VIRGINIA WASHINGTON: Ex-slave, age estimated as 90.

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/resources/wpa.html

"One day I made up my mind I was goin' to try and get away, if I died in doin' it, because I done got to where I'd rather be dead than keep on so. Do you know that hard treatment make you feel that way? Well, I got just like that inside, but I done act sweet and deceitful like."

"One night I saw it was the best chance I'd ever get, so I 'slipped away. I didn't have nothin' cept de clothes on my back, and not many of them."

"I thought I was going try and make it up to Cincinnaty. I slep' in er woods under brush heaps for sev'ral days. Then a bunch of Yankee soldiers come past. It was a God send, I reckon, because they keep me in

camp for a few days, en say they knowed when a boat was due in Memphis, and that they could get me off safe with some men they knowed on the boat."

"I got through all right, en was up to Cincinnaty, at a place where they say I'd be safe with folks they knowed.”

END OF WASHINGTON NARRATIVE

http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/roper/menu.html

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**Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper, from American Slavery.**

I set off for Charlotte, in North Carolina. I went on very quickly the whole of that day, fearful of being pursued. The trees were thick on each side of the road, and only a few houses, at the distance of two or three miles apart; as I proceeded, I turned round in all directions to see if I was pursued, and if I caught a glimpse of any one coming along the road, I immediately rushed into the thickest part of the wood, to elude the grasp of what, I was afraid, might be my master. I went on in this way the whole day.

While thinking what I should do, I observed some waggons before me, which I determined to keep behind, and never go nearer to them than a quarter of a mile--in this way I travelled till I got to Salisbury. If I happened to meet any person on the road, I was afraid they would take me up, I asked them how far the waggons had gone on before me? to make them suppose I belonged to the waggons. At night, I slept on the ground in the woods, some little distance from the waggons, but not near enough to be seen by the men belonging to them. All this time, I had but little food, principally fruit, which I found on the road. On Thursday night, I got into Salisbury, having left Chester on the Monday preceding.

After this, being afraid my master was in pursuit of me, I left the usual line of road, and took another direction, through Huntsville and Salem, principally through fields and woods; on my way to Caswell Court-House. I also came up with a small cart, driven by a poor man, who had been moving into some of the western territories, and was going back to Virginia, to move some more of his luggage. On this I told him I was going the same way to Milton, thirteen miles from Caswell Court-House; he took me up in his cart, and went to the Red House, two miles from Milton, the place where Mr. Mitchell (Roper’s

former owner) took me from, when six years old, to go to the Southern States.

At the Red House I left the cart, and wandered about a long time, not knowing which way to go and find my mother. After some time, I took the road leading over Ikeo Creek. I shortly came up with a little girl, about six years old, and asked her where she was going; she said, to her mother's, pointing to a house on a hill, half a mile off. She had been at the overseer's house, and was returning to her mother. I then felt some emotions arising in my breast, which I cannot describe, but will be explained in the sequel. I told her I was very thirsty, and would go with her to get something to drink. On our way I asked her several questions, such as her name, that of her mother; she said hers was Maria, and that of her mother's Nancy. I inquired, if her mother had any more children? She said five besides herself, and that they had been sold, that one had been sold when a little boy. I then asked the name of this child? she said it was Moses. These answers, as we approached the house, led me nearer and nearer to the finding out the object of my pursuit, and of recognising in the little girl the person of my own sister.

AT last I got to my mother's house! my mother was at home. I asked her if she knew me? she said, no. I told her, I knew her very well, and thought that if she at me a little, she would know me, but this had no effect. I then asked her if she had any sons? she said, yes; but none so large as me. I then waited a few

minutes, and narrated some circumstances to her, attending my being sold into slavery, and how she grieved at my loss. Here the mother's feelings on that dire occasion, and which a mother can only know, rushed to her mind; she saw her own son before her, for whom she had so often wept; and, in an instant, we were clasped in each other's arms, amidst the ardent interchange of caresses and tears

of joy.

On the next Sunday night, I laid me down to sleep between my two brothers, on a pallet, which my mother had prepared for me; about twelve o'clock I was suddenly awoke, and found my bed surrounded by twelve slave-holders with pistols in hand, who took me away (not allowing me to bid farewell to those I loved so dearly) to the Red House, where they confined me in a room the rest of the night, and in the morning lodged me in the gaol of Caswell Court-House.

IN this way we came to my old master, Mr. Gooch

On the Monday, he chained me to the same female slave as before. We made up our minds to escape into the woods, and secrete ourselves. This we did, and he not being able to find us, which they could not do; and about twelve o'clock, when we thought they would give up looking for us at that time, we went on, and came to the banks of the Catawba. Here I got a stone, and opened the ring of the chain on her neck, and got it off; and the chain round my neck was only passed through a ring; as soon as I got hers off, I slipped the chain through my ring, and got it off my own neck.

We then went on by the banks of the river for some distance, and found a little canoe about two feet wide. I managed to get in, although the irons on my feet made it very dangerous, for if I had upset the canoe, I could not swim. The female got in after me, and gave me the paddles, by which we got some distance down the river. The current being very strong, it drove us against a small island. It was a very dark night and rained tremendously; and, as the water was rising rapidly towards the top of the rock, we gave all up for lost, and sometimes hoped, and sometimes feared to hope, that we should never see the morning.

We remained all night upon the rock, and in the morning reached the opposite shore, and then made our way through the woods till we came to a field of Indian corn, where we plucked some of the green ears and ate them, having had nothing for two days and nights.

We came to the estate of--, where we met with a coloured man who knew me, and having run away himself from a bad master, he gave us some food, and told us we might sleep in the barn that night. Being very fatigued, we overslept ourselves; the proprietor came to the barn, but as I was in one corner under some Indian corn tops, and she in another, he did not perceive us, and we did not leave the barn before night, (Wednesday.)

We then went out, got something to eat, and strayed about the estate till Sunday. On that day, I met with some men, one of whom had irons on the same as me; he told me that his master was going out to see his friends, and that he would try and get my feet loose; for this purpose I parted with this female,

fearing, that if she were caught with me, she would be forced to tell who took my irons off. The man tried some time without effect, he then gave me a file and I tried myself, but was disappointed on account of their thickness.

On the Monday I went on towards Lancaster, and got within three miles of it that night; and went towards the plantation of Mr. Crockett, as I knew some of his slaves, and hoped to get some food given me. When I got there, however, the dogs smelt me out and barked; upon which, Mr. Crockett came out, followed me with his rifle, and came up with me.

*(At this point, Roper was returned to his master, and sold to another man. He*

*later slipped away from that master when they were traveling. He tricks a young*

*boy into writing him a pass, but decides he needs one written by an adult.)*

I had now to wade through another river to which I came, and which I had great difficulty in crossing, in consequence of the water overflowing the banks of several rivers to the extent of upwards of twenty miles. In the midst of the water, I passed one night upon a small island, and the next day I went through the remainder of the water. On many occasions, I was obliged to walk upon my toes, and consequently found the advantage of being six feet two inches high, (I have grown three inches since,) and at other times was obliged to swim. In the middle of this extremity, I felt it would be imprudent for me to return; for if my master was in pursuit of me, my safest place from him was in the water, if I could keep my head above the surface.. I was, however, dreadfully frightened at the crocodiles, and most earnestly prayed that I might be kept from a watery grave, and resolved, that if again I landed, I would spend my life in the service of God.

Having, through mercy, again started on my journey, I met with the drovers; and having, whilst in the waters, taken the pass out of my hat, and so dipped it in the water as to spoil it, I showed it to the men, and asked them where I could get another. They told me that in the neighbourhood, there lived a rich cotton merchant, who would write me one. They took me to him, and gave their word that they saw the passport before it was wet, (for I had previously showed it to them,) upon which, the cotton-planter wrote a free pass and a recommendation, to which the cow-drovers affixed their marks.

The recommendation was as follows:--

"John Roper, a very interesting young lad, whom I have seen and travelled with for eighty or ninety miles on his road from Florida, is a free man, descended from Indian and white. I trust he will be allowed to pass on without interruption, being convinced, from what I have seen, that he is free, and though dark, is not an African. I had seen his papers before they were wetted."

( *Roper uses this pass to travel, but is unable to get out of the South. He reaches a port city where he is met by a stroke of luck.)*

But when I reached the docks at Savannah, the first person I met was the captain of the Fox, looking for another steward. He was a very kind man, belonging to the Free States, and inquired if I would go back to his vessel. This usage was very different to what I expected, and I gladly accepted his offer. This

captain did not know that I was a slave. In about two days we sailed from Savannah to New York.

WHEN I arrived in the city of New York, I thought I was free; but learned I was not, and could be taken there. I secreted myself till I heard of a ship, the Napoleon, sailing to England, and on the 11th of November, 1835, I sailed. The time I first started from slavery, was in July, 1834, so that I was nearly sixteen months in making my escape.

**END OF ROPER NARRATIVE**