

KAS RADIO - Episode 8

Recreational Pursuits of Kentucky's Enslaved People A *Think History* Radio Spot

Episode Transcript



People dance while musicians play at an 1852 festival. Two men play stringed instruments – the fiddle and the banjo – while another plays the spoons. A third is “patting juba” on his thighs to set the pace.

Central Kentucky’s enslaved people did not spend all of their time working. Dan Bogie, formerly enslaved in Garrard County, remembered that “We did not work on Saturday afternoon. The men would go fishing, and the women would go to the neighbors and help each other piece quilts.

We used to have big times at the corn shuckings. The neighbors would come and help. We would have camp fires and sing songs and usually a big dance at the barn....”

Enslaved musicians played for their owners, and for family and friends. According to Tinie Force and Elvira Lewis, who were enslaved in Ballard County, “Banjo and guitar playing were practiced by many blacks of the slavery period. These were on the order of concerts; and many...became rather accomplished musicians.”

During archaeological investigations around a Jessamine County plantation’s kitchen and slave house, archaeologists discovered parts of musical instruments: a brass reed plate from a harmonica; a metal bracket from metal tuning knob pins from a guitar or banjo; and the iron frame of a juice harp.

To Read More

A History of Blacks in Kentucky, Vol. 1, From Slavery to Segregation, 1760-1891,

by Marion B. Lucas (1992). Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort.

Traces the role of Blacks from the early exploration and settlement of Kentucky to 1891, when African Americans gained freedom only to be faced with a segregated society. Extensive use of primary sources: slave diaries, Freedmen’s Bureau records, church minutes, personal papers.

African Americans Continued to Sing and Dance, a blog by Barbara Wells Sarudy (June 12, 2019).

<https://b-womeninamericanhistory19.blogspot.com/2019/06/despite-slavery-19c-african-americans.html>

This short essay on the enduring traditions of African American singing and dancing is richly illustrated with colorful period paintings and black and white engravings.

Day of Tears by Julius Lester (2007). Hyperion Books for Children, New York. Children's fiction book based on an actual event for ages 10-14/grades 5-9. *On March 2 and 3, 1859, the largest auction of slaves in American history took place in Savannah, Georgia. More than 400 slaves were sold. On the first day of the auction, torrential rain began falling, stopping only when the auction had ended. The simultaneity of the storm with the auction led to these two days being called "the weeping time."*

January's Sparrow by Patricia Polacco (2009). Philomel Books/Penguin Random House, New York. Children's fiction book for ages 8-12/grades 3-7. *In the middle of the night, the Crosswhites must flee the Kentucky plantation where they work - January has been beaten and killed by the plantation master, and they fear who may be next. Sadie must leave behind the wooden sparrow carved for her by January. Through the Underground Railroad, the Crosswhites make their way to Michigan and freedom.*

Kentucky Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in Kentucky from Interviews with Former Slaves (1936-1938), by the

Federal Writers' Project, Works Progress Administration (2006). Library of Congress, Applewood Books, Bedford, MA.

First-person accounts of slavery and 500 black-and-white photographs of former slaves collected in the 1930s as part of the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) of the Works Progress Administration, later renamed Work Projects Administration (WPA).

Image Credits

Robert Criswell, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" (New York, 1852), facing page 113. "Festival, South Carolina, 1852." From *Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora*, accessed May 25, 2021. (<http://www.slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/1004>).

To learn more about **Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938**, go to <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection/>. Find the Kentucky Slave Narratives in Volume 7 here: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mesn.070/?st=gallery>

Louisville Jug Music by Michael L. Jones (2014). The History Press, Charleston, SC. *During the nineteenth century, Louisville, Kentucky, was at the heart of jug band music. German and Irish immigrants, former slaves en route to Chicago, and homesteaders moving into the city created a fertile ground for this new sound. Local writer Michael L. Jones describes a musical tradition that has left a long-lasting impression.*

Narrative of the sufferings of Lewis Clarke, During a Captivity of More Than Twenty-Five Years, Among the Algerines of Kentucky, One of the So Called Christian States of America, Dictated by Himself, by Lewis Garrard Clarke (1845). David H. Ela, Printer, Boston, MA. Electronic Edition (1999), Academic Affairs Library,

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill.

<https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/clarke/clarke.html>

Originally published in 1845, this was the first narrative to be copyrighted by a slave. Lewis Clarke, born in 1815 in Madison County, Kentucky, dictated his story to the abolitionist J. C. Lovejoy. It directly inspired Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel Uncle Tom's Cabin.

The Strength of These Arms by Raymond Bial (2000). HMH Books for Young Readers/ HoughtonMifflinHarcourt, Boston. Children's nonfiction book for ages 10-13/ grades 5-8.

The everyday life of plantation slaves is detailed in text and haunting photographs of recently excavated plantation sites, giving immediacy to the lives of enslaved Africans while paying tribute to the daily courage of a people who endured against all odds.

Uncovering the Lives of Kentucky's Enslaved People by M. Jay Stottman and Lori C. Stahlgren (2017). Heritage Spotlight 5, Kentucky Archaeological Survey, Lexington. <https://www.kentuckyarchaeologicalsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Spotlight-No.5-Uncovering-the-Lives-of-Kentuckys-Enslaved-People.pdf>

Summarizes archaeological research carried out at a typical early to late nineteenth century Kentucky plantation in central Kentucky. Focuses on the lifeways of the enslaved Blacks who lived and worked there.



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