

Former Slave, to be 91, Remains Active. Mother Oliver recalls watching Jesse James slay a praying victim.

Submitted by Renee Koechner
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Seventy six years ago in a dusty road in the little Missouri town of Otterville, a frightened young negro girl watched a handsome youth with long light hair calmly shoot down another man praying on his knees in the road. The killer was Jesse James, slain by a traitor eighteen years later. The negro girl is now white haired Mrs. Frances Marie Oliver, former superintendent of the colored Old Folks Home.

Mother Oliver, as she is known, will reach her 91st birthday on Thursday, but the memory of that episode remains fresh in her mind. The victim, she recalled, was the village blacksmith. The bandit shot him after ordering him to pray.

James and his men were just plain bushwhackers, she said as she sat in the parlor of the home at 9837 Perrin Avenue. There weren't any romantic stories about them then.

Mother Oliver recalls that she had been freed from slavery just three years before.

Soon after the Civil War, she entered Lincoln University, then Lincoln Institute, at Jefferson City, Mo. and was among the first graduates. After graduation, Mother Oliver came to St. Louis to teach her people in a little German Church at 19th and St. Louis Avenues.

The former slave was later sent to The Simmons School at 4200 St. Louis Avenue and then served 25 years in the St. Louis public schools. Later she became interested in work among delinquent girls and during that time opened the Industrial School¹ for girls at Tipton, where she was superintendent.

After several years of work in that field, Mother Oliver became housemother at The Wheatley Christian Association, then went to the colored Old Folks Home as superintendent. She retired from active service there several years ago.

Still spry and active, Mother Oliver leads the hymn singing at her home each morning, spends her leisure hours making old fashioned patchwork quilts and takes care of her two roommates, one 94, the other 80.

Worry, she says, kills more people than war. She gives her lack of worry and regular habits the credit for her own long life.

What you can't cure, she said, philosophically, you must endure.

¹ This school is located in Tipton, Moniteau County, Missouri. It opened on May 15, 1916 and ended around 1944. Then the state made the facility into a Women's Correction Center. Then in 1976, the state made it The State Correction Pre-release Center for male inmates nearing their release date. Finally, in 1989 it became known as the Tipton Treatment Center with a voluntary program designed for parole violators and includes substance abuse counseling. This is how it still is today. The above from a 1996 article from the *Tipton Times* entitled 'Pictorial History of Tipton and her Neighbors.'