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From: Jane Matthews <quill@icsi.net>
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Subject: Lara Cornish Report
Date: May 27, 2000 4:22 PM

I found the article you asked for. I hope I have attached it correctly.
Jane

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From the Feb Issue of Texas Illustrated Magazine:

Laura Cornish's Slave Narrative, 1937

Laura Cornish, living at 2915 Nance Street, Houston Tx., was born on the plantation of Isaiah Day, near Dayton, Liberty Co., Tx. She does not remember when she was born, but she "reckons I'se 'bout 12 or mebbe 13 years old when all de cullud folks was made free." She also stresses the fact that Mr. Day would allow no one to refer to the colored people on his plantation as slaves or "Negros",

insisting that they were as free and white of soul as anyone, only "jes ' sunburnt on de outside."

Lord have mercy 'pon me, when you call me Aunt Laura it seems jes' like you mus' be some of my white folks, 'cause dat's what dey calls me,-I mean Papa Days chillen an' der young uns when dey used to come to see me. But it's been a long time since any of 'em come to see old Aunt Laura, an' I reckon dey most all gone now.

You know whar Dayton is at? Well, that's whar Papa Days plantation was an' whar I was born. I don't know jes' when I was born 'exactly ;but when the cullud folks was turned loose, you know , when dey was freed by de Gov'ment, I was 'bout 12 mebbe thirteen years old.

"Mama's name was Maria Dunlap and Daddy's name was Saul Dunlap. I don't re'lec whar Momma come from but I hear her say it was somewhar here in Texas.She was de seamstress aan' don't do nothin' but weave cloth on de sspining wheel and make clothes. Daddy was from laake Province I hear him say, but I don't know whar dat is. He does all the carpenter work 'round de plantation. I has five sisters and two brothers, but dey is all lots older'n me an' doon't pay no mind to me, an ' dat's 'boout al I knows 'nout my own folks. I ss'pose mamma aan' daddddy jahas folks too, but dey wasnt on Papa Day's place an' I gon't rec'lec' hearrin ' em talk 'bout 'em.

We belong to Me. Day, his name, Isaiah Day, but we all calls him Papa Day 'cause he won't let none of his cullud folks call him "Master" 'cause he won't 'low none of his cullud folks to call

him "Master" . He says we is born jes' free as free he is, only de white folks won't tell us so, an'

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dat our souls is jes' as white, and de reason we is darker on de outside is 'cause we is sunburnt. I has fear of lots of good white folks , but I don't reckon what anyoone was as good to de cullud as he was.

"Mis' Martha, dat his wife, was mighty good to, an' do any of us chillen get hurt or scratched, she's de one we goes to, an' she fixes us up with ointment or lin'ment 'pending on what de trouble is. Den she gives us a hug an' say "now you be careful an' don't get hurt no more." Lord have mercy, I can hear her jes' as plain like it was yestiddy. I knows Papa Day has two boys and a girl, an' a long time ago deey come to see me here an' brings dey own chillun, but I jes can't 'member things so well no more an' Lord forgive me , but I jes can't rec'lec' dere names. Seems like some things I members all right , an' some things I tries to think of what I has knowed 'bout is kinda foggy like.

I can't tell how many cullud folks Papa Day has on his plantation, but I know'd he had lots of em." 'Course I was jes' young den, an' 'bout all I think 'bout was playin' and eatin', an' we chillen sure did plenty of both of 'em. De only work Papa let us do was in de cotton field in de fall when cotton was most picked. We picks the boles close to the ground what was hard for grown ups to get, an' dat wassn't much work, it's mostly fun, 'cause we gets to ride to de house in de wagon what takes the picken in at night.

"But I rec'lec' 'sides the cotton Papa Day has lots of sugar cane, an' grinds de cane for two or three weeks an' makes de sugar an' syrup right on de plantation. Den he raises lots of sheep and hogs an' cattle'cause it takes a lot to feed all de folks on de place."

"No suh, ain't nobody gonna tell me dey has better white folks den Papa Day. None of his

cullud folks works Satiddys an' Sundays. Dey has time off to do what dey wants to, mebbe visit 'round the de neighbor plantations, an' we don't have no pass like de cullud folks do on de

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ther plantations. I'se telling you de truth. An' no one had better bother us either, 'cause Papa Day tell everyone if they touch a hair on our head, dey better do a good job and kill us , 'cause he's goin' to kill the one that hurts us."

"Dey never was no whippin' on our place either, 'cause Papa Day says we is human beiings and not beasts.

"I rec' lec ' one time we chillen is playin' near the woods whar dey is big briar patch, an' we see two old men what looks like wild men sure nuff, dey had long hair all over dere faces an dere shirts was all bloody , an ' when dey see us lookin ' , dey hides down in de brush. Lord have merccy, we sure was scairt an' we run as fas' as we could to de house an tell Papa Day whaat we seen. He tells us to take him whar we seen de men an' we goes to the place an' sure 'nuff dey is still dere . Papa Day goes in de briar patch an ' me an ' Lucy, one of de chillen I 'se playin' with

go long , too, but the rest stays out, an' one of de old men takes Pap Day 'round de knees an' begs not to tell dere master whar dey are 'cause dey can't work so good any more. I don't rec' lec' who dey say dey belong to , but I 'member Papa Day has tears comin' in his eyes an' he says 'dat is de sin of sins , to bloody flesh dat way.'

I don't know how long dey hid in de briar patch, but dey can't hardly walk, an' Papa Dday send me to de house an' tells me to have Aunt Mandy , de cook, to fix up some food an to hurry an' bring it back. Lord have mercy, I never see sech eatin' dere wasn't nothin' left for a ant to feed

himself, dey was so hungry.

Dats one time I see Papa day mad. Um Um, he sure do rare. He tells de old men To stay whar dey is at 'til he gets back , an' we goes to de house an' drives down whar de po' old men is an' gives 'em some clean clothes. Den He tells everybody to mind der own business an' not to stand 'round gwakin' an puts old Lodge an' Baldo in a house in de quarters by dere selves, an' tells us not to

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say nothin' to nobody 'bout what we has seen. Den he gets on a horse an' rides off an' don't get back till 'most dark. He goes to de man what owned Lodge and Baldo an' tells him dey at our place an' jes dares him to come an' get 'em. Yes ssuh, dat's de truth 'cause Aunt Mandy hears him tell Mis' Martha about it. I hears later on he pays de man somethin' for 'em. 'Cuse dey stay on our place an' jes work a little a'round de yard. I guess dey thought dey was in Heaven at Papa Day's place.

Now, I tells you sometin' an' its de truth too. I can't eat watermelon, 'cause de red meat look like se bloody shirts of Lodge and Baldo , an' jes to think 'bout it makes me sick to my stomach. Lord have mercy, dey was de awfulest sight I ever see.

“ On Sunday, we has preachin' at the plantation. Papa Day do de preachin' an' fore long folks is clappin' hands an' shoutin' an' ' singin'. He don't preach none 'bout us obeyin' a white master or mistress, no suh, but he tells us we better 'bey the Good Book an serve the Lord. I 'members two songs we sing de most is 'Amazin Grace 'and' 'Am I born to die?'. Lord have mercy, how we sing an' thank the Lord for all de goodness.”

One Mornin' Papa Day calls all de folks up to the house an' reads 'em de freedom papers what

de Gov'ment says to read to all de ccullud folks an' when he finish readin' he say "De Gov'ment don't need to tell you dat you is free, 'cause you been free all your days. Now, If you wants to stay you can , an' if you wants to go , you can, but if you go, white folks ain't gonnin' treat you like I do'. Dat's jes' de words that he said."

For de longest time, mebbe two years, dey wasn't none of Papa Day's cullud folks what left, but den, furst one family den 'nother gets 'em land to make a crop on, an den we leaves, too, when Daddy gets some land."

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"I don't rec'lec' how he gets it, mabbe from Papa Day, 'cause it wasn't far from his place, but him an me an ' Mamma goes to farmin ' on it. My sisters and brothers was all older than me , an' dey was all married, aan Papa Day married 'em himself outa de Book. Some of 'em stave dan ' worked for Papa Day., an ' some of em had a place of dere own, but Daddy and Momma and me sure worked hard on our place an' lots of times I hear Momma say she wish we staay on Papa Days place.

I dont' rec'lec' how long we stay on de farm, but I rmember onee year we don't make no crop hardly, an' Daddy say he goin' get out 'fore we starves and we come to Houston. Right here whar I lives now was jes' a prairie then, jes like the country. Daddy gets him a job as a carpenter an' hires me out for a house girl, but I don't stay too long 'cause Momma took sick an' I had to nurse her til she die. Den Daddy get sick right after Momma is buried and died of the rots. I don't rmember what else dey calls it what he died from."

"Lord a Mercy , That sure was a hard time for me when I lose my Momma and Daddy , an' I has to go back to Dayton an'stay to my sister Rachel, an' I'se had a hard time since, ccause both my husbands what I married has been dead a long time an' de only chile I had died when he

was jes a baby, an' l'se jes' alone, sittin' an' waitin' for de Lord to call me."