for de old granny on de place to come right away. Us both run all de way back. Good us did, for dat boy come right away. I 'members, to dis hour and minute, dat as soon as dat boy got here, he set de house full of noise and cryin' like a cat squallin'. All chillun does dat though, as soon as they come into de world. I got one sister older than me; her name Jenny Watson. Her live in a house on de Canaan place, callin' distance from where I live. Us is Methodists. A proud family, brought low by Mr Hoover and his crowd. Had to sell our land. 'spect us would have starved, as us too proud to beg. Thank God, Mr Roosevelt come 'long. Him never ask whether us democrat or 'publican nor was us black or white; him just clothe on nakedness and ease de pains of hunger, and goin' further, us goin' to be took care of in our old age. Oh, how I love dat man; though they do say him got enemies."

"My brother, de preacher, says dat occasioned by de fact dat de president got a big stick and a big foot, dat sometime he tromp on de gout foots of some of them rich people. Howsomever, he say dat as long as de Lord, de Son, and de Holy Ghost is wid de president, it'll be all right for us colored folks. It makes no difference 'bout who is against de president. He says us niggers down south can do nothin' but be Methodist, pray to de Lord, and shout for de president. It's goin' to try to do some of de prayin' but dis voice too feeble to do much shoutin'."

"What kind of house us live in at slavery time? Nice plank house. All de houses in de quarters made dat way. Our beds was good. Us had good marster. Our livin' houses and vittles was better and healthier than they is now. Big quarters, had many families wid a big drove of chillun. Fed them from a big long trays set on planks. They eat wid iron spoons, made at de blacksmith's shop. What they eat? Peas, beans, okra, Irish 'tators, mush, shorts, bread and milk. Dere was 'bout five or six acres to de garden. Us kept fat and happy."

"Who was de overseers? Mr. Wade Rawls was one and Mr. Osborne was another. There was another one but 'spect I won't name him, 'cause him had some trouble with Uncle Dennis. 'Pears like he insult my aunt and beat her. Uncle Dennis took it up, beat de overseer, and run off to de woods. Then when he git hungry, him come home at night for to eat sumpin'. Dis kept up 'til one day my pappy drive a wagon to town and Dennis jined him. Him was asittin' on de back of de wagon in de town and somebody point him out to a officer. They clamp him and put him in jail. After de 'vestigation they take him to do whippin' post of de town, tie his foots, make him put his hands in de stocks, pulled off his shirt, pull down his britches and whip him terrible."

"No sir, Marster General Bratton didn't 'low his slaves' chillun to work. I just played 'round, help feed de stock and pigs, bring in de fruit from de orchard and sich like. Yes sir, marster give me small coins. What I do wid de money? I buy a pretty cap one time. Just don't 'members what I did wid it all. Us went fishin' in de Melton Branch, wid hooks. Ketch rock rollers, perch and catfish. They eat mighty good. I like de shortnin' bread and sugar cane 'lasses best and de fust time I ever do wrong was 'bout de watermelons."

"Our shoes was made on de place. They had wooden bottoms. My daddy, being de foreman, was the only slave dat was given de honor to wear boots. Dere was just two mulattoes on de place. One was a daughter of my aunt. All de niggers was crazy 'bout her and wid de consent of my aunt, marster give her to some kinfolks in Arkansas. De other was name Rufus. My marster was not his daddy. No use to put down dere in writin' just who his pappy was."

"Stealing was de main crime. De whippin's was put on de backs, and if you scowled , dat would git you a whippin' right dere and then. Yes sir, dere is haints, plenty of them. De devil is de daddy and they is hatched out in de swamps. My brother say they is demons of hell and has de witches of earth for their bosses."

"De neighbors 'bout was de Neils, de Rawls, de Smiths and de Mobleys. Marse Ed Mobley was great for huntin'. Marse General Bratton was a great sheep raiser. In spite of dat, they got along; though de dogs pestered de sheep and de shptguns peppered de dogs sometimes."

"My marster was a general in de Secession War. After dat, him a controller of de state. Him run Old "Buttermilk" Wallace out of congress. Then he was a congressman."

"My mistress was Miss Bettie. Her was Dubose. Her child, Miss Isabella, marry some big man up north and their son, Theodore, is de bishop of de high 'Piscopal Church of Mississippi"

"Now I repeats de question: Does you think I's a fool just 'cause I's born on dat fust day of April, 1852? You made me feel religious askin' all them questions. Seem like a voice of all de days dat am gone turn over me and press on de heart, and dis room 'fect me like I was in a church. If you ever pass de Canaan place I'd be mighty happy to see you again."

1850 and Year 2000 Population Figures

1850---Free	7,158	Year	2000
1850---Slaves	<u>14,246</u>		
Total	21,404	Total	23,454