

SLAVE NARRATIVES

A Folk History of Slavery in the United States

From Interviews with Former Slaves

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KENTUCKY NARRATIVES

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Story of Peter Bruner, a former slave:

Peter Bruner, was born in Winchester, Kentucky, Clark Co., in 1845. His master was John Bell Bruner, who at that time treated him fairly well. When Peter was 10 years of age his master brought him and his sister to Irvine. After arriving in Irvine, Peter's master was very cruel to him. They got only cornbread, fat meat and water to eat. If his master's hunger was not satisfied, he would even take this little from them. There were [no] tables to eat from.

Once, Peter was taken into his master's house to nurse the children and was made to sleep on the floor with only a ragged quilt to lie on and one thin one over him.

Often he was whipped because his mistress said the washing was not clean, when it was. On one occasion when he was beaten his master took a piece of sole leather about 1 foot long and 2 inches wide, cut it full of holes and dipped it in water that was brined. He then took the leather and lashed the poor slave's back.

Joe Bruner, was a better master to his slaves than John. Once when Peter stole some sugar and flour, that he and his sister might have a pound cake, Joe caught him. He did not whip him however, because he knew that Peter did not often have enough to eat.

Peter endured torture as long as he could and finally decided to escape. He went to Richmond, Kentucky on to Lexington. On his way he made a contract with a man to drive his horses to Orleans, but was caught while in Lexington. On his way they caught him and took him to jail and he remained until his master came for him. This did not down [discourage] him, for just as soon as he could he escaped again, and this time got as far as Xenia, Ohio, but was again caught and brought back. This time he was severely beaten for three hours.

Then 17 years old, Peter was hired out to Jimmy Benton, who was more cruel than John Bruner, but was again brought back. It was then that he tried again to escape. This time

he went through Madison Co. near Sugar Creek. This was about the year 1861, when the war had begun. Again he was caught and taken back, but this time by Joe Bruner.

He escaped several times, but never could seem to get anywhere. Once when he and another slave, Phil, escaped they were caught and made to walk the entire distance barefoot. After this Peter, was chained each night to a chair. One morning while eating his breakfast he heard a knock at the door and on opening it he found a troop of Union Home Guards. Jim Benton and John Bruner were taken to prison. After this Peter went to Miller's Creek and worked at odd jobs for awhile.

When John Bruner was taken from Prison, he was much better to Peter. Soon after John was released from Prison, Peter escaped again. This time he had joined a regiment in the war. He went through hardships, cold, hunger and illness.

Often when they were awoken in the morning they would find their blankets frozen to the ground. He was sick several times. His feet frozen and other things would go wrong such as having fever and once he had Variloid [Varioloid, a form of smallpox].

After serving for awhile, he was mustered out and returned to Winchester, where his mother lived. He stayed a short time and then went to Oxford, Ohio. Here he went to school, but soon decided he was not learning anything so decided to get married. In the spring he was married to Nannie Proctor.

Again he made a mistake and during this time suffered hardships trying to keep a roof over their heads and food enough to eat. He worked at odd jobs, but could not find much to do and got very much in debt. He then went to Hamilton, Ohio, and asked Mr. John Frye to loan him some money. He had asked Mr. Roberts for some and he would not loan it. However, John Frye did loan him the money and Peter paid himself out of debt and bought a stone quarry from his mother-in-law. He sold a lot of stone from it, but finally sold this and took a job as engineer at Oxford College. Dr. Walker was president at that time. It was here that Peter celebrated his 25th wedding anniversary. The teachers, faculty and seniors made this a happy day for him. He got a job as janitor under Dr. Thompson at Miami University. He worked here for 13 years under President Taft. He is a member of Bethel A.M.E. Church and has been for over 50 years. In 1918 he and his wife celebrated his golden anniversary.

Peter Bruner is still living (1936) but his eyesight is impaired. He 91 years of age.