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Jan Furman, ed. *Slavery in the Clover Bottoms: John McCline's Narrative of His Life during Slavery and the Civil War.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998. xxvii + 155 pp. $30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57233-007-8.

Reviewed by Michelle A. Krowl
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Seeing War Through a Child's Eyes

By any measure, John H. McCline witnessed incredible events over the course of his long life. Born a slave in 1852 in Clover Bottom, Tennessee, his early childhood was marked by both terror and gaiety. But a chance encounter with a passing regiment of Michigan volunteers during the Civil War changed the trajectory of McCline's life and gave him the opportunity to witness history in the making. After the war, McCline sought his fortunes by heading north, and then out west. Some time in the 1920s, McCline recorded his experiences as a slave and a Union teamster, and it is this narrative which forms the basis of *Slavery in the Clover Bottoms*.

McCline divided his life into three distinct phases, reflected in the text: before, during, and after the Civil War. In the first section, McCline relates events he either witnessed personally or heard about while a slave on the Hoggatt plantation. His mother had died and his father resided on another plantation, so McCline and his brothers lived with their grandmother. As a child, McCline was too young to work in the fields, and he instead did chores for his grandmother and the other slaves and cared for the livestock. His job as a "cowboy" allowed McCline a certain measure of independence and the chance to roam the plantation, while also developing a life-long love of animals. McCline's recollections of slavery are similar in style to the WPA slave narratives of the 1920s in that they are told in roughly chronological vignettes. Often McCline's stories are not about himself, but rather other slaves on the plantation. His own experiences, however, suggest that while under the ever-present threat of the lash, a slave child could still enjoy occasions of fun.

Interestingly, the section "during the war" actually begins after the war has already begun. Union and Confederate troops had both occupied the Clover Bottom plantation early in the war, but the Civil War did not become a reality for McCline until he joined it in 1862. While minding the cows one day, McCline saw the Thirteenth Michigan Volunteers pass by and decided to follow the regiment after one of the soldiers called out, "Come on, Johnny, and go with us up North, and we will set you free" (p. 51). Instead of going north, the regiment spent the next two and a half years fighting in the South and participated in Sherman's campaigns in Georgia and the Carolinas. Throughout that time, McCline served as a teamster, eventually receiving wages for his work. He witnessed the death and destruction that the war produced, but his youth also allowed him to find enjoyment, whether taking care of the horses, playing marbles and cards with other boys, or learning the alphabet. Indeed, the declaration "I was the happiest of boys" punctuates McCline's remembrances of his wartime activities.

Initially, McCline planned to end his history with the end of the war, but was encouraged to include a section detailing his postwar life. In six pages, McCline speeds through moving to Michigan, working as a waiter in Chicago, attending the Nashville Institute and then teaching nearby, becoming a waiter and hat rack attendant in St. Louis, relocating to Colorado Springs for his health, and finally entering the employ of the Hagerman family in 1892. Although the narrative ends there, McCline remained in the Hagermans' employ for over forty years, much of the time working for Herbert Hagerman, a territorial governor of New Mexico.

Given the incredible events McCline witnessed during his lifetime (he died in 1948), *Slavery in the Clover Bottoms* is disappointing for how much McCline omitted from his story. The section devoted to the war is the most coherent and compelling, clearly indicating that McCline found the Civil War to be the defining moment in his life. How unfortunate that he devoted only a few pages to the thirty years after the war, and none at all to his experiences living in New Mexico in the twentieth century. In their respective introductions, Jan Furman and Herbert Hagerman both comment on McCline's later experiences, but the story loses something in not being told

by McCline himself. Neither did McCline look at his life in a reflective way, which is equally disappointing. He is careful to detail what he did, where he went, and things he heard, but only occasionally acknowledges the larger meaning of these activities or the personal impact they made on him. McCline mentions, for example, that fugitive slaves accompanied Sherman's army on its march through Georgia and the Carolinas. But beyond noticing that many were nearly starving, the sight of thousands of refugee slaves seems to have made little impression on the boy. Given his own status as an escaped slave, and having lived apart from a black community for so long, one would have expected McCline to say more on the subject.

Slavery in the Clover Bottoms, furthermore, will have to be used carefully as an historical source. Like the WPA narratives, questions of the author's youth when the events occurred and the accuracy of his memory more than half a century later may compromise some of McCline's recollections. Indeed, the editor mentions in the endnotes that McCline confused dates, directions, and names on various occasions. While corrections in the notes are helpful, one wonders if less verifiable facts are also confused, despite the editor's confidence in McCline's "marvelous recall of details" (p. xxvii). Additionally, McCline's original manuscript has been lost, thus the text Furman edited was a transcription made by McCline's employer, Herbert Hagerman. As Furman recognizes, it is impossible to determine how closely Hagerman's transcription matched McCline's original document.

Furman appears to have done her best to correct errors and highlight inconsistencies in the narrative, and the appendices are useful for identifying the soldiers and slaves to whom McCline refers. Furman also supplemented the text with a liberal supply of interesting photographs and maps. Her introduction, however, is the weakest element in the book, making it difficult to get a clear sense of McCline's life before hearing his story. She omits useful information, such as McCline's year of birth and the identity of Herbert Hagerman. One can infer that Hagerman is the governor of New Mexico, but it is not until Hagerman's own introduction that the reader understands the political controversies to which Furman referred. Her discussion of the black military experience, on the other hand, is more extensive than necessary given that McCline was neither impressed as a teamster nor did he ever enlist as a soldier.

Despite the inherent problems in the text, *Slavery in the Clover Bottoms* should prove a welcome addition to the primary literature regarding children's experiences in the Civil War. That the narrative describes the adventures of a black youth who served with the Union Army makes the story even rarer still.

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