

George Parker, 100, Once Slave, Won't Count First 40 years: Says He is Only Sixty

He Tells Story

Century Old Civil War Veteran Celebrates Birthday

Amused by Radio

Source: *Corydon Republican* newspaper, March 4th, 1937, page 2

It has taken a better part of 100 years for George Parker, retired Boone Township Negro farmer, to learn what is meant by "American Freedom" and now that his day has come, he is just beginning to live.

Residing on his meager little farm, south of Corydon, with his family around him, he can recall a brutal struggle for life and liberty that dates back to pre-civil war days when he took food and lodging as payment for whip lashings and endless days of bitter toil for a heartless master.

Observes 100th Birthday.

Thursday, February 25th, 1937, he was told by the family that on that day he was to celebrate his 100th birthday-that one hundred years ago he had been born of slave parents on a farm in Meade county, Kentucky. But little, old George wouldn't believe it.

Brushing a falling tear from his cheek, he uttered in a voice now broken with age: "You're kiddin' me, now. Don't I know I'm only sixty today."

Many who might have heard him, probably would have tossed aside his speech as the meaningless mutterings of an old man whose mind was becoming blank with extreme old age.

Had Good Reason.

But to his brother, Ambros, now 87, who sat by his side, therein was painted a vivid story of years back when as a youth in his teens, he saw a cruel master try to break his brother's fine spirit just as he would that of one of his fine horses. Ambros knew that George was subtracting those early years and only counting the last sixty of his life.

And only now that the same government, that gave Old George and Ambros their freedom from lives that "weren't fit to live," is supplying financial aid so that they may live their declining years in comfort, are these former southern slaves able to tell their stories of cruelty and hardships they were forced to endure.

The Republican photographer and staff writer wanted to look in on the family gathering last Thursday upon hearing that Old George was to celebrate his 100th birthday. They began the journey in an automobile and concluded it on foot as the car refused to brave the perils of a road filled with mud and jagged rocks.

His Pitiable Life's Story Revealed. . . .



—(REPUBLICAN PHOTO)

George Parker, (above) of Boone township, a former Negro slave and Civil War veteran, observed his 100th birthday last Thursday at his home. The Republican this week relates the colorful life story of this aged Harrison county farmer as told to a staff writer by Ambros Parker, 87, brother of the veteran of the War Between the States. The story appears on Page 2.

Source: *Corydon Republican* newspaper, March 4th, 1937, page 1

Sought Isolation.

But on arriving they found a reason for that apparent isolation. George and Ambros were contented with what seemed to your writer an unbearable loneliness because, when they first arrived, they had no confidence in other people. And later, they were glad to call this docile life home.

And why shouldn't they enjoy their present life! George never married, but Ambros did and he provided his brother, as well as himself, with a family-sons and daughters, who, "thank Heaven, wouldn't have to endure the hardships they were forced to share."

And they were satisfied with the results. The youngest of the Ambros' sons is still at home. He is Dewey, and with his wife, makes sure that his father and uncle have all the comforts of a real home.

Made Wise Choice.

Dewey made a fortunate matrimonial choice. His wife, small but with bundles of tireless nervous energy, dedicates here 24-hour days to making the two men happy. In fact, she is seldom beyond the finger tips of the gentleman, in whose honor that February 25 was being spent.

Dewey has two brothers in Chicago who cast their lots there. Both return to their childhood homes periodically and their shiny, powerful automobiles tell their stories of grand success.

And only with knowledge that "all is well: in the Parker household are these two old men able to endure the burning thoughts of their early lives.



"Primps" For Picture.

While Mrs. Parker was "primping" old George for his photograph, Ambros began the painful account of their childhood in old Kentucky.

One of the first memories of either was the "awful" day down in old Louisville when their father was placed on the block and sold for \$1,000. From that day the two youths were snatched away from parental ties and shipped down the river to Meade county to be offered into human bondage in the same merciless way their father was sold.

Imagine, if you can, the day when George was lead, not unlike a dumb animal, onto the block and sold to the highest bidder. Little Ambros, then but a mere child, looked on as his brother was sold to Joe Woodford, Meade county land owner, for \$500.

Pitiable Story Told.

Then came from the lips of this old man a pitiable story of days of painful toil under a hot Kentucky sun, lashings at the hand of Master Woodford and days of suffering for want of adequate food and clothing.

With fifty other slaves, George and Ambros answered the beck and call of a merciless owner.

During that time in their lives when a youth should be allowed to enjoy only amusements and seldom is forced to think of work, these two boys working along side of men, some many years older than themselves.

But a smile spread over the old man's face as he recalled to mind the dances held by the slaves during the periods when it became too dark to work. Choosing a well-beaten plat of ground those darkies would dance the hours away to the music and singing of famous old Negro spirituals.

Held Constant Fear.

Full enjoyment of these dances was withheld, however, as the slaves were in constant fear of being discovered by the hard-hearted land owner. On discovery, they were beaten "within an inch of their lives," and sometimes even denied food for days following the violation of the rules and regulations set up by their owner.

Once George rebelled against such vile treatment. Caught in the act of "havin' some fun" he was chased by the owner and when about to be caught George came upon some hot coals from the fire. He hurriedly scooped up some and hurled them in the general direction of the owner, "unluckily missing him."

And this act, according to Ambros, resulted in the worst beating his brother ever had.

Then Came the War.

Along came the Civil War, George, then twenty-three years old, became the victim of a vile plot by his master to keep from having to enter the actual conflict himself. In reality, George was bought off by his master.

Woodford apparently horrified at the prospect of having to defend his country's flag, offered the youthful Negro slave \$500 to do his fighting for him. But when George was made to understand the purpose of the North's reason for fighting, he was glad to go to the front. He was willing to risk his life that his friends and relatives might be freed from the treatment he was forced to suffer.

Fought with U. S. Grant.

Up and down the country, George traveled as a member of the Company A, 122 U. S. Colored Infantry (Note: George Parker is now believed to have been a member of the 124th U.S. Colored Troops, Co. D), taking part in many of the most famous battles of the war. Fitting of the Negro's

victory in gaining freedom for their future generations, George stood proudly in line at Richmond, Va., when General Robert E. Lee surrendered his sword to General U. S. Grant, of the Northern forces.

Another blow came to George following the Battle Between the States, when he returned to collect the \$500, promised him by Woodford, only to have the Meade county slave holder laugh at him and promise a beating if he “made trouble.”

But George’s enthusiasm at the prospect of being freed was not dimmed by this discovery. He, with Brother Ambros, packed his meager belongings and forded the Ohio River to look for a more promising life beyond.

Settle in Boone Township.

He settled in Boone township and put to use his knowledge of farming he had learned while in bondage. George and Ambros made the fields grow crops and provided the family, Ambros was later to foster, with an adequate living on this site buried in the hills of Harrison county.

The two brothers profited by the things they were denied in childhood and made certain the children were given educations and allowed to enjoy the privileges due them.

So the day has come when George and Ambros can forget the hardships of the days when they were slaves and concern themselves with the happiness of themselves and their family.

Enjoy Radio.

Even the radio has come into the Parker home and George has taken to it as his most enjoyable pastime. Characteristic of his apparent lightheartedness he remarked, during a radio program recently:

“Them people sure sing pretty!” I wonder when they’re gonna jump out of that box an’ say something to us?”

The weather is cold now and George is confined to the house, where Dewey’s fire greets him every morning with a cheery “good morning” when he awakens. But he longs for the spring and summer when he can go for a short walk with young Mrs. Parker and chew the Kentucky tobacco, he loves so well.

Last of Negro Veterans.

Old George is the last of a settling of Negro Civil War veterans that settled in his vicinity in Boone Township. C. N. Istecook and Si Rogers, both former slaves and life-long friends of his, now are dead and buried in the little cemetery within a stone’s throw of the Parker home. All were crusaders for a common cause and all lived long enough to see their dreams come true.

So we've seen the Parker family –George, 100, Ambros, 87; Dewey, 39; Charles, 14; Grace, 12, and Raymond, 5. Yes, they are happily free of any dread of future servitude and ill treatment at the hands of a ruthless slave holder.

And with that century behind him, there is little wonder that George chooses to disregard the first forty years of his life and feel that “Life Really Begins at Sixty.”