

Genealogy Pathfinder

for African American Research

Prepared by the Genealogy Specialists in [Special Collections Department](#)

Central Library, Fifth Floor

Updated November 2006

Getting started

For the years following the 1870 census, the documents you will need are similar to the documents sought by any family researcher. Your librarian can suggest several "how-to" books and pamphlets. Our [Genealogy Pathfinder for Beginners](#) is a useful starting point. There are special problems you will face in researching African American ancestors before 1870, and especially before Emancipation, such as the scarcity and inaccuracy of pre-1865 records. There are, however, more resources for solving these problems than is often realized.

Tracing ancestors before 1870

The U.S. census is a powerful tool for genealogical research. However, with few exceptions, the names of slaves were not recorded in any Federal census. Of course, not all African Americans were slaves, and the names of free heads of households were recorded from the beginning. Enslaved ancestors can sometimes be traced by studying slaveholding families. Look for your ancestors in the 1870 census, and check for nearby white families of the same last name. Many (but by no means all) former slaves took the name of their last owner and often lived near them after Emancipation. In some cases, information on slaves is given in wills, deeds, and other legal and business documents. In Georgia, the best place to begin such a search is the State Archives (once you have gathered as much information as you can through talking to relatives and using the census). The Freedman's Bureau, the government organization created to assist ex-slaves, often recorded numerous facts about individuals they served. These documents are still being organized by the staff of the National Archives, and often are not readily accessible. The records for the Atlanta, Savannah and Augusta branches of the Freedman's Bank are available on microfilm. They are part of National Archives microfilm series M816 and M817. African Americans who served in the armed forces during the Civil War may have left service records as well as pension applications. The National Archives is the best place to begin a search for these documents as well as information on service in other conflicts. The Southeastern Regional Branch of the National Archives is located in East Point. Ask your librarian about form NATF 80.

Some useful resources in our collection

- Our vertical file on African American genealogy, which includes *A Guide to . . . Using the Resources of the National Archives* and other information.
- *The Slave Bills of Sales Project*, assembled by the African American Family History Association, which abstracts many bills of sale for Georgia slave transactions, shelved under GEN R929.3758 A: SLAVE.
- *Black Roots: A Beginner's Guide to Tracing the African American Family Tree*, by Tony Burroughs. Shelved at GEN R 929.1 Burroughs
- *Finding A Place Called Home: A Guide to African American Genealogy and Historical Identity*, by Dee Parmer Woodtor. Revised edition (1999) shelved at GEN R 929.1 Woodtor.

Helpful resources outside our collection

Records of Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations from the Revolution through the Civil War,

edited by Kenneth M. Stamp. This is a massive set of microfilms published over several years by University Publications of America, and is not yet complete. The University of Georgia is one source of the records; UGA is attempting to acquire the entire set as each new part is produced. These records will not help you at the beginning of your research, but may be useful at a later point. They are *not* indexed by the names of slaves.

Organizations

African American Genealogy Group P.O. Box 1798 Philadelphia PA 19105-1798
(*Brochure in vertical file*)

Periodicals

Two periodicals available in the Georgia and Family History Collection are *Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society Newsletter* and the *Journal of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society*. The Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society may be contacted at P.O. Box 73086, Washington DC 20056-3086.

Some libraries specialize partly or entirely in various aspects of African American culture and history

Locally, there is the [Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History](#), part of the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System. [Click here](#) for hours, location and directions by car and by MARTA. Materials at the AARL are useful for historical background or for advanced research. The Georgia Local and Family History Department is the place to begin your genealogical search. One of the most famous special libraries is the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Malcolm X Blvd., New York, NY 10037, (212) 862-4000. **Note:** It is always a good idea to call a library for details about its holdings, hours, fees, parking, etc., before visiting, especially if it is in another city.

Planning a family reunion?

See our vertical file on reunions and our copies of *Reunions* magazine.

Ask your Georgia Local and Family History librarian about . .

- . . research in other counties, states and countries.
- . . getting in touch with professional genealogists.