

Remarks by Edward Lewis.

I am very sorry that this meeting is in a church and if I can control my feelings in speaking on this subject of slavery, I will. A great many of the slaves say that their old masters were good ones, but I tell you my dear friends, that slavery is damnable. The word slavery means just what it is, that you are confined somewhere. If I should tell you all I know about slavery, I should say first that it was a most damnable institution. I was born in Richmond, Va., in September, 1846, but before I proceed further, I shall say this, that John Brown has a warm spot in my heart. The older class of people know my arguments, and I have told some my experiences of slavery, and how I escaped from it, and how I had seven masters in all. I was 17 years a slave, longer than all the time I have lived since. 43 years ago this month (May) I enlisted in the United States Army. In my early days, it was pleasant to live in those hills, provided slavery had not been there. I played on the hilltops, my master's name was Hugh Percival and he is in hell tonight and I am glad of it. I played around on the hilltops and wore only shirt, so when they wanted to whip me it was not very hard to get near my skin. My old mistress looked at me and said I was active and quick and they put me in the house. Of course, I did not know any better then I made fires, cleaned holders, they did not have electric lights then, and I had to clean the andirons, made of brass or iron.

# Courtesy of the Museum of Springfield History, Springfield, MA

The master's were of brass. Well, the old master took me around with him until I got to be a good sized boy, blacking his boots, waiting on table, keeping flies off of him, and in the meantime that good old mother of mine told me abut slavery, and from the time she told me about it, I hated it. The way it came about was this: they had law in Virginia where a negro when set free was sent away by the white people, he had to go in a year. A day later I wanted to go like any other there, but my mother told me the people owned me and I was a slave. I asked he what a slave was and she did not want to tell. I worried her about it until she told me that I belonged to that man and must do as he told. Well, I waited around the house and waited on table, and my master took me for for his bdy servant, and I often had to go hungry and I stayed with sometime and used to go to town with him often. Well, I came here to the north and have been in Springfield nearly forty years and I hated all white people. When I was a slave I played with the white boys, and they did not know the difference then and they went to school, but they did not send negro boys to school, but I learned from the boys, and got so I could say my A B Cs backward. One day we were lying on the grass and with the book the boys were telling me what the teachers had told them, when the old master came out there and saw what we were doing, and he cursed his son and said if he ever caught him learning me to read, he would kill him. Well, it scared the boy, but I did not care as I could read better than

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he could before he went to hell. Well, there was a preacher around there one time and they wanted me to go and hear him and I told them I did not want to hear him, and I have been so all my life and I guess I will stay so unless a change comes. Now, slavery does away with virtue among women in one sense of the word, and a slave woman is at the mercy of the white man and his son. You can tell that by the looks of the present generation. My father and my mother's father were Indians, full blooded, and I am proud to say that there is not a drop of white blood in my veins.

Courtesy of the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum Archives, Springfield, Mass.