

Interview of Mrs. Louise Jones
401 Clinton Street
Petersburg, Virginia
By—Susie Byrd
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I couldn't tell you how long I been here, but I was here before this here Petersburg Depot was built. Bred and born in Dinwiddie County. I belonged to Louis Merriday. From that I fell to his daughter, Mary Snyder. All us slaves was divided up; yes, child some of them sold way before the old heads died. Lord! Lord! Them times was times. Uh-hum. Yes, Honey when old Master and Mistress passed things changed. They started dividing us slaves up among the heirs.

I used to sit on a pallet and tend to the babies. Yes, some of them white babies and nigger babies too would cry. And do you know it was just for meanness. I know sometimes wasn't nothing in this wide world wrong with them. I reckon the reason colored folks love meat skins today is because they got it so much when they were babies. During slavery time us nurses used to keep the babies from hollering by tying a string around a piece of skin and stick it in their mouth. You see if they got choked, we pulled out the meat skin with the string. Lord, yes! I've done it many times. You don't hear talk of that now days. What is that thing they call they use not? Nipple! Yes, yes. Isn't nothing but rubber and when I believe that meat skin sucking helped babies. You all got a lot of tom foolishness in bringing up brats in this day and time.

No, I didn't have a bit of whipping on my back; no more than my grandma gave me. Mistress didn't allow it.

Slaves was sold like this. They carry them to the block. This block where they was put on and sold to the highest bidder; you know like people sell cattle, horses and cows. Them was sad times. Sometimes we would hear the white folks plan the sale; and call slave names that they want to carry to the bock the day before. Then honey, we prayed and sang and called on my God that we get a good master and mistress.

You know, Honey, some mistresses and masters was mean to their slaves and they would beat them. Then the poor things would run away.

When I was a slave I didn't know what church was. We talked to God and prayed

by ourselves just wherever we were working; of course the white folks didn't hear us. Child, look like right now I can hear some of them mournful voices; especially brother John. He would always sing and pray. Uh-hum. He was sold, then I lost track of him. The man that bought him took his slaves way down South. That right far, ain't it?

Mistress hired me out to work on Washington Street. Lordy me! Honey, that was the meanest white woman in the world, I reckon. That woman treated me so mean that I took and run away from her. You know I just had to run across the field to the joining plantation; but was three or four miles before I got to the house. I will always recollect that day going through the woods. I had to pass a spring. I got tired from running. After I got out of everybody's sight, I start walking and playing long as children will do. I got tired and sat down on the bank near the spring. After getting a drink of the nice cool water, I sat down to pick a splinter out of my big toe. With that same brass pin I pierced these here holes in my ears and put straws in them. And do you know, Honey, I ain't never had no trouble with these brass pin holes in my ears. By that time it was late, so I went back to my mistress.

My mistress' slaves, like land and property, went to the heirs. And when things was settled up they didn't give me "sweat off the black cat's eye." No didn't give me nothing.

Slaves call themselves married when they jump over a broom stick. But I was married by a preacher.

What I think of the young folks of today? Well, them moving pictures they is ruining young folks. I just naturally think it best not to have moving pictures. It causes them to spend money that they could buy victuals (food) and rags (clothes) to put on their naked backs. You done seen the little dirty and ragged boys hanging around picture places. Gal, I tell you sometimes they will go stray doing like they see in these here pictures; shooting, killing, and going on. Yes, is terrible. I went to one once and saw it for myself. Nobody will persuade me to go in another one. I don't believe in no such carrying on. Yes, that "movie" as you call it keeps a heap of them in jail.

WAR

I remember the very night the soldiers took Petersburg. I recollect was just about the break of day. We lived on Canal Street. I could hear the guns. All of a sudden three soldiers appeared and started knocking an beating on the door asking

If our white folks was good to us. If we had said “no” them Yankees would kill Mistress and Master.

Them soldiers they keep coming to town until night. Mother made coffee and I toted (carried) water from the spring. The soldiers would give me money. Man, sir, when they left I had a whole hat full of money. Do you know my daddy took all my money. No, didn't give me one brass cent. Child, like I cried and just bellowed until the old lady spanked me. That was a spanking I remember until this day.

When Yankees came to a store they would break it open, and give you all you could take. They broke into smoke houses and they would throw the biggest hams; whole meat sides, and the like. Flour, meal, corn and everything was yours, and if the niggers didn't get what they wanted, it was their own fault.