

Getting Started in African American Family History Research

Section 3: Strategies & Case Studies

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What is the 1870 Brick Wall?

The 1870 US Federal Census was 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.

Where to begin?

- Step 1: Write out clear research questions
 - Examples of research questions:
 - Was this individual born into slavery?
 - If so, who enslaved them?
 - Can we find more information about their parents?
- Step 2: Know your history.
 - Create a timeline of State Slave Laws
 - Note laws that may lead to record sets
 - Know where you are
 - Look at maps from the time period and today.
- 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.
- Step 4: Gather Information – Keep it organized
 - 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.

What can I 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.

Helpful Hints

- Spelling 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 and neighboring households to try to expand the network of possible associates and family
- The 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.

What is the Freedmen's Bureau

- 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 Smithsonian Website).

The Four Divisions of the Freedman's Bureau

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

The Field Offices of the Freedman's Bureau

There were 15 major Field Offices of the Freedman's Bureau. Records are typically organized by Field Office and there were many local offices under each state:

- | | | |
|---|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Alabama | 6. Kentucky | 12. South Carolina |
| 2. Arkansas | 7. Louisiana | 13. Tennessee |
| 3. District of Columbia
(Washington, DC) | 8. Maryland & Delaware | 14. Texas |
| 4. Florida | 9. Mississippi | 15. Virginia |
| 5. Georgia | 10. Missouri | |
| | 11. North Carolina | |

Example: If you were looking for the records of the local Smithville, North Carolina Office of the Freedmen's Bureau it would be filed under records of the Field Offices for the State of North Carolina.

Finding Local Freedman's Bureau Office Records

1. Use the website <https://mappingthefreedmensbureau.com/maps/map/>
2. Find the office closest to where the individual resided in 1870
3. Click National Archives Publication number which will bring you to the local office records on FamilySearch.org
4. Browse or search the collection for records related to the person you are researching.

Freedman's Bank Records

The Freedman's Savings and Trust Company was incorporated in 1865 by an act signed by President Abraham Lincoln. The purpose of the company was to create an institution where former slaves and their dependents could place and save their money. The original bank was first headquartered in New York and later moved to Washington, D.C. Shortly thereafter branch offices opened in other cities, primarily ones in the south where there was a larger population of African Americans.

When people opened accounts at the Freedmen's Bank, they were required to provide a great deal of personal information to ensure that bank officials could locate family members in the event of a depositor's death.

- The records of 29 branches of the Freedmen's Bank survive today
- These records are on Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org

Freedman's Bank Locations

Atlanta, Georgia	Lynchburg, Virginia	Raleigh, North Carolina
Augusta, Georgia	Memphis, Tennessee	Richmond, Virginia
Baltimore, Maryland	Mobile, Alabama	Savannah, Georgia
Beaufort, South Carolina	Nashville, Tennessee	Shreveport, Louisiana
Charleston, South Carolina	Natchez, Mississippi	St. Louis, Missouri
Columbus, Mississippi	New Bern, North Carolina	Tallahassee, Florida
Huntsville, Alabama	New Orleans, Louisiana	Vicksburg, Mississippi
Lexington, Kentucky	New York, New York	Washington, DC
Little Rock, Arkansas	Norfolk, Virginia	Wilmington, North Carolina
Louisville, Kentucky	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	

1867 Voter Lists

- 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 from.
- Will also show other eligible voters in the area which can help with cluster research

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

- Widow's Pensions
- Disability or Minor's Pensions
- Compiled Service Files
- Unit Rosters and Muster Rolls

Civil War Pension Records

- Civil War Pensions can be ordered from the National Archives using the application number and certificate number.
- These files can be hundreds of pages in length and provide detail into the families and backgrounds of Civil War Veterans.
- These files are typically not online and must be ordered from the National Archives.
 - Note: Some Widow's Pensions are on Fold3.com

Civil War Compiled Service Record

- A compiled service file is a chronological file detailing the entire service of a Civil War soldier.
- They are compiled from a variety of sources but essentially provide a detailed look into the day to day of a soldier's experience.
- Often has great information about the soldier's life before the Civil War

State-Specific Resources:

Alabama

1866 Alabama State Census:

- Lists the head of each household in Alabama in the year 1866. First state enumeration for Alabama after the Civil War and Emancipation
 - Access on Ancestry.com <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1576/>

1867 Alabama Voter Lists

- A registration of all male citizens, 21 years and older, in each county who were also qualified to vote in the year 1867 in the state of Alabama
 - Access on Ancestry.com <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/60968/>

District of Columbia

District of Columbia, U.S., Slave Owner Petitions, 1862

- In April of 1862 the U.S. government passed an act abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia. Petitions for compensation that were offered to slave owners whose slaves were emancipated by the act are contained in this database.
 - Access on Ancestry.com <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2159/>

District of Columbia, U.S., Slave Emancipation Records, 1851-1863

- This microfilm publication reproduces all the records relating to slavery in the District of Columbia that were kept by the U.S. Circuit Court for the District of Columbia.
 - Available on Ancestry.com <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2171/>

Florida

Florida Voter Registration Rolls, 1867-1868

- A list of individuals who registered to vote in Florida in 1867-1868.
 - Available on FloridaMemory.com https://www.floridamemory.com/discover/historical_records/election1867/

Florida Mortality Schedules 1850-1880

- Mortality schedules are lists of individuals who died in the 12 months preceding the federal censuses of 1850, 1860, 1870 and 1880. The schedules are organized by year and then by county. For each deceased person listed, the documents generally provide the person's name, sex, race, age

at death, marital status, place of birth, occupation, cause of death and length of illness. The mortality schedules for 1850 and 1860 also track whether a person was enslaved or free.

- Available on FloridaMemory.com
https://www.floridamemory.com/discover/historical_records/mortality-schedules/

Georgia

Georgia Returns of Qualified Voters and Reconstruction Oath Books, 1867-1869

- This database contains books recording those oaths of allegiance and returns listing qualified voters registered in Georgia in 1867. It includes both black and white citizens.
 - Available on Ancestry.com <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1857/>

Georgia Property Tax Digests, 1793-1892

- The records include all men 21 and over and women who owned property. Another important feature of the digests is their inclusion of African-American freemen by name.
 - Available on Ancestry.com <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1729/>

Louisiana

New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S., Slave Manifests, 1807-1860

- Manifests for slave ships entering or leaving from the port at New Orleans.
 - Available on Ancestry.com <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1562/>

Orleans Parish Notarial Records

- Parish Notarial Records record all sales and transactions including the sales of enslaved people. They are arranged by the name of the Notary and then by year.
 - Note: These records are typically recorded in French
 - Available on the Orleans County Civil Clerks Office
<https://www.ortanscivilclerk.com/notaryalpha.htm>

Maryland

- 1864 Maryland County Slave Statistics
 - The Maryland Slave Statistics consist of lists of slaves owned as of 1 November 1864, the date when the Constitution of 1864, which abolished slavery in Maryland, took effect.
 - Each county is held in a different location. Many are available on the website of the Maryland State Archives. Prince George's County Maryland for example is found here: <https://guide.msa.maryland.gov/pages/series.aspx?id=CE157>

Mississippi

- Enumeration of Educable Children, 1850-1892; 1908-1957
 - This collection includes enumerations of educable children from Mississippi. This is a great collection to find information about children living Mississippi at the end of the Civil War.
 - Records are available on FamilySearch.org
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1856425>
- Mississippi state WPA ex-slave narratives
 - Typescript and handwritten transcripts of interviews with ex-slaves from 36 Mississippi counties.
 - Records are available on FamilySearch.org
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1923904>

North Carolina

- Records of ante-bellum Southern plantations from the Revolution through the Civil War : Series F and J, Selections from the Manuscript Department, Duke University Library
 - Various manuscript collections in Duke University Library related to Southern Plantations before the Civil War
 - Records are available on FamilySearch
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/564185>

South Carolina

- York and Williamsburg County South Carolina, County Voter Registration Records, 1882-1895
 - Voter registration records for York and Williamsburg counties in South Carolina for years 1882-1895.
 - Records are available on FamilySearch.org
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/3326837>
- Edgefield, South Carolina, Slave Records, 1774-1866
 - This collection was compiled from more than 28,000 entries extracted from various records over a period of six years. The records referenced are primarily at the Edgefield County Archives in Edgefield, South Carolina.
 - Records are available on Ancestry.com
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/60512/>

Tennessee

- Tennessee Enumeration of Male Voters, 1891
 - Enumeration of Male Inhabitants of Twenty-One Years of Age and Upward, Citizens of Tennessee, January 1, 1891.
 - Records are available on Ancestry.com
 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2884/>

Texas

- Texas Voter Registration Lists, 1867-1869
 - This database contains names of men who registered to vote in Texas in 1867-1868
 - Records are available on Ancestry.com
 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2274/>

Virginia

- 1866 Cohabitation Registers
 - The Cohabitation Register is the legal vehicle by which formerly enslaved men and women legitimized both their marriages and their children in the State of Virginia
 - Library of Virginia Database
https://lva.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/collectionDiscovery?vid=01LVA_I NST:01LVA&collectionId=81120570040005756&lang=en
- Freedman's Contracts
 - This collection consists of work contracts between formerly enslaved individuals and employers enacted during the operation of the Freedmen's Bureau.
 - Library of Virginia Database
https://lva.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/collectionDiscovery?vid=01LVA_I NST:01LVA&collectionId=81119359570005756&lang=en
- Election Rolls
 - Election records within this collection consist of lists of voters by county, magisterial district, and sometimes precinct, who participated in elections.
 - Library of Virginia Database
https://lva.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/collectionDiscovery?vid=01LVA_I NST:01LVA&collectionId=81120398740005756&lang=en

General Resources:

Freedman's Bank Records, 1865-1874 <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8755/>

Freedman's Bureau Records, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/freedmens-bureau>

Freedman's Bureau Records, <https://www.familysearch.org/en/info/freedmens-bureau-records>

Freedman's Bureau Records, <https://www.ancestry.com/cs/freedmens>

Civil War Compiled Service Records for the United States Colored Troops,
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1107/>

Civil War Pension Index Cards <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/4654/>

1860 Federal Census - Slave Schedules <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/7668/>

1850 Federal Census - Slave Schedules <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8055/>