

1870 Brick Wall



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What is the 1870 Brick Wall?

- The 1870 US Federal Census is the first Federal Census after the emancipation of slavery.
- This is typically the first federal census which names formerly enslaved people with first and last names, ages and household composition.
- When researching African American Genealogy this is the most common place to run into a brick wall for research.

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What type of records can I use?

- Freedmen's Bureau records
- State Specific Schedules or Registers
- 1867 Voter Lists
- Military and Pension Records

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Freedmen's Bureau records

- The Freedmen's Bureau was responsible for the supervision and management of all matters relating to formerly enslaved people in the Southern United States.
- There are many different types of Freedmen's Bureau Records.
- These records are held in a variety of locations virtually: (Some on Ancestry.com, FamilySearch and the Smithsonian Website).

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Divisions of the Freedmen's Bureau

- There were four divisions that records are held under
 - Government Controlled Lands
 - Records will relate to land and property occupied by Federal Troops during the Civil War.
 - Financial Affairs
 - Records will relate to The Freedmen's Banks and other financial institutions.
 - Medical Affairs
 - Records will relate to food, healthcare, shelter and medical care.
 - Records
 - Can be a variety of record types, including school lists, educational records and even vital records that occurred on military lands.

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List of Departments of the Freedmen's Bureau

- Alabama
- Arkansas
- District of Columbia (Washington, DC)
- Florida
- Georgia
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maryland & Delaware
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- North Carolina
- South Carolina
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Virginia

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State Specific Schedules or Registers

- States often have specific collections that give detailed information about formerly enslaved individuals.
- An example is the 1867 Maryland Slave Statistics
 - These registers were compiled in 1867 and record the first and last name of every person enslaved in the state of Maryland as of the year 1864.
 - These records are recorded by county and some are available to view for free on the Maryland State Archives Website
 - We will see an example in a case study later in the presentation .

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1867 Voter Registration

- For many southern states, the voter lists from the 1867 Elections have survived.
- These records can put your ancestor at a specific location depending on where they registered.
- These records will also show other eligible voters in the area which can help with cluster research.

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Military Records

- Records related to African American soldiers during the American Civil War can be outstanding resources for family history research.
- The following types of records can be extremely helpful:
 - Widows Pensions
 - Disability or Minors Pensions
 - Compiled Service Files
 - Unit Rosters and Muster Rolls

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Overall Helpful Tips






- Spellings of surnames can vary greatly from record to record. Try very broad and phonetic spellings for best results.
- Always look at other members of the same household to try to expand the network of possible associates and family.
- Ages of individuals can vary greatly from record to record. Be aware that ages of formerly enslaved people are likely going to be very broad.

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Developing a Research Strategy

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Developing a Research Strategy

-  Step one: Write out clear research questions
-  Step Two: Know Your History
-  Step three: Identify Potential Sources
-  Step Four: Gather Information – Keep it organized
-  Step Five: Repeat steps 1-4

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Research Strategy Step 3: Identify Potential Sources

- What historical events on your timeline may have created records?
- Check state, county, local, and university libraries and archives for collections specific to slavery or freedmen.

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Laws Creating Records in Virginia

- 1853 – Virginia requires the registration of births and deaths including enslaved people.
- 1850 – Virginia demands that emancipated slaves leave the state within a year and forbids the legislature from freeing any slave.
- 1865 – 13th Amendment and establishment of the Freedmen’s Bureau.

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**Research Strategy Step 4:
Gather and Organize Information**

- Make checklists of record sets you want to check.
- Determine what information you can pull from each record.
- Make sure your notes are easy to view quickly and include as much information as possible.
- Suggestion: use Microsoft Excel to organize complex research.

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**What you can learn from the
1870 Census**

- It can tell you exactly where your ancestors were beyond just an enumeration district.
- Note neighbors to compare to the 1860 federal census and/or maps of the area.
- Who owned land in the area (check Real Estate Value column).
- Compare to 1860 Slave Schedules for Slaveowners.
- Provide additional surnames to research.

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