**THOMAS COLE was born in Jackson Co., Alabama, on the 8th of August, 1845, a slave of Robert Cole. He ran away in 1861 to join the Union Army. He fought at Chickamauga, under Gen. Rosecran and at Chattanooga, Look Out Mt. and Orchard Knob, under Gen. Thomas. After the war he worked as switchman in Chattanooga until his health failed due to old age. He then Came to Texas and lives with his daughter, in Corsicana. Thomas is blind**

**"I might as well begin far back as I remember and tell you all about myself. I was born over in Jackson County, in Alabama, on August 8, 1845. My mother was Elizabeth Cole, her bein' a slave of Robert Cole, and my father was Alex Gerrand, 'cause he was John Gerrand's slave. I was sposed to take my father's name, but he was sech a bad, ornery, no count sech a human, I jes' taken my old massa's name. My mother was brung from Virginny by Massa Dr. Cole, and she nussed all his six chillen. My sister's name was Sarah and my brother's name was Ben and we lived in one room of the big house, and allus had a good bed to sleep in and good things to eat at the same table, after de white folks gits through.**

**"I played with Massa Cole's chillen all de time, and when I got older he started me workin' by totin' wood and sech odd jobs, and feedin' de hawgs. Us chillen had to pick cotton every fall. De big baskets weigh about seventy-five to a hundred pounds, but us chillen put our pickin's in some growed slave's basket. De growed slaves was jes' like a mule. He work for grub and clothes, and some of dem didn't have as easier a time as a mule, for mules was fed good and slaves was sometimes half starved.**

**But Massa Cole was a smart man and a good man with it. He had 'spect for the slaves' feelin's and didn't treat dem like dumb brutes, and 'lowed dem more privileges dan any other slaveholder round dere. He was one of de best men I ever knows in my whole life and his wife was jes' like him. Dey had a bit, four-room log house with a big hall down the center up and down. De loge was all peeled and de chinkin' a diff'rent color from de logs and covered with beads. De kitchen am 3 one-room house behin' de big house with de big chimney to cook on. Dat where all de meals cooked and carry to de house.**

**"In winter massa allus kill from three to four hundred hawgs, de two killin's he done in November and January. Some kill and stick, some scald and scrape, and some dress dem and cut dem up and render de lard. Dey haul plenty hick'ry wood to de smokehouse and de men works in shifts to keep de smoke fire goin' sev'ral days, den hangs de meat in de meathouse. First us eat all de chitlin's, den massa begin issuin' cut-back bones to each fam'ly, and den 'long come de spareribs, den de middlin' or a shoulder, and by dat time he kill de second time and dis was to go all over 'gain. Each fam'ly git de same kind of meat each week. Iffen one git a ham, dey all git a ham. All de ears and feet was pickle and we eats dem, too. If de meat run out 'fore killin' time, us git wild turkeys or kill a beef or a goat, or git a deer.**

**"Massa let us plant pumpkins and have a acre or two for watermelons, iffen us work dem on Saturday evenin's. Dere a orchard of 'bout five or six acres peaches and apples and he 'low us to have biscuits once a week. Yes, we had good eatin' and plenty of it den**

**"Massa had one big, stout, healthy lookin' slave 'bout six foot, four inches tall, what he pay $3,000 for. He bought six slaves I knows of and give from $400 up for dem. He never sold a slave 'less he git unruly.**

**"Massa allus give us cotton clothes for summer and wool for winter, 'cause he raised cotton and sheep. Den each fam'ly have some chickens and sell dem and de eggs and maybe go huntin' and sell de hides and git some money. Den us buy what am Sunday clothes with dat money, sech as hats and pants and shoes and dresses.**

**"We'd git up early every day in de year, rain or shine, hot or cold. A slave blowed de horn and dere no danger of you not wakin' up when dat blowed long and loud. He climb up on a platform 'bout ten feet tall to blow dat bugle. We'd work till noon and eat in de shade and rest 'bout a hour or a little more iffen it hot, but only a hour if it cold. You is allus tired when you makes de day like dat on de plantation and you can't play all night like de young folks does now. But us lucky, 'cause Massa Cole don't whip us. De man what have a place next ours, he sho' whip he slaves. He have de cato-nine tails of rawhide leather platted round a piece of wood for a handle. De wood 'bout ten inches long and de leather braided on past de stock quite a piece, and 'bout a foot from dat all de strips tied in a knot and sprangle out, and makes de tassel. Dis am call de cracker and it am what split de hide. Some folks call dem bullwhips, 'stead of cat-o-nine tails. De first thing dat man do when he buy a slave, am give him de whippin'. He call it puttin' de fear of Gawd in him.**

**"Massa Cole 'low us read de Bible. He awful good 'bout dat. Most de slave owners wouldn't 'low no sech. Uncle Dan he read to us and on Sunday we could go to church. De preacher baptize de slaves in de river. Dat de good, old-time 'ligion, and us all go to shoutin' and has a good time. Dis gen'ration too dig'fied to have de old-time 'ligion.**

**"When baptizin' comes off, it almost like goin' to de circus. People come from all over and dey all singin' songs and everybody take dere lunch and have de good time. Massa Cole went one time and den he git sick, and next summer he die. Missy Cole, she moves to Buntsville, in Alabama. But she leave me on de plantation, 'cause I'm big and stout den. She takes my mother to cook and dat de lest time I ever seed my mother. Missy Cole buys de fine house in Huntsville my mother tells me to be good and do all de overseer tells me. I told her goodbye and she never did git to come back to see me, and I never seed her and my brother and sister 'gain. I don't know whether dey an sold or not.**

**"I thinks to myself, dat Mr. Anderson, de overseer, he'll give me dat cat-o-nine tails de first chance he gits, but makes up my mind he won't git de chance, 'cause I's gwine run off de first chance I gits. I didn't know how to git out of dere, but I's gwine north where dere ain't no slaveowners. In a year or so dere am 'nother overseer, Mr. Sandson, and he give me de log house and de gal to do my cookin' and sich. Dere am war talk and we 'gins gwine to de field earlier and stayin' later. Corn am haul off, cotton am haul off, hawgs and cattle am rounded up and haul off and things 'gins lookin' bad. De war am on, but us don't see none of it. But 'stead of eatin' cornbread, us eats bread out of kaffir corn and maize. "e raises lots of okra and dey say it gwine be parch and grind to make coffee for white folks. Dat didn't look good either. Dat winter, 'stead of killin' three or four hundred hawgs like we allus done befo', we only done one killin' of a hundred seventy-five, and dey not all big ones, neither. When de meat supply runs low, Mr. Sandson sends some slaves to kill a deer or wild hawgs or jes' any kind of game. He never sends me in any dem bunches but I hoped he would and one day he calls me to go and says not to go off de plantation too far, but be sho' bring home some meat. Dis de chance I been wantin', so when we gits to de huntin' ground de leader says to scatter out, and I tells him me and 'nother man goes north and make de circle round de river and meet 'bout sundown. I crosses de river and goes north. I's gwine to de free country, where dey ain't no slaves. I travels all dat day and night up de river and follows de north star. Sev'ral times I thunk de blood houn's am trailin' me and I gits in de big hurry. I's so tired I couldn't hardly move, but I gits in a trot.**

**"I's hopin' and prayin' all de time I meets up with dat Harriet Tubman woman. She de cullud women what takes slaves to Canada. She allus travels de underground railroad, dey calls it, travels at night and hides out in de day. She sho' sneaks dem out de South and I thinks she's de brave woman.**

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**You ain't gwine take me back to de plantation, is you?' Dey says, 'No. Does you want to fight for de North?' I says I will. 'cause dey talks like northern men. Us walk night and day and gits in Gen. Rosecran's camp and dey thunk I's de spy from de South. Dey asks me all sorts of questions and says dey'll whip me if I didn't tell dem what I's spyin' 'tout. Fin'ly dey 'lieves me and puts me to work helpin' with de cannons. I feels 'portant den, but I didn't know what was in front of me, or I 'spects I'd run off 'gain…**

**First-hand account #2**

"I was born in Greene County near Penfield, Georgia," she said. Aggie Crawford was my mother and she was married to Jim Young. My only sister was Mariah, and my three brothers were Ned, John, and Jim. Ned was a mulatto. I know who his father was, but of course you won't ask me that. I wouldn't want to expose my own mother or the man who was Ned's father. I was quite a small child during the war period, and I can tell you very little of that time, except the things my mother told me when I grew old enough to remember. My mother belonged to the Crawford family in Greene County, but when I knew anything we were living in Athens and were the slaves of Marster John Crawford.

"As children we played around the yard; those of us who were old enough had odd jobs to do. The unceiled house that my father and mother shared with three other families was weatherboarded and had a chimney made of sticks and dirt. There was a bed in each corner of the room and from one to three children slept in the bed with their parents: the rest of the children slept on the floor. The tall old home-made wooden beds had very much the appearance of beds used now, except that cords were used instead of the metal springs that came into use later. Our osnaburg mattress ticks were filled with straw. I'm quite sure there were no pillows. There was also a two-story house on the lot for slaves." She was asked what she called her father and mother during slavery time, and her reply was: "I have always said father and mother because I liked it better, and the Bible teaches us to say that.

"I never got any money in slavery time. If the slaves ever got any, it was when the Yankees came through here. At that time the white people gave their money to the slaves for safekeeping, and after the Yankees went on it was returned to the white owners.

"My mother was the cook and looked after the house. Oh, yes indeed, we had good food to eat. Bread, milk, meat, collard greens, turnips, and potatoes. I would say we had just everything that was grown in the garden and on the plantations to eat at that time. The cooking was done in the kitchen in the yard. The fireplace was as wide as the end of this room, and a long iron bar extended from one end to the other. The great cooking pots were suspended over the coals from this bar by means of pot hooks. Heavy iron skillets with thick lids were much used for baking, and they had ovens of various sizes. I have seen my mother bake beautiful biscuits and cakes in those old skillets, and they were ideal for roasting meats. Mother's batter cakes would just melt in your mouth and she could bake and fry the most delicious fish. There was no certain thing that I liked to eat more than anything else in those days. I was young and had a keen appetite for all good things. Miss Fannie and Miss Susan often made candy and it was so good I could have eaten all they made, had they given it to me. My father hired his time out; he made and sold gingercakes on the railroad.

"Marster John Crawford, son of the distinguished William H. Crawford, was my owner. Indeed, he was good to us. I'll tell you after awhile about the time he wouldn't let the town marshal whip my mother. They told me his wife was a fine woman and that she was as good to her slaves as she could be. She died very young in life and Marse John's sisters, Miss Fannie and Miss Susan, kept house for him after that. Marse John's three children were Miss Fannie, Miss Rosa, and Marse Allie. Miss Rosa married Marse Tom Golden, and Miss Fannie married a Gerdine; I've forgotten his first name.

"Marse John may have had an overseer on one of his plantations, but I don't remember. I do know he didn't have a carriage driver for he didn't have a carriage. I don't believe I can describe the peculiar shape of his fine eight-room house. It was on Dougherty Street, right back of Scudder's School. The Crawfords were considered very uppity people and their slaves were uppish too. Marse John didn't have many slaves and they had to get up and get going early every morning. Marse John was postmaster of Athens and had to be in his office by eight o'clock every morning so he ordered that his breakfast be served regularly at seven-thirty.

"No Mam, our white folks didn't teach their slaves to read and write because it was against the law. However, they did read the Bible to us, and the slaves that were smart enough were asked to repeat the verses they had learned from hearing Miss Fannie, Miss Sue, and Marse John read. The Crawford children were caught teaching my mother to read and write, but they were made to stop. Mother was quick to learn and she never gave up. She would steal the newspapers and read up about the war, and she kept the other slaves posted as to how the war was progressing. She knew when the war was over almost as soon as Marse John did.

"I don't recall any certain reason why the slaves were punished; they needed it, I'm sure of that. Some folks need to be punished now. Miss Sue, as we called her, whipped the slaves for misbehavior. I remember one time there was quite a commotion. The town marshal came to our house to whip my mother. It had been told that she had been writing letters, asking people to buy whiskey from her, but Marse John wouldn't let the marshal touch her. There was a jail, but I don't recall that any of Marse John's slaves were ever put in there. I was told that his slaves were, as a rule, well behaved and that they gave him no trouble.

"Yes Mam, we went to church, that is, those of us who cared to go did. There wasn't any separate church for colored people in Athens, that I can remember. We went to church and Sunday School at the First Presbyterian Church, where the slaves were allowed to sit in the gallery. I recall that Dr. Hoyt used to pray that the Lord would drive the Yankees back. He said that 'Niggers were born to be slaves.' My mother said that all the time he was praying out loud like that, she was praying to herself: 'Oh, Lord, please send the Yankees on and let them set us free.' I wasn't enough of a singer to have a favorite song, and I was too happy playing with the Crawford children to be interested in going to baptizings and funerals.

"After the work for the day was finished at the big house, the slaves went to their quarters to weave cloth and sew, but when ten o'clock came and the bell sounded, everything had to be quiet. Slaves on our place worked Saturday afternoons the same as any other day. On Saturday nights the young folks and a few of the older folks danced. Some of them got passes from Marse John so they could visit around. They popped corn, pulled candy, or just sat around and talked. Those of us who desired went to Sunday School and church on Sundays; others stayed at home and did their washing and ironing, and there was always plenty of that to be done.

"My mother went to cornshuckings, cotton pickings, and quiltings. They must have had wonderful times, to hear her tell it. She said that after the corn was shucked, cotton picked, or quilts quilted, they always gave them plenty of good things to eat and drink and let them aloose to enjoy themselves for the balance of the night. Those things took place at harvest time, and everyone looked forward to having a good time at that season. Mother said that Marse John was particular with his slaves, and wouldn't let them go just anywhere to these things.

"About the only game I can remember playing as a child was a doll game. The Crawford children would use me for the doll, and then when my turn came to play mamma and claim one of them for my doll, Miss Fanny or Miss Sue would appear and then I would have to be a doll for them. I didn't mind, for I dearly loved them all.

"Marse John was grand to sick slaves. He always sent for Dr. Moore, who would make his examination and write out his prescription. When he left his parting word was usually 'Give him a sound thrashing and he will get better.' Of course he didn't mean that; it was his little joke. Dr. Holt, Dr. Crawford Long, and Dr. Jones Long were sometimes called in for consultation on particularly serious cases. We didn't like Dr. Moore and usually begged for one of the other doctors. I don't think my white folks used teas made of herbs, leaves or roots; they may have, but I don't remember it. However, I do know that we wore little sacks of asafetida around our necks to keep off diseases, and the white folks wore it too.

**First-hand account #3**

*Late in the afternoon my new master put me into a wagon and took me over very rough and hilly roads to his home about five miles distant, on a farm located on the bank of Beech Fork river. We reached this home of William Madinglay about ten o'clock at night. His wife, one child, and Peter, a slave, constituted his family, and I made one more.*

*On reaching the place, Madinglay called loudly: "Peter!" This individual soon appeared, saying: "Yes, sir, Master!" He was then asked:*

*"Have you put in feed for the horses?"*

*"Yes, sir, Master!"*

*Turning to me he said: "Come along with me."*

*We went to the kitchen and there we met his wife at the door when she asked: "What have you there, William?"*

*His answer was: "Oh, I have a little boy here for you."*

*"Indeed, you have a bright little fellow," she replied.*

*He then said: "This is one of the Yeager niggers we saw advertised for sale at auction."*

*"I declare he is not a very dark colored one!”*

*"No, wife, he isn't, you see he is one of those pumpkin seed niggers from the mountains."*

*"Oh Bill! what makes you talk that way? I think he will make a good servant."*

*His reply was: "I reckon he will when he gets that black snake around him a couple of times." (He referred to the raw hide whip.)*

*"William, I hope he will not need that at all, I don't think he is as stupid as Peter."*

*"Oh well, Margaret, I don't mind if he is stupid, I can train him, there is nothing like the black snake for stupidness."*

*I had never heard such talk before, and I hung my head and began to cry when she said: Oh Bill, don't scare the boy to death, I think he will be a good boy.*

*Master then commanded: "Stand up there and straighten up, let your Mistress see what kind of a boy you are, she hasn't half seen you yet."*

*She brought a lamp from the shelf and carefully looked me over, after which she said: "Oh what a nice little lad, and what a nice suit he has on!"*

*"Oh yes, wife, up on the mountains they don't know how to work the niggers, but I will teach him how to work. The idea of a nigger with a suit on him like that! Wait till I get a suit on him, I'll show him how to work."*

*She then asked: "What is your name?"*

*"Isaac," I answered.*

*"That's a nice little name. Take off your hat, put it on the chair and sit down in the corner."*

*I took off my hat and coat and looked for a place to hang them, as I had been accustomed to do in our old home, but found none. I laid them on the little bundle I had with me and walked over to the corner of the fireplace and sat on the floor. Peter came in and Master asked: "Have you got your chores all done?"*

*"Yes, sir, Master."*

*"Did you go to the mill to-day?"*

*"Yes, sir, Master."*

*"Did you bring a load of meal home!"*

*"Yes, sir, Master."*

*"Is there plenty of wood at the still?"*

*"Yes, sir, Master."*

*"Do you know if they are going to grind tomorrow?"*

*"Yes, sir, Master, dey's going to grind tomorrow."*

**(being “loaned out” to work for others)**

*On the first of January, 1854, I was sent to my Master's brother, his name was James Madinglay. I remained with him two months. He was the meanest kind of a slave holder. He had two slaves, a girl and a boy. He drank very hard and seldom left his room on account of his being too drunk to do so. He would order the slaves to his room and whip them unmercifully without any cause or provocation. His son was equally as mean as he, he would watch the slaves, and if he saw one idle, only for a moment, he would inform his father and that meant, every time, a severe whipping. We were to husk corn one morning during the husking season, but it rained so very hard that we did not start at once for the crib. For this delay, Master called us all in to be punished. I stood by and saw him whip the other boy severely. I knew my turn would come next, and I started on the run for home as hard as I could run, not stopping till I reached there. Mistress saw me and wished to know my reasons for my appearance. I told her what had taken place and she said it was "all right, stay here till your Master comes home."*

*I didn't know what Master would say or do, but when he came I told him all about it. He listened quietly till I was through, and then said: "It is all right this time, Isaac, as I have rented my farm for four years and sold you to my brother, John, who lives on the Beech Fork river, about six miles from here; he is not at home now but will be in a few days, so you can 'back' your things and I will take you there in the morning.*

*I felt very well satisfied with the result and said: "I have nothing to 'back' as all I have is on my back and I can go any time."*

*The next morning we went to his brother John's farm. There was no one there except the overseer and an old negro woman. The overseer's name was Steward, and he had been engaged to manage what was called "an improved stock farm." In a few days my new Master sent to the farm a fine looking slave girl, an octoroon, she was to take charge as stewardess. Master had won her at a game of poker in St. Louis. This girl he kept for his own use, and she was made Mistress of the stock farm. By stock it will be understood is meant negro slaves.*

*The stock soon began to arrive, there was a negro with a couple of brood mares, then came Jim and Peter, then two males, then three women, then about the first of April John Madinglay made his appearance with a group of twenty, making thirty slaves all told. There were also brought onto the farm, farming utensils, mules, ten horses, thirty head of cattle, one hundred hogs and fifty sheep. He owned one thousand acres of land, but most of it was covered with brush or bushes. He raised the usual farm products and when these did not require attention we were set to work clearing the land. He had agents out in the country buying slaves and forwarding them to the farm, and soon there were one hundred and twenty slaves on the farm. After harvesting, the surplus negroes were sent to the Southern markets at Grand Gulf, Jackson and Vicksburg, at each of which places he had slave pens.*

*The time of the removal was kept secret from the slaves, and about ten o'clock the night before, twelve men were sent into the cabins and these hand-cuffed the males. In the morning these were brought out by twos and fastened to a chain about forty or fifty feet long. The women and children not able to walk were packed into wagons and the line of march commenced, the chained men first, the women able to walk next, and the wagons brought up the rear. A beautiful sight for a country that boasts of its freedom! How the boasted Southern chivalry must have delighted in such sights, delighted in them so greatly they were ready to go to war to preserve the "sacred institution" of human slavery! I have tasted its sacredness and felt that its Divinity is devilish. The line of march was to Nashville where they were placed aboard of boats and taken to the different slave pens.*

*The pens were divided into groups, women in one, men in another, girls and young boys by themselves. Here the buyers came and examined the stock, feeling of them as men do horses, looking into their mouths and eyes and asked questions as to sickness. Then the sales commenced and were held from November till about the first of March, during which time the agents were scouring the country, picking up new stock and forwarding the same to the market. After the first of March, if there were any unsold, they were taken back to the stock farm to work during the summer and shipped with the next lot ready for market.*