

Early Negroes of Corpus Christi.

Malvina Garrett, grandmother of the writer, was born in Virginia, of Negro and Indian parentage. She was sold into Mississippi by her owner, to satisfy a debt, with a promise that she would be bought back as soon as possible; this promise was never redeemed, so when she bade her mother, father, and sisters goodbye, she was never to see, nor hear from them, again. Such were the horrors of slavery — worse than those of war!

Again she was transferred from Mississippi to Texas by a man named Baskin. When she landed in Corpus Christi, Jan. 1, 1849, she said there were about ten houses in all in what was then called Skinner's Ranch. So she was among the first Negroes in Corpus Christi, if not the first.

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By some business transaction she became the property of Forbes Britain, who later became the father-in-law of E. J. Davis, Republican governor of Texas. She then went to live on Britain's Ranch and around to other ranches beyond Corpus Christi and near ~~New~~ Braunfels.

When she came back to Corpus Christi, about 1860, various families had moved here and brought their slaves. There was Col. John M. Moore of Alabama who brought his family and several men and women slaves, among whom were Alfred and Henry with their wives, sister, daughter and niece. These men were blacksmiths and Henry followed his trade until his death, long after emancipation. The women were cooks, maids and laundresses who were taught to do their work thoroughly and well.

Outstanding among these men was Samuel Franklin Moore, a handsome young man, showing very little, if any, Negro blood; a giant in size and strength, a blacksmith also, but he didn't continue this work. In later life he resembled the portraits of Henry Longfellow and Samuel F. B. Morse.

He loved animals and followed the races, was entirely fearless; had never been struck by his master nor any one else without giving a blow in return. He married Malvina Garrett before the Civil War, and after the war they were married again by the Justice of the Peace to make sure the marriage was legal. He became wharf manager and a guide to Mexico. When he returned from these trips to Mexico, he always brought his wife presents, and she would laughingly tell that she had more silk dresses than calicos and her

underwear was of linen.

General Bee brought in some slaves, among whom were Tom and Sally. General Bee was related to the father of Carlos Bee, at one time the leading attorney of San Antonio, Texas Association with these refined and cultured whites accounts for the refinement of the early Negroes of Corpus Christi.

The Vineyards and Means had slaves who came to Corpus Christi, after the war's end. Capt. King brought in Anthony King, who became the father of a large family. His daughter was one of the early teachers in the public school.

While Malvina Garrett lived in Mississippi she met a friend named Dorcas who married a man named

Tom. He and his sister Clara had been brought over on a vessel with slaves from Africa. Tom, Dorcas, and Clara were brought to Corpus by a man named Powers who had bought them. They settled on a lot within a stone's throw from Malvina's home which they bought when they were allowed to do so. They were friends and neighbors until the death of the three.

When Dorcas died, she had the little home with two or three little rent houses, Malvina and another neighbor cared for her all through her illness. So grateful was she to them that she instructed them to rent her little houses until her doctor's bill and church dues were paid, then sell the place and divide the money

between Malvina's grand-daughter and the other neighbor's daughter. This was done though it took some time to do it.

Strange to say, though these slave people were ignorant, as ~~far as~~ ^{far as} education was concerned, as soon as they were able, as soon as they were free, they began at once to buy homes.

A woman named Easter Wheaton bought her home where the Elk's Club now stands. At her death, by her will, the property was sold, and the proceeds given to the Congregational Church which then stood where Mr. Eli Merriman's home now stands on Broadway.

This church was the leading church in Corpus, and at that time the most beautiful church building. It was

fostered by the American Missionary Association which was the helper of the freedmen. This church never came South until after the war, because it did not accept members from slave owners. The A. M. A., as it was called, built schools and colleges for Negroes as soon as the war clouds cleared, among which were Fish University, Talldege College, Atlanta University and other smaller schools. Members from both races, white and colored, belonged to this church, because it was the only Congregational Church in town and is yet. It is still in existence on Waco St. A rule of the church is its ministers must be educated.

The Negroes, at that time were hardworking and thrifty. The men were carpenters, blacksmiths, drivers, cistern-makers, fishermen, etc. When the whites took their jobs away from them, they could find no work, and so had to do what they could for a living.

A Captain Avery came to Corpus Christi, bringing his slaves, consisting of a woman named Frances and her three children. This man was a man of means, he came for his health, had a boat, more than four hundred acres of land where the Chemical Plant now stands, a good house, ferns, horses and cows, farm implements, and ten thousand dollars in the bank. Upon his death he willed all of this to his ex-slave,

Francis Avery his library was willed to his lawyer. Some descendants of Francis Avery yet live in Corpus Christi. Legal papers still refer to the Avery Tract.

Emancipation was proclaimed in Texas on June 19, 1865. Some of the slave owners kept their slaves in ignorance of their freedom. When Skerry and Alfred, led by Sam Moore, heard of this, they took a wagon and team, went to the outlying plantations, and let these slaves know they were free. As many as they could, they brought to Corpus Christi, some of the men driving, while Sam Moore sat with his back to the drivers facing the slaves in the wagon, with a gun on his lap to shoot any one interfering with their plans to free these

Negroes. Some of them he carried to his own home, which tho' humble, was always a shelter to the unfortunate, until they could find employment.

Later came teachers and preachers, among whom were John Strong, a preacher and D. N. Leathers, a teacher. These men came fresh from Talladega College in Alabama.

In the late 80's a group of Jamaicans drifted into Corpus coming from working on the railroad in Mexico. Most of them could read and write, and were hardworkers. Some of them were Brown, Mitchell, Ellis, who worked for Dr. Spohn for years, Kinlock and others. They were subjects of England and most of them remained so until their death. They belonged to the Church of England, but

upon coming to Corpus, joined the Congregational Church. They loved to sing, and on Sunday afternoons, would meet at the Church and have singing school. They helped in entertainments for the benefit of the church. All these Jamaicans have passed away, and to my knowledge, there is only one Jamaican in Corpus—a grandson of Ellis.

As time went on, and railroads began to come in, other Negroes came in until the population numbered into the hundreds. Churches were built as soon as the war ended. A public school took the place of the private school which was in operation. Solomon M. Coker came here to be the first colored principal as well as the pastor of the

Congregational Church. The present Solomon
M. Coker School was named for him.

For a long time the Negro population
of Corpus was small. For many years
a four room building for the school
was sufficient, but in recent years,
these rooms have been doubled, a
gymnasium has been built serving as
classrooms, and soon two more buildings
will be erected, adding twelve more
classrooms. The Negro population is
now about 3000 and increasing
daily

Mrs. H. J. Smith