![FamilySearch]

Getting Started with African American Research

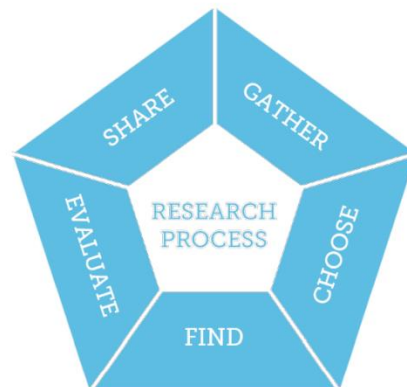FamilySearch Library U.S. and Canada Research Specialists

Objectives

- Explain the process for African American genealogical research after 1865
- Demonstrate five success strategies for successfully locating your ancestors in historical records
- Introduce helpful resources available on FamilySearch.org

The Research Process

https://www.familysearch.org/help/helpcenter/lessons/1-research-process-introduction

- Gather known information – Start with yourself, ask close relatives, reach out to extended family
    - Look for:
        - Photographs
        - Family Bibles
        - Newspaper clippings
        - Letters
        - Family documents: birth, marriage, and death certificates
        - Church records: christenings, baptisms, communions, marriages, burials
        - Funeral programs
        - Journals or diaries
        - Oral traditions and stories
    - Organize Your Research
        - Use charts and forms
          https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Use_Appropriate_Forms
            - Family Group Records
            - Pedigree Charts
            - Research Logs
        - Timelines: https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Timeline_Grids
- Choose a research goal—ask a specific question
    - What do you already know?
    - What do you want to know?
- Find new information
    - Select the best records
        - FamilySearch Wiki county genealogy pages
        - FamilySearch Wiki record finder tables
          https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Record_Finder
        - Original sources instead of derivative sources
        - Primary information instead of secondary information

- Obtain the records
    - Online repositories
    - Government offices
    - Private collections
    - Books and periodicals
- Study the records
    - Look for indexes
    - Look for family members
    - Be thorough
    - Record your results, both positive and negative
- Evaluate new information—decide what the evidence means and whether it is reliable
    - Ask questions:
        - To whom does this apply?
        - What does it mean?
        - Does this evidence fit with what I know?
        - Is there conflicting data?
        - Can I trust this information?
        - What clues does this give me for future research?
- Share new information—learn even more
    - Family trees
    - Newsletters
    - Blogs
    - Social media
    - Family reunions

Five Success Strategies for African American Research

- Go from the known to the unknown—follow the paper trail starting with the most recent records and move back in time.
- Search every available record—different records often contain different clues, even if the main information is the same.
- Find all known family members—records of siblings can contain missing information about parents and other relatives.
- Be aware of name changes—after the Civil War, many African Americans chose new names. Some changed their names several times throughout their lives.
- Study the local history—to understand migration, laws and customs, occupations, and records.
    - Know the local vocabulary used in the records
        - B – Black
        - C, Col'd – Colored
        - FPC – Free person of color
        - FMC – Free man of color
        - FWC – Free woman of color
        - N, Neg – Negro
        - M, Mul – Mulatto (1/2 Black)
        - Q, Quad – Quadroon (1/4 Black)
        - Oct – Octoroon (1/8 Black)
    - For segregated records, check both the Colored and White registers. Some clerks were not consistent.

Unique African American Records Collections and Resources

FamilySearch
African American Genealogy (includes links to many collections housed in the Library)
- https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/African_American_Genealogy

State African American Pages
- https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/African_American_Genealogy

African American Online Genealogy Records (links to many online databases)
- https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/African_American_Online_Genealogy_Records

Quick Guide to African American Records
- https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Quick_Guide_to_African_American_Records

Southern States Slavery and Bondage Collections (Library collections listed by county and state)
- https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Southern_States_Slavery_and_Bondage_Collections

African American Digital Bookshelf (digital copies of books to aid in your research)
- https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/African_American_Digital_Bookshelf

The Freedmen's Bureau records (more information below)
- https://www.discoverfreedmen.org/

African American Freedman's Savings and Trust Company Records
- https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/African_American_Freedman%27s_Savings_and_Trust_Company_Records

Family Tree "Other Relationships" feature

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, or "The Freedmen's Bureau"
- http://www.freedmensbureau.com (Freedmen's Bureau website)
- http://www.mappingthefreedmensbureau.com
  Locate the field office closest to where your ancestors lived and access films online at FamilySearch

Freedman's Bank Records
- http://www.freedmansbank.org
  These records were created between 1865-1874. Bank signature cards or registers can contain names, ages, birthplaces, residences, employers, family members, former enslavers and plantations, and other information.

Library of Congress
- African American Family Histories and Related Works
  https://www.loc.gov/rr/genealogy/bib_guid/aframer/
  183 books that cover topics ranging from abolitionists, American Loyalists, and revolutionaries to masters and slaves, freedmen, Civil War soldiers, and Cherokee Indians.
- Voices Remembering Slavery: Freed People Tell Their Stories
  https://www.loc.gov/collections/voices-remembering-slavery/about-this-collection/
  Surviving voice recordings from formerly enslaved persons
- Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938
  https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection/
  Collections of experiences of formerly enslaved persons as told in their own words
- Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers
  https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/
  Find what newspapers existed at the time and place your ancestors lived. Many newspapers are digitized and available to view for free.

University of North Carolina's Documenting the American South
- https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/
  Large collection of North American slave narratives. All are digitized and available to view for free. Vary from a few pages in length to hundreds of pages.

Enslaved: Peoples of the Historical Slave Trade
- https://www.enslaved.org
  Growing collection documenting slave ships and their passengers, records of enslaved persons, and slave traders.

Saving Slave Houses
- https://savingslavehouses.org
  Photographs and drawings of former slave houses and enslaved persons. Includes sections for genealogy, education, and preservation.

Accessible Archives
- https://www.accessible-archives.com/collections/african-american-newspapers/
  Subscription database containing African American newspapers and information about life and history in the nineteenth century.

Black Press Research Collective
- https://www.readex.com/products/african-american-newspapers-series-1-and-2-1827-1998
  The BPRC is dedicated to generating digital scholarship and archiving the Black Press to preserve the significance of the historical and contemporary role of black newspapers in Africa and the African Diasporas.

Readex's African American Newspapers, 1827-1998
- https://www.readex.com/content/african-american-newspapers-1827-1998
  Subscription website available at many public libraries. Contains African American Newspapers from 1827-1998.

Afrigeneas
- https://www.ongenealogy.com/listings/afrigeneas-african-ancestored-genealogy/
  Free website with multiple collections of African American genealogy records.

Access Genealogy
- https://accessgenealogy.com/black-genealogy
  Directs researchers to free United States genealogy resources online. Includes sources for birth records, death records, marriage records, census records, tax records, church records, court records, military records, historical newspapers, cemeteries, and ethnic records. Also provides some historical details about different times and people in America's history.