

MARTHA'S STORY

Martha was a very young girl at the start of this story. She was under 10 years of age, although I cannot confirm her age. She was born into slavery and as such lived in the same miserable conditions many of our ancestors shared. Life on a Virginia plantation was not glamorous. For Martha living there sheltered her from many of the advances that were made nationwide during that time. So when her master came to her one day and whispered a secret for her to keep, Martha was more than willing. Being young, she did not know to be wary of all the possible dangers that life on a plantation would present daily.

The master asked her if she would like to see a “train,” and said if she did, then he would take her to see one. There was just one condition; she had to keep their little trip into town a secret from her mother and from the other slaves on the plantation. Martha in her eagerness to see a real live train, eagerly agreed to keep this secret.

So in the wee hours of the next day, before the sun even had a chance to show its first rays of the new day, the master came to Martha's raggedy little cabin and whispered for Martha to come out and join him. While the details of how excited Martha was as she rode in the carriage or wagon to town to see the train, are lost to history. I can only imagine her glee and her excitement in during that her ride into town and I can only imagine her mother's agony and despair when she woke and found Martha missing.

What I can share, is that Martha's master's sole purpose for the ride into town was to sell Martha at the slave auction. Martha was sold to another slave owner who did take Martha to see and to ride on that infamous train. Martha travelled far south to another plantation, which one I cannot attest to for that fact is also lost into history.

However, what was shared through my family's oral history is that some how when Martha became an adult she had her freedom. I am not sure if this was through the emancipation of slaves by President Abraham Lincoln or whether for whatever reason her master decided to free Martha. Sometime during her adult life Martha met and married a Native American Indian. She bore him several children.

It was said that he was a gambler and through his love of the game he lost his life in a dispute. Martha was without a husband, on her own, with several children. It was not shared with me how Martha managed to make her way back to Virginia. She did, and on a Sunday morning, she walked into the family's church. I cannot share with you the name of the church; I would dare guess it was our family's long-standing church in Orange, Virginia, Locust Grove Baptist Church. It was there that Martha walked in and her presence disrupted the church's service. Everyone was shocked and gladdened to see Martha. For when they woke that fateful morning and discovered Martha was missing and then learned of her being sold to slavery, everyone had given up all hope of ever seeing Martha again.

Martha's reunion that Sunday morning was wonderful and awesome. I can only imagine the joy on everyone's faces, the tears of happiness that was shared. I hope that Martha's mother was there to welcome her home. Of course, this is a happy ending, all I know is that Martha lived out her remaining days with her family in Virginia.

I am glad that my Aunt saw fit to share this amazing story of one of my ancestors, Martha Dulaney, who was a strong determined woman.

Submitted by Twanna Smith Wiggins, October 16, 2019