

# AFRICAN AMERICAN GENEALOGICAL SOURCEBOOK



edited by  
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# Basic Genealogical Research Methods and Their Application to African Americans

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Researchers tracing the lives of African Americans (or any other ethnic group) are encouraged to determine what records, either at home or in various repositories (such as libraries, state or church archives, or historical societies), may be available for genealogical research in the areas where their ancestors lived. Information on African Americans appears in records which one would normally associate with family history research: family records (Bibles, letters, diaries, photographs); cemetery, church, court, military, naturalization, and vital records; censuses; passenger ship lists; newspapers; and numerous others (for instance, city directories; social security, school, and hospital records), including secondary sources (those which are transcriptions or indexes of original records). This chapter discusses these and other records, the types of information that they contain, their location, and their strengths and limitations as they apply to African Americans. Also included is a brief survey of the types of charts and record keeping systems that genealogists may use in their research. Finally, researchers are encouraged to become familiar with various repositories of genealogical information and how they may prove helpful in the quest for information.

## Charting and Record Keeping

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An important part of any type of research is developing an efficient system of organizing any information found. This is particularly true for genealogical research.

Without some type of order, it will prove difficult to locate a particular piece of data. Various methods of note taking and organizing materials are possible, and the key is to find one that is suitable to the researcher's particular needs.

Keeping good notes involves several different factors. As simple as it may sound, one should be able to read one's own handwriting later when the notes may not be as fresh in the mind as when they were taken. The researcher should select the type and size of paper, note cards, or notebooks that will be used for taking notes. Notebooks, for example, can contain all notes and are easily accessible, particularly if one has a lot of work to do at one place. Whenever possible, the information should be copied as it is in the original source, except when lengthy legal documents, such as deeds, may suggest the expediency of abstracts.

The source containing the information and the site wherein the information was found should be completely cited. The name of the repository (such as the county courthouse), the source of the data (name of the source, volume and page numbers, date), and the results (whether or not information was found, how reliable the data is) should be noted. For example, "Mobile County Courthouse, Mobile, Alabama, Recorder of Deeds office, Deed Book 1, page 10, January 12, 1850," should be included in one's notes. The researcher should be as specific as possible when identifying sources, primary or secondary. When citing information from a book, the author's name, title of the book, place of publication, publisher, publication date, and page should be listed. If nothing on the ancestor being researched was located in a source, one should note that the book was examined to prevent duplication of work. Several style manuals that detail how to cite one's sources are available. Two of these are Richard S. Lackey's *Cite Your Sources: A Manual for Documenting Family Histories and Genealogical Records* and *The Chicago Manual of Style* (University of Chicago).

A number of different charts may be used in the organization of research notes. Basic forms, such as a family group sheet, pedigree or ancestor chart, research log, and correspondence log are important tools that may be purchased from genealogical societies, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) Family History Centers, or the Everton Publishers in Utah.

A family group sheet should be completed with all documented evidence on a particular family. It may contain spaces for some or all of the following data: father's name; mother's name (including her maiden name); dates and places for births, baptisms, marriages, deaths, and burials; occupations; religion; military service; names of other spouses. Information on children should include dates and places of birth, marriage, death, and names of spouses. Each fact on the family sheet should be individually referenced to the material in the researcher's files from which it was extracted along with a numbered list for the references. The compiler should be identified by name, address, and date. Appended to the group sheet should be a chronological summary of everything found to date on that person in raw note form, not as a narrative summary.

For example, if the husband has been located in several census records, the birthplace from each record should be indicated on the group sheet and a number should be used to indicate each specific source, such as "The federal census, population schedule, Cole County, Missouri, page 43." On a separate sheet, the complete citation of the data could be recorded with notes from the sources. This would include the names, dates, and other data found in the census, for example, on each family member. The complete citation would include the census year, schedule, county, page, dwelling and household numbers, and line numbers.

Pedigree or ancestor charts contain basic genealogical data: names; dates of birth and marriage for the person being researched; and similar data and dates of death for the research subject's parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on. These charts can provide a quick overview of one's family. Numbering individuals on these should refer researchers to the correct family group sheet and vice versa. For example, if Joe Smith is person 12 on pedigree chart 4, you would find his family group sheet numbered 4-12.

Other useful charts include a research calendar or log and a correspondence record. The former contains spaces for the ancestor's name; date of the research; location and/or call number of the source; description of the source, such as census or will book; time period searched, such as 1850-1900; and comments (names searched, purpose of each search, results, etc.).

A correspondence record may contain one's ancestor's name, addressee, address, date sent, purpose of the letter, date replied, and results of the correspondence.

## Sources of Information

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Searching for clues to one's past should begin at home with reviewing family records and interviewing family members. It may seem obvious, but it is best to begin with what is known about the family and then work backwards to the unknown.

To facilitate the search, family Bibles, letters, diaries, photographs, scrapbooks, legal documents such as deeds or wills, military discharges, tax receipts, birth or death certificates, obituaries, and any other personal or legal documents found at home that may contain information about the family should be examined. Family Bibles may contain valuable data concerning marriages, births, and deaths—information that may not have been recorded in civil or church records. Family letters may also contain clues to further research. Photographs, which may provide the names of relatives, a date when the picture was taken, or the name and location of the photographer, provide glimpses into the past. The researcher may locate the name of the photographer in a city directory and from this information ascertain an approximate date of the picture. Clothes, buildings, or people in the picture might provide clues concerning the date of the photograph. If someone was dressed in a military uniform, the researcher would want to locate the military records of that individual. A tax receipt may provide a street address, which can be a clue for further research in deed records or city directories. The latter source may list that person's occupation or other relatives who resided at the same address. Wills and estate settlements may contain the names and addresses of other family members. Thus, any record that may contain information about the family should not be overlooked. After one has extracted all clues and organized all notes, one can begin researching records located outside the home.

### Census Records

Perhaps no other source is used more often by genealogists than census records. Beginning in 1790, and in every tenth year since, the federal government has taken a census. The amount of information in the records has changed over the years. It should be noted that federal census schedules less than seventy-two years old are restricted and not made public. Earlier records were not as detailed as later ones, but they all are important sources for those tracing the ancestry of any ethnicity. Although pre-1850 censuses do not contain the names of

every free member of the household in any racial category, they at least indicate that a family resided at a certain place at a certain time and reveal the age and sex composition of the household. Thus, the researcher can continue searching for clues in available records. Census records should be read carefully, as the data contained therein may not be accurate and may conflict with data from other sources. The type of information contained in the various schedules of federal census records, their limitations, and their utility in tracing African-American ancestry will be discussed below.

Federal censuses from 1790 to 1840 contain only the names of the heads of households and are not "every name" censuses. Members of the household, white, non-white, slave, and free, were enumerated in age brackets by sex. Age categories changed through the years. Unlike later censuses, such information as relationships, birth-places, or other personal data, was not listed. The 1790–1810 censuses listed free nonwhites as "all other [free] persons" and did not specifically mention free people of color. The 1820–1840 record provided a separate listing for free people of color. For example, the Mobile, Alabama, household of Richard Field, a free man of color, contained two people according to the 1830 U.S. census: a free woman of color aged between thirty-six and fifty-five years, and Field, aged between fifty-five and one hundred. The household of John A. Collins in the same city (1840 federal census) contained three free males of color, one aged between thirty-six and fifty-five years, one between ten and twenty-four, and the third under ten years. It also contained free women of color, one between thirty-six and fifty-five years, one between twenty-four and thirty-six, and three under ten. One female slave aged between ten and twenty-four also resided with the Collins family. The household of John McDonald, a white male, contained two male slaves, two female slaves, and a free woman of color.

For all U.S. censuses between 1790 and 1849, it is important to note that the "other free" or "free persons of color" categories do not distinguish between individuals of African ancestry and those of Native-American ancestry. No assumptions about ethnicity can be made from this data without evidence from other records.

A major change occurred with the 1850 census. For the first time, the population schedule listed the names of each free member, white and nonwhite, of the household. In addition, the enumerator was instructed to record each person's age, sex, color (white, black, or mulatto), profession or occupation of males over the age of fifteen, value of real estate owned, place of birth (state, territory, or county), whether married within the year, whether attended school within the year, whether able to read and write (if over twenty years), and whether deaf and dumb,

blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or a convict. For example, the free nonwhite John A. Collins, a mulatto and the same person listed in the 1840 census, was identified in 1850 as a fifty year old carpenter who resided with four other mulattoes: Isabella, fifty; Virginia, seventeen; Emma, sixteen; and John, fifteen. Each member of the family was born in Alabama.

One additional column of information was added to the 1860 federal census: the value of personal property owned by the family. The household of the same Collins family that appeared in the 1840 and 1850 censuses included the same individuals, but the assessed value of personal property was listed. As stated earlier, inaccuracies in censuses are not uncommon, and the entry of John A. Collins provides an excellent example. From the 1850 to the 1860 census, Collins did not age: both censuses listed him as fifty years. His wife aged seven years in that decade, Virginia nine, and John only five years.

The 1860 census is important, as it is the last federal census conducted prior to the Civil War. As such it can provide clues to nonwhites who have traced their ancestry at least as far back as the 1870 census as to whether a particular ancestor was a free black or slave prior to or during that war. This information can be uncovered if one searches for the ancestors' surnames in the 1860 census in the same general area where they resided in 1870. One should also consider searching the 1860 census for the white neighbors as listed in 1870 of the African-American ancestor(s). Comparisons can also be made between data on the 1870 census and from sources such as slave schedules, estate records, and bills of slave sales.

Beginning in 1870, population schedules of the federal census began to list the names of all nonwhites. Of particular interest to the researcher would be the place of birth for each person: state, U.S. territory, or foreign country. The additional information recorded for each person basically repeated that contained in the previous census: age, sex, color, occupation, values of personal and real estate, whether parents were of foreign birth, whether born or married within the year, and citizenship status for males twenty-one years of age or older. Following the same Collins family, the 1870 census indicated that John A. Collins was a seventy-one year old carpenter, Isabella was a sixty year old housewife, and that the household now contained Clara, twenty-one years old, and John, one year old. All were mulattoes born in Alabama.

The researcher should note that none of the federal censuses considered up to this point state any relationship between members of a household. Researchers may hypothesize that Isabella was the wife of John A. Collins; that Clara was their daughter; and that young John was

Clara's son; but evidence supporting the hypothesis must be sought elsewhere.

The 1880 census provided greater detail on family members. It is the first federal census to specifically state the relationship of each person to the head of the household. Also shown are marital status (single, married, widowed, or divorced), whether a person was sick or disabled, and birthplace for each person and his or her parents.

Thus, if the census recorded the names of a family consisting of a father, mother, their children, and grandparents, it may be possible to trace that family to another area, or perhaps to the previous census in the same state. Tracing the migration of a family would be possible if, for example, the children were born in a different state than their 1880 residence. If the entire family was born in the same state where they resided in 1880, then that state's 1870 census could be checked. For example, John A. Collins continued to reside in Mobile. He lived with Isabella, whom is now known to be his wife, and John A. Collins, Jr., his grandson. Each was a mulatto born in Alabama, and each person's parents were born in Alabama. The identification of the grandson, John, supports the hypothesis drawn from the 1870 census suggesting that Clara of 1870 should be sought as the mother of young John A. of 1880. Thus, the 1880 census contains valuable clues that previous censuses do not.

Researchers should not overlook the special schedule of dependent, delinquent, and defective classes from the 1880 census. Many nonwhites may be found in them. People from prisons, jails, mental hospitals, or orphanages, for example, were enumerated like others in the 1880 population schedule, but "the fact that they are inmates of a public institution means that they are removed from the family unit and often from the counties—or even states—in which their families reside" (Hatten 1992, 57–58). The supplemental schedules may contain the person's home residence (city or town, county, or state), as well as other relevant data which varied from class to class. The schedule for homeless children included, for instance, whether the child's parents were deceased, whether abandoned, and whether born in the institution where he or she resided at the time of the enumeration. For instance, in Florida, the insane schedule shows that Leonard Basset, a nonwhite resident of Jacksonville, was afflicted at age twenty-eight, that he was sight and hearing impaired, and that he was a patient of an institution. Dolores Hull, a resident of a colored asylum, appears in the homeless children schedule as a resident of St. Augustine, Florida.

Most of the 1890 federal census was destroyed by a fire in the Commerce Department building in 1921. The National Archives has prepared an index to the extant

schedules, available on two rolls of microfilm (National Archives microcopy No. M496). Partial listings exist for areas in Alabama, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Illinois, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Dakota, and Texas.

The 1890 special federal census of Union veterans and widows of Union veterans of the Civil War was one of two censuses that contained information about military personnel. (The other was the 1840 census that listed pensioners for Revolutionary War service.) Information provided in the 1890 return may include the enumeration district, house and family number from schedule one of the same census, name, rank, company, regiment or vessel, dates of enlistment and discharge, length of service, post office address, disability incurred, and other remarks. For example, William Wiggins was a private in Company C of the United States Colored Troops and served from November 1863 to March 26, 1866. His address and length of service were also listed. With this information, the researcher could check Civil War service and pension records. The 1890 special censuses from "those fourteen states and territories alphabetically from 'A' through 'Kansas' (and part of 'Kentucky') have been lost" (Greenwood 1990, 226).

Several changes occurred with the 1900 census. The following items were included: dates of birth (year and month); number of years married; for mothers, number of children born and number living; for immigrants, year of arrival in the United States, number of years in the United States, and whether naturalized; whether one's house was owned or rented; and whether house was mortgaged. The census form also contained other information. Some of the added changes may be especially useful to the researcher as there may be no other records that document the number of children a slave mother had and whether they were still living when the census was taken.

Data in the 1910 census are similar to that of 1900. For example, location; relationship to the head of the family; personal description (sex; color; age; marital status; if a mother, number of children and number of them living); place of birth; place of birth for parents of each person; year of immigration; whether naturalized; occupation; literacy; whether owned or rented a home and if owned, whether mortgaged; whether a survivor of Union or Confederate army or navy; and other data. Unlike the previous census, the 1910 census did not provide the month and year of birth.

The 1920 census contains much of the same data as the 1910 census. Information on the 1920 form included address; name; relationship to the head of the household; whether home was owned or rented; personal description (sex, color or race, age, marital status); year of immigration; whether naturalized; year of naturalization; literacy;

place of birth for each person and his or her parents; occupation; and other data.

Censuses for 1900–1920 are valuable to the researcher as they usually are one of the first records outside the home to be checked. After examining records and family papers found in the home, censuses can be checked to verify any information obtained from other written documents or from oral histories. If the researcher has located family members in the 1920 enumeration, for example, a next step would be to trace the family backward through the censuses and other appropriate records.

In addition to the federal decennial censuses, other governmental agencies required that censuses be taken. These included special enumerations taken by the federal government (such as the military censuses discussed above), and censuses taken by territories, states, counties, and cities. For example, some Missouri state censuses, which are incomplete, are available at the Missouri State Archives. Selected city and county of St. Louis censuses were taken in the antebellum period and are available at the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis. Thus, the researcher should inquire about non-federal censuses and how they may be obtained or located in the state in which he or she is conducting this research.

African Americans trying to trace their enslaved ancestors need to identify their slave owner family. Freed slaves did not always take the name of former owners. According to one source,

Some slaves took surnames before the Civil War ended, while others waited until they began establishing themselves as free citizens. Many slaves took the surname of their last owner or their father who might have been a white slave owner or overseer, a deceased slave, or a slave sold to another owner several years prior to the Emancipation. Hundreds of slave families took the name of a prominent American, a local political figure, or the given name of the father of the family. It wasn't uncommon for freed slaves to be known by several surnames, making a final choice years after the Emancipation. (Cerny and Eakle 1985, 332)

Slave schedules are a valuable source for the African-American researcher attempting to bridge the gap between slavery and freedom as well as for those who were free before the Civil War. Compiled in 1850 and 1860, they typically contain the name of the owner, and the age, sex, and color for each slave, but not the name, although there are some exceptions to this. "When researchers identify a potential master through other sources, they can compare the age, sex, and color of each tallied slave against the data given for freedmen on later censuses; this process may strengthen or eliminate the possibility of a connection" (Brasfield, "To My Daughter and the Heirs of Her Body," 274). By itself this source of information can be inconclusive but by comparing the data with that in deed books containing bills of sale, owner's records, etc., the connection may be

strengthened. Some free people of color owned slaves, and sources providing information on these people should not be overlooked by researchers looking for African Americans who were free before 1865. Although not a typical slave owner for either race, a South Carolina free man of color in 1860 owned sixty-three slaves. In Alabama, a free nonwhite owned six slaves aged between one and twenty-eight years.

What should the researcher do if his pre-Civil War ancestors were enslaved and cannot be located easily by assuming that they took their former owner's surname? Other records must be used. It may be necessary to check records on possible white families in the neighborhood where the black family resided after emancipation. This would entail examining antebellum documents, such as wills and bills of sale, and comparing all data found in such records with data contained in post-war sources. Thus, when examining census records, the researcher should identify slave owners' neighbors whose records may provide sought after answers to their questions.

In addition to the population and slave schedules, agricultural schedules of the federal census, 1850–1880, are available. These schedules provide data on farm size and value, number and type of livestock, livestock value, amount of crops produced, and other information. Though agricultural producers were not identified by race, and owning land was not a requisite to be listed, these schedules can provide more detail on ancestors already discovered elsewhere. In 1860, for example, Zeno Chastang, Sr., one of the more prosperous free Negro farm owners in Mobile County, Alabama, owned eighty improved acres, 1,230 unimproved acres, and produced, among other items, twelve hundred bushels of corn. The value of his farm was \$3,900.

Mortality schedules of the federal census are another valuable source for genealogists of all races. These records cover the years 1850 through 1880 and contain the names of persons who died in the twelve months preceding the date of the census. The 1850 and 1860 forms contained the same data for each person: name; age; sex; color; whether slave or free; marital status; place of birth; month of death; occupation; disease or cause of death; and number of days ill. Data in the 1870 schedule include the number of the family as given in the second column of schedule one (population); name; age; sex; color; whether parents of foreign birth; month of death; occupation; and cause of death. Data in the 1880 schedule include the number of the family as given in column two of schedule one (population); name; age; sex; color; marital status; place of birth; place of birth of the person's parents; occupation; month of death; disease or cause of death; length of residence in the county; and other data.

Several examples illustrate the value of this source. In March 1850 Tom Smith, a fifty-five year old free black who was born in Virginia, died in Dallas County, Alabama, of rheumatism. Harriet Smith, a forty-four year old free mulatto who was born in Georgia, died in the same county in June of unknown causes. In St. Louis, Joseph Dooley, a free black laborer born in Africa, died in June 1849 from cholera. In Howard County, Missouri, several slaves born in Kentucky were listed consecutively, and each died in the same month and from the same disease—cholera. Information in this source may not have been recorded in other records, especially for slaves. Obviously, for the researcher who is especially interested in tracing family medical history, these records have a special significance.

An example from the 1880 (or 1870) schedule provides greater clues. For example, if one checks the St. Louis schedule for the surname Washington, several entries are found in enumeration district 145. Betty and George L. Washington, two black children who were born in Missouri and whose father was born in Virginia and mother in Missouri, died in the same month and from the same disease. By examining the population schedule with the same enumeration district and knowing the family number from the mortality schedule, the researcher will locate the children's family. George L. Washington, his wife Hester, and their daughter Mollie were enumerated, and information on them can now be extracted. For example, the places of birth for the elder George and his wife were listed. It should be noted that had the researcher tried to locate this family in the Soundex (a special index made for some censuses including the 1880 one—see below for more information), it would not have been listed, as only households with children under ten years of age were included in the 1880 Soundex.

There are limitations to these schedules. For instance, they listed deaths for only every tenth year, and they were not complete. "It is estimated that in the mortality schedules for 1850, 1860, and 1870 only 60 percent of the actual deaths within those twelve-month periods were reported. . . . that means that less than 8 percent of the actual deaths for this thirty-one year period are in the mortality schedules" (Greenwood 1990, 229).

Census records may be obtained in several ways. Microfilms of agricultural, mortality, population, and slave schedules may be available at public, university, or genealogical libraries; or historical societies. If a local library does not have the needed census records, the interlibrary loan department may be able to order the films from another library or rental program. For a nominal charge, the researcher may also order films through the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Library system. In addition, various microfilms,

including census records, may be rented from the National Archives Microfilm Rental Program or the American Genealogical Lending Library. For a fee, these organizations lend or rent microfilms and send them directly to the researcher.

Printed indexes are generally available for pre-1880 censuses. Some printed indexes to the 1890 special federal census of Union veterans and widows of Union veterans of the Civil War have also been published. Information in most of these indexes is arranged by state and thereunder alphabetically by surname. A special index, the Soundex, is available for the 1880, 1900, and 1920 censuses, but only part of the 1910 census has been indexed. For the Soundex, index cards contain information that will direct the researcher to census records. The cards for the 1880, 1900, and 1920 census list volume, enumeration district, sheet or page number, and line number. The cards also contain the name of the head of the household; that person's color, sex, age, birthplace, city and county of residence; and the names of members of the household, with their relationship to the head of the household, ages, and birthplaces. These cards "were alphabetically coded and filed by state under a system where all names sounding alike, regardless of spelling differences or errors (if they began with the same letter of the alphabet), would be interfiled" (Greenwood 1990, 220).

The index to the 1910 census, called the Miracode, uses the same coding system, but instead of listing the page and line number, it lists a visitation number. For example, the right side of the top line of the page from a 1910 card contains three sets of numbers: the first is the volume number of the census, the second is the enumeration district, and the third is the visitation number. To locate a family in the actual census, the researcher should locate the county (also listed on the top line), then the enumeration district (located on the right side of the top of the page of the census), and finally, the visitation number (column two in the census). Only twenty-one states have been indexed under this system.

To use the Soundex (available through many libraries with genealogical collections), the researcher must determine the correct code. Only surnames are coded, and given names were filed alphabetically under the code. The code consists of the first initial of the surname along with three numbers. Vowels and y, w, and h are not coded. The code numbers are: 1 (representing the letters b, p, f, v), 2 (c, s, k, g, j, q, x, z), 3 (d, t), 4 (l), 5 (m, n), and 6 (r). Whenever two letters with the same code number follow each other, the two are coded as one letter, and zeroes are used if three codable letters are not in a name. For example, the surname Smith has a code of S530, Kohn K500, Schaefer S160 (the c is not coded

because it is equivalent to the s which it immediately follows), Kelly K400, and Adair A360. Once the appropriate cards for the code have been located in the film, one should be able to locate the given name of the person.

Limitations and problems with censuses and the indexes which accompany them are evident. If the researcher cannot locate a family, variant spellings of the surname should be checked. Using one's imagination with regard to the way an enumerator recorded a name is essential, for it was recorded as the enumerator heard it.

In the antebellum period, if a white man had a free Negro family, the children may have been listed in censuses (and other records) under the name of either their white father or nonwhite mother. For example, in the 1840 population schedule for the city of Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama, the household of Polite Collins, a free woman of color, included several other free Negroes and an adult white male. Ten years later, Collins resided with several nonwhites and four children assumed to be white because their race was left blank. All children went by the surname Collins. However, in 1860, Polite Collins resided with Roswell Swan, a white man, and several of their children who were identified as mulattoes and who went by the surname Swan. (In other records, Swan acknowledged that he had children by this free woman of color.)

In addition to the problem of identifying offspring of an interracial union, "any assumption of ethnicity on the basis of census data from a single year (or any other single document) may err. Determining the ethnic identity of any family labeled *free people of color* (or *f.p.c.*) on any record invariably requires exhaustive research in the widest-possible variety of resources" (Gary B. Mills 1990, 264). For example, twentieth century governor of Alabama, Braxton Bragg Comer, "appears as a child on the 1860 Federal Census, Population Schedule, of Barbour County, whereupon he and his entire family, despite their prominence in the county, were clearly identified as *black*" (Gary B. Mills 1981, 23). Lawrence Brue appears as white in the 1860 federal census, but in previous censuses and in other records he appears as a free person of color. In 1860, for Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, the ethnicity of seventy-six of the 1,614 families was misidentified.

Although such inaccuracies in census records frustrate the researcher, some enumerators recorded more specific data than their instructions required. They sometimes included detailed information concerning places of birth, marriage, or other subjects for both whites and nonwhites. For example, an apparently free black couple residing in Arkansas informed an enumerator of their exact year of marriage. A free woman of color in the 1860

census for St. Louis, St. Louis County, Missouri, ward 2, page 802, indicated that she had been "freed by Benjamin Soulard," and that she was "married to slave John Harris." In addition, the name of John's owner and their exact birthplace, St. Louis, were listed. A free woman of color, born in New Orleans, was "on visit" in St. Louis in the same area. In another instance, a female slave was listed last in the household of a white man who had hired her. Not only was her given name recorded but also the complete name of her owner. The value of such information cannot be overlooked as such "errors" provide clues for additional research.

Thus, census records may contain a variety of information. Generally, each successive census included more detailed information about an individual than its predecessor. The researcher should trace an individual through all schedules of all censuses from birth to death and extract data about the individual and the area in which that person resided. Although censuses contain errors, they are particularly valuable genealogical sources that simply need to be used with caution.

### Church Records

Religion played an important role in the lives of early African Americans, and the activities of various denominations are documented in their sacramental registers and business minutes. Most major denominations accepted both free nonwhites and slaves. In the antebellum era, for example, Roman Catholic and Protestant churches contained both white and nonwhite members. Many predominantly black churches were also in operation, keeping their own records. Whenever separate registers for the races were kept, researchers are urged to check both, as some nonwhites appear in the "white" registers.

Sacramental registers provide a wealth of information including baptisms (which may list birth data), marriages, and burials (which may list death data). Information from these registers may not be available in any other source, especially in the periods before the 1850 census and before keeping vital records became mandatory. They may contain the dates of birth and death for a child who lived between census years. It should be noted that some owners freed their bondsmen or slaves at baptismal ceremonies. As for free people, the names of slaves, approximate ages (sometimes exact dates), and often the mother's name were recorded.

Baptismal records also may contain a variety of other information: names of parents (when known), or when the parent or parents (white or black) acknowledged paternity, dates of birth and baptism, names of sponsors (who were often related to the individual being baptized), and, in the case of slaves, the name of the owner. For



instance, the baptisms of the children (and slaves) of a free nonwhite couple appear in the "colored" register ("Baptisma Nigrorum, 1806–1828") of the Parish of the Immaculate Conception located in the Mobile Church Archives, the Catholic Center, Mobile, Alabama (entries 251, 352). The researcher should note all information, even if at the time it does not appear to be relevant.

Marriage records may contain the names of the bride and groom, date of marriage, witnesses, place of origin, ages, and names of slave owners. In some instances, priests or ministers may have recorded other information pertinent to the marriage, including the fact that a couple had applied for a civil license or even that a man had previously changed his name. In Alabama, the marriage of Zeno Chastang and Maria Teresa Bernoudy, both free people of color, appeared on page 108 in the "white" register of the Parish of the Immaculate Conception, "Marriage Records Book 1, 1726–1832." John Baker married Marie Denise (of French-African descent) on October 25, 1820, at Natchitoches, Louisiana. The Spanish priest identified the groom as aged thirty-two, a native of Broneston, Virginia, a son of John Baker, a man of color, and of Nancy, a white woman. The bride was fourteen years and six months old, and daughter of Marianne Baden, a free Negro (Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Natchitoches Church Marriages*, 1985, 15). When slaves Charles and Marie were married at the Cathedral of St. Louis, Missouri, the priest also recorded the names of their owners in the "Register of Marriages, 1840–1849" (page 152). This register is now held in the Basilica of St. Louis, the King, the Old Cathedral, St. Louis.

In the absence of civil death records, church burial records are especially important. Data in Catholic registers may include dates of death and burial, place of origin, age, and names of the deceased's parents. Again, all information in a source should be skimmed. In one case, when a priest recorded several slave burials, he only identified the owner, a free man of color, by his given name ("Burials for Coloured People," Parish of the Immaculate Conception, Mobile Church Archives). A different priest, however, recorded the same man's complete name. In the same volume, John Martin, a free man of color, native of Virginia and about twenty-seven years old, received the benefit of a Catholic burial, as did a nonwhite woman who was a native of St. Domingo (entries 2, 19). On November 18, 1805, in New Orleans, Carlos Brule, son of Carlos Brule, "captain of the mulatto militia of this city" (Woods 1993, 43), and Maria Constanza Gaillard, age six, were buried.

Protestant church records in the form of either minutes or registers also contain valuable information. Some Episcopal registers (baptismal, marriage, burial, and confirmation) contain the same types of data concerning

African Americans as found in Catholic records, including origins or former residences. Ministers did not always identify free nonwhites as such; they may appear as colored, and not necessarily as free colored or free persons of color.

Several examples illustrate this type of data. A minister of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Mobile, Alabama, recorded the baptism of William A. Saxon, "free," son of Armstead and Mary Saxon in the Parish Register baptisms dated July 15, 1855 (volume 2). The Second Presbyterian Church, Mobile, received John Burton and his wife Mary Ann Burton, free people of color, as members according to the "Session Book," volume 1, 1842–1855. They previously had been members of the Presbyterian church in Demopolis, Alabama. This same book, located at the Central Presbyterian Church Archives in Mobile, also states that "Francis Godfrey a coloured (*sic*) servant having been examined as to her experimental knowledge of religion, was unanimously received to the communion and fellowship of this church" (63–65). In 1835, the First Baptist Church of Christ (records are located at the First Baptist Church Archives in Mobile) "received into the fellowship as a member of the church coloured brother William Jones belonging to J. G. S. Walker, upon a letter of dismission from the Baptist Church in Augusta, Georgia" ("Minutes, 1835–1848"). On October 5, 1845, in the Second Baptist Church "Minutes" (1845–1875) which are located in the same archives, it is stated that, "at the waters edge a free woman of colour Sally Chamberlain, presented herself for membership when upon her Christian experience she was received for baptism" (p. 4). On May 16, 1847, the same church licensed four nonwhites (Charles Leavens, Tom Knight, Guiford Ward, and Cupid Redwood) to preach in its African branch. "Being of good character, orderly and consistent in their conduct," they were "licensed to preach or exhort according and in conformity with the laws of Alabama" (p. 24).

Church records may be located in many different places. The researcher should first determine if the church or parish is still in operation: if so, a phone call or letter may be a first step toward the examination of the records. If the church has been closed, a church or archdiocesan archive may have the records. Sometimes, however, other churches may acquire the records of a closed church. Libraries, historical societies, and state archives hold church records, either originals or microfilm copies. The Family History Library in Salt Lake City has microfilmed many church records, and these may be borrowed through Family History Centers around the country. Other records have been published, although researchers finding information in published (secondary) sources are urged to examine the original records.

In addition to possible difficulties in locating a specific church's records, the researcher may encounter other obstacles when using the records. Not all identify nonwhites as such, especially records from the antebellum period. All records are not accessible to the public; each parish or church may have its own guidelines concerning research of its holdings. The records may be written in a language other than English. Not all records have been indexed. Finally, unlike public facilities which house government records and are open during regular hours, church archives may be open for limited periods of time.

### Court Records

Many types of court and legislative records may be used to trace the lives of African Americans. Among them are civil and criminal records, probate documents, deed or general record books, and acts of state legislatures. Different courts operated throughout the United States on the federal and state levels, including circuit, chancery, probate, city, land, (state) supreme, county, and mayor's, and each generated its own records. Researchers are encouraged to examine city directories (usually available in libraries) to ascertain which courts operated for a particular area. Court records may consist of loose paper files or record, minute, and docket books; and researchers are urged to examine all types. Some items of interest that might otherwise be missed may be located by reading the books page by page, often necessary if indexes are not available. As with other records, nonwhites may not have been identified as such.

Court records are usually located in county courthouses. However, some may be found in other repositories (city, state, or university archives or historical societies). Many have been microfilmed.

Throughout history, African Americans' legal rights varied considerably. "Free Negroes in the South (like most of their Northern counterparts) did not enjoy all rights of citizenship; the court systems represented one area in which these abridgements are most noticeable" (Gary B. Mills 1990, 270-271). For example, most free nonwhites in the North and South were not allowed to testify in court against whites. "They were, in fact, prohibited from even instituting a suit against a white in most states before the Civil War" (Gary B. Mills, *The Forgotten People* . . . , 200). There were, of course, exceptions to this. Free people of color were involved in a variety of lawsuits against whites and others of their class, and a variety of illegal acts were ascribed to African Americans. Nonwhites were able to purchase and sell real and personal property. Also, divorce proceedings involving African Americans may be found among civil records.

Several examples will illustrate the value of these records. In 1850, Peter Bolling appeared in a Mobile County, Alabama, circuit court and indicated that in 1837 he had been a slave of Thomas Batte who lived in the town of Dayton, Marengo County, Alabama (University of South Alabama Archives, Mobile). In 1830 George Mulhollen, a free man of color, sued Robert McCullough in Adams County, Mississippi, alleging that he had been born free in Easton, Pennsylvania, in 1798 or 1799, and that he was being illegally held in slavery by a white named Robert McCullough. The defendant demanded that Mulhollen present proof of his freedom. Despite the fact that Mulhollen could only offer his testimony, a jury of twelve whites granted him his freedom (Record of Judgement, May 1830-May 1831, 458-461). In another case, Sarah, a free woman of color, indicated that she had been claimed as a slave by Louisa Higgins of Mobile County. Sarah indicated that she was about twenty-one years old, that she was born in Montgomery County, Alabama, that she had been held by Higgins but that she was never claimed by her as a slave until 1853, that her mother was also a free-born woman, and that she had a child. A witness for Sarah indicated that he knew Sarah's mother, Delpha, when they were in Upson County, Georgia, about 1829 or 1830, that previous to this a Negro slave named John was Delphi's husband, and that "in the neighborhood where she lived in Georgia, it was generally reputed, and believed, that she (Delphi) was the daughter of a white woman, by a black man. I have heard the same report in the neighborhood where she lived in this state." This information was culled from the "Final Record Book, 1852-1856," of the Mobile County, Alabama, Circuit Court (University of South Alabama Archives, 246-248) and the "Loose Paper File Collection," Mobile County (same archives, Circuit Court Case 27493). Finally, according to records at the University of South Alabama Archives, the court ordered a free man of color to contribute to the "support and education of the bastard child" of a free woman of color since he was "the reputed father" ("Circuit Court Minutes, 1856-1858," Mobile County, Alabama, p. 93).

Abstracts of files from superior court records that deal with slaves and free people of color have been published by Helen T. Catterall. But, again, the researcher should keep in mind that in court cases, as in other records, not all free people of color are identified as such. After researchers have located a case, they are urged to read the published state court records, available at law libraries, which contain greater details. In fact, it is necessary to check the state records to determine the county from which the case was appealed. Catterall lists the name of the case, the source (published state court records), the date, and an abstract of the case. For example, in *Stikes, Administrator v. Swanson*, 44 Ala. 633,

June 1870, 44 represents the volume number, and 633 the page on which the case appears in *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in The Supreme Court of Alabama, During The January and June Terms, 1870*. Legal librarians can be most helpful in assisting the researcher in finding the volume from which the citation comes. Note that only appellate cases are recorded in casebooks.

These court records may contain genealogical data. In Louisiana, there was a case in which several nonwhites sued for their freedom. The names of a slave mother and her master, her two children, and several grandchildren are provided. In the case cited above, the information that Cassius Swanson was formerly a slave in Florida where he was emancipated, and that he later moved to Mobile, and had at least three sons by two slave mothers is given as well as the year of his death. Cases after the Civil War may contain data about the antebellum lives of nonwhites. In *Donovan v. Pitcher et al.*, 53 Ala. 411, Dec. 1875, for example, William Pitcher was a man of color "who had been a slave, permitted by his master to go at large, retain and dispose of his earnings, to acquire property, make contracts, and in all respects to conduct himself as a free man." During the 1850s, he left Alabama on two different occasions and went to Ohio, where he eventually died. His wife, born a slave in North Carolina and the daughter of a free man of color who purchased her and brought her to Alabama, also went to Ohio to live with her husband.

Researchers should not overlook criminal records as a source for genealogical information. For example, some dockets may contain names, offenses, judgments, and other useful data. In Daviess County, Indiana, Charles Brown was arrested for grand larceny (for allegedly stealing a coat worth \$7.00), convicted, fined \$10.00, and sentenced to three years in the state prison, after which he would be disenfranchised for five years. Before the Civil War, one free woman of color was arrested for failure to post bond. The record provided data on her background: "It appears from the evidence in the case that the defendant is descended from a white woman, [and] she is discharged not being subject to the free Negro laws" (Daviess County, Indiana, "Circuit Court Book D," 296, 389-390; City of Mobile, Alabama, City of Mobile Municipal Archives, "Guard House Docket, 1862-1863," 243).

Other criminal records, such as those of the mayor's court, list names of the defendants and the alleged crimes (such as assault or disorderly conduct). It might be discovered in records information such as a jury finding a nonwhite guilty of grand larceny and ordering him to be sent to the state penitentiary. Newspapers also contain information concerning criminal and civil cases.

Records of the probate court are among the most important to the researcher. They include wills, court minutes, administrator account books, loose paper files which may contain all transactions of an estate record, guardianships, and other miscellaneous books of the court. Indexes to individual books, estates, or perhaps a general index that covers all records of the court are usually available. One such computerized index (Mobile County, Alabama) contains all references to a person's estate as recorded in the various court documents. Thus, instead of having to check the indexes to each court book, the researcher would only have to check one index. Most county courts, however, do not have one general index, so the researcher may have to examine several relevant indexes.

Wills contain a variety of information. Relationships are often mentioned. In 1805, Abraham Jones, for instance, a farmer in Anson County, North Carolina, manumitted (released from slavery) his wife Lydia and their seven children whom he named in his will. He also carefully detailed how his estate was to be divided (North Carolina State Archives). In another instance, Romeo Andry indicated that he was the "son of the late Simon Andry by a free woman of color named Jane or Jeanne" (Mobile County Courthouse, Alabama, "Will Book 3," 641). In a will filed in 1866 another nonwhite indicated that he purchased land from his brother, and that he owned land jointly with his sister. He also named his father and son-in-law, and left property to his children. The names of each relative were provided. In St. Louis, a free woman of color not only identified her grandson but also mentioned his age. Although she indicated that she had purchased him, she did not state his owner. However, a witness to the signing of the will had the same surname as the woman's grandson, suggesting some connection between the two.

Previous relationships and former residences can be documented in wills. In 1857, one free man of color made several bequests. In addition to identifying his wife by her maiden name, he made special bequests to his sons born from a previous union. The mother of those children was also named. Similarly Regis Bernoudy, "a free man of color of the city . . . of Mobile" (Mobile County Courthouse, Alabama, "Will Book 1," 170), left property to his three daughters, children of a free woman of color who predeceased him. He also left lots in Mobile and Pensacola. A free woman of color indicated the name of her father and his previous residence in a nearby county where she owned land. Cyrus Evans, a free man of color, acknowledged that his son was "born in the bonds of slavery and purchased by me for a fair consideration from Oregon Sibley . . . of Baldwin County" (Mobile County Courthouse, Alabama, "Will Book 2," 148). Finally, in St. Louis, Elmira Hawken stated that she was

the former slave of Mrs. Victoire Labadie. Hawken also identified her two children, who had a different surname. She also mentioned a man who previously had conveyed to her several lots in the city of St. Louis; his surname was the same as that of her children (St. Louis County, Missouri, Probate Court, "Will Book E," Civil Courts Building, 314-315).

African Americans tracing their enslaved ancestors are urged to check probate records of both whites and nonwhites. If former slaves did not take the name of a former master, researchers are encouraged to check the records of whites (or other nonwhites) who resided in the same neighborhood as their ancestors in 1870.

Wills also may contain the names and ages of slaves. Among the slaves Zeno Chastang bequeathed to his wife were Margaret and her two children Tom and Frank (Mobile County Courthouse, Alabama, "Will Book 3," 242). Probate minute books also contain the names and ages of slaves and the names of those who inherited them.

Probate and deed records may also contain references to slave sales, manumissions, and free papers which may list previous residences or other relatives. (Free people of color often carried proof that they were free, and these documents were recorded in the courts. Newspapers sometimes published these lists.) George Rootes of the town of Fairfax, Culpeper County, Virginia, freed his "wife Sarah and her three children, Ellen, Sarah Ann, and James . . . all of whom I have lately purchased for the purpose of carrying with me to the state of Ohio whither I am about to move" ("Deed Book 20," 1830, 311). A public notary residing in the city of New York certified that a black seaman about twenty-one years old was a free person. The papers showed that he was born in Scoduc, Rensselaer County, New York.

Deed, conveyance, or general record books usually contain the buying and selling of real property between two or more people, and not between individuals and the government. Indexes, direct and indirect or grantor and grantee, are normally available, and the amount of information contained in them varies from county to county. For example, one commonly encountered printed index contains the name of the grantor, grantee, type of instrument (such as deed or power of attorney), date recorded, book name and number, page number, and description of the property. Nonwhites were not identified as such in the index. Thus, if whites and nonwhites with the same names purchased real property, data from other sources such as tax records may be needed to determine if a particular deed is relevant to the researcher. An index published by Oscar W. Collet, 1804-1854, for St. Louis County, Missouri, lists the grantor, grantee, book and page numbers, and some genealogical information. Researchers are urged to copy all information from such

indexes and then seek out the original documents for additional detail.

The types of data in deed books varies considerably. In addition to references to real property sales, including slave sales, deed books may contain information on free papers, manumissions, deeds of gift or partition (and possibly a list of heirs), or leases. They may also contain records of slaves who purchased their own freedom. Even the most mundane books can provide information on prior residences, family cemeteries, or occupations.

Among the most common types of instruments recorded in these deed books were land sales. Nonwhites sold and purchased land from whites and other nonwhites. Deeds may contain names of the buyer and seller, date of the transaction, description or location of the property, references to previous sales of the same property, or some genealogical data such as the names of a spouse or children. For example, Magdalene, a free woman of color and widow of Etienne Fuselier, sold to her son, Pierre S. Fuselier, land in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana (St. Landry Parish Courthouse, Opelousas, Louisiana, "Conveyance Book E," April 15, 1820, 243). In Greenville County, South Carolina, Samuel Taylor, a free Negro who had been emancipated by Arthur Taylor in 1806, bought 131 acres in 1812 and ninety acres in 1813. Five years later he sold two acres to the Baptist Society of Columbia, South Carolina ("Deed Book I," 89-90, 180-181; "Deed Book K," 197-198). In 1852, William Dugger purchased a lot in the city of Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama, on the north side of St. Louis Street between Lawrence and Cedar Streets. The deed did not indicate that he was a free man of color, but tax and census records did ("Deed Book 4," new series, 355; City of Mobile, Alabama, "Tax Book, 1856," ward 7, City of Mobile Municipal Archives; "1850 Population Schedule," 425).

Slave sales and manumissions may also be found in deed books. Slave bills of sale cite name of buyer and seller, counties of residence, date of sale, and the market value of the slave. Often the name, age, gender, and color of the slave is also listed. According to "Conveyance Book F-1," in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, a free woman of color sold a male slave named Nicholas, aged about thirty-six years, to her daughter (p. 91). A court approved Robert Taylor's request to manumit his slave Milly, a mulatto who was about forty-five years old, "for and in consideration of the long and faithful conduct and services" (p. 177). Jack, a free Negro and previously the slave of Charles Comeau, freed Letty who "lived with him many years as a wife" (St. Landry Parish, "Conveyance Book A," 171).

Other valuable genealogical information may be contained in deed records. In 1854, for example, a non-

white mentioned that part of his land contained a family cemetery. He also indicated that his father, who was not identified as such, was buried in said cemetery. In another deed record, the possible origin of a free woman of color was documented when the record indicated that while a resident of Pensacola, Florida, she had purchased land in Alabama.

Two other important record groups are state legislative acts and petitions. Most state legislatures in the South ruled upon manumission attempts made by white or free Negro slave owners. Researchers should check house and senate journals for "unsuccessful attempts at manumission" (Gary B. Mills, *Tracing Free People of Color* . . . 1990, 269). The researcher may have to search these records page by page. In 1827, the Alabama legislature approved an act to emancipate Cyrus, slave of the free woman of color, China Evans, of Baldwin County (Acts Passed at the Ninth Annual Session of the General Assembly of the State of Alabama 1828, 116). In 1836, the North Carolina legislature emancipated "Henry Howard, Fanny Howard and John Howard, children and slaves of Miles Howard, of Halifax County" (Laws of the State of North Carolina . . . 1837, 327). Although some legislative acts required the freed person to leave the state, many continued to reside there in contravention of the law.

Thus, a variety of court records contain valuable genealogical information. Civil, criminal, probate, and deed records as well as legislative acts and petitions document the activities of nonwhites (and whites). African Americans seeking information concerning manumissions, land and slave sales, estate records, free papers, divorces, and patterns of migration are urged to examine these records. Although they have limitations, including the fact that many do not identify ethnicity, the records may serve as valuable primary or secondary sources, enabling researchers to flesh out the facts already obtained from other sources or provide clues as to how the investigation into the lives of their ancestors should proceed.

### Vital Records

Vital records, as discussed herein, refer to records of births, marriages, and deaths. Prior to statewide requirements for the filing of such records, local and family records such as church registers and Bibles help fill the void for researchers. Not until the early twentieth century were national requirements passed for the filing of such records. Some cities and states, particularly in the South and in New England, did maintain them prior to 1900, but not all were complete. Laws for maintaining vital records varied. And, for slaves, the laws were more loosely applied according to one author. For instance, slave marriages were seldom registered or legally recognized.

Vital records are maintained by city, county, or state government offices, such as health departments for birth and death certificates, and county courthouses or city halls for marriage records. Usually for a fee, clerks will check their files for a particular record over a specific time period, such as a five-year span. Some indexes and records have been published and may be available in public or genealogical libraries; many have been microfilmed and may be obtained from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) Family History Centers. Some newspapers also listed births, marriages, and deaths, but these records are selective at best.

Content and availability of birth records vary, depending upon the time period. For example:

In 1853, Virginia began to register births and deaths. Birth records contain the gender but not the names of the baby or the parents. The slave owner's name, however, was listed. For slave records, the name of the plantation may be listed as well as the area in which the child was born. These county registries have been microfilmed and are available at the LDS Family History Library.

Records from Fayette County, Pennsylvania, include a register of Negro births, 1788–1826. It shows the slave owner's name, birthdates, and names of the child and parents.

An act of the New York legislature providing for the gradual abolition of slavery stipulated that any child born of a slave after July 4, 1799, should be "deemed and adjudged to be born free" (Eisenberg 1980, 67–68). Records from the town of Bath, Steuben County, New York (located in the New York State Archives in Albany), indicate that the elder Presley Thornton's slave Lucinda gave birth to Mima, who was born March 15, 1806.

New Jersey has birth records which sometimes designate race, dating from June 1848 to 1878.

In Missouri, records created mainly during the 1880s and early 1890s may contain the name of the child and parents, race, date and place of birth, nationality, occupation of father, maiden name of mother, and ages and residence of parents. A standard certificate may contain the date and place of birth (county, city, name of hospital); child's name; mother's place of residence; whether mother was married; data on the parents (name, race, birthplace, age, occupation); and physician's name.

Data in marriage records also vary. The names of the bride and groom, dates of the license and marriage, whether the license was returned and signed by the person who performed the ceremony (a justice of the peace or clergy member), and location of the wedding may be cited. If two slaves who had resided as husband and wife before the Civil War were legally married after

1865 and if they had children before the legalization of their marriage, the document may contain information on those children. If the clergy member's name was provided but not the name of the church with which the cleric was affiliated, other sources, such as city directories, may provide this information. Church records can then be located to provide further details. Marriage records do not necessarily identify nonwhites as such, although some records were classified by race.

Indexes to marriage records, some of which have been published, are available. They may contain the names of the bride, groom, or both, and volume and page numbers of the marriage books wherein the record is located. Some indexes may contain separate sections for the races, and nonwhite entries may be located after the white ones (as was the case in antebellum St. Louis County, Missouri). Other indexes may signify nonwhite marriages by the letter *C*, to indicate that the marriage involved a "colored" couple. Still others did not identify individuals by race. Indexes before the Civil War may also contain references to slaves and free people of color.

The following examples obtained from city or county civil records illustrate the variety of data that exists. When Jane Deveraux married Arthur Donnelly in Hancock County, Georgia, in 1819 the record did not cite either party as nonwhite, although other records created throughout their lives refer to them as free people of color ("Marriages: February 1819," Ordinary's office). According to "Marriage Records," St. Louis County, Missouri, St. Louis City Hall, Joseph Labaddie, a free mulatto, and Mary Anne Price, whose ethnic background was not recorded, were married by a priest, as were two slaves at a different time (Volume 1, 202). Another record indicated that two "colored persons" were married by an assistant minister, but it did not mention whether they were slave or free. According to "Colored Marriages," Jefferson County Missouri, a microfilm located at the St. Louis County Public Library, Richard and Sarah E. Collier were married in Jefferson County, Missouri, in 1869 and the names of their six children were also recorded (p. 9). In the same county, John Posten married Josephine Becket, and the minister certified that Posten had an eleven year old daughter named Lucy (p. 2). Frank Marshall and Louisa Reno, both "colored" persons, were married in that same county at the residence of Archie Reno (p. 10). Similarly, in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, when Marie Eloise Jones married Auguste Delphine on February 8, 1876, the civil record of the marriage did not note whether both parties and all three witnesses were former slaves or free people of color ("Marriage Book 5," 388).

Death records, like marriage records, may contain a variety of information. Depending upon the year, they

may provide any or all of the following: dates of birth and death, age, sex, race, cause of death, place of birth, names and birthplaces of parents, places of death and burial, whether slave or free, occupation, marital status, residence, and name and address of undertaker. If death records are not available, coroners' or sextons' records may be of some use. As is true for other records, information in death records may not be accurate, and researchers are encouraged to compare and verify information in other sources.

Several examples illustrate the value of these records. Published records from Rhode Island contain references to slaves and free Negroes. In 1847, the St. Louis coroner reported that Sarah, a slave aged eight years and two months, "came to her death by violence inflicted on her person while in the employment of Edwin Tanner" (St. Louis County, Missouri, "Coroner's Record of Inquests, 1838-1848," volume 1, entry 84, Missouri Historical Society). Mary Walker, who was identified as a free woman of color, was forty years old when she died on August 18, 1864, in Mobile. The record indicated that she was born in Alabama, that the cause of death was consumption, that she was buried in the New Grave Yard (Mobile), and that her color was "dark" (Mobile, Alabama, "Death Certificates," reel 56, entry 834, Aug. 18, 1864).

The LDS Family History Centers have the United States Social Security Death Index in their CD-ROM collections (see "Other Media"). It contains information on people who died as early as 1937, but the emphasis is on deaths reported to the Social Security Administration since 1962. Researchers may find birth and death dates (month and year only for death dates through 1987; after that, the day of death is also listed), last place of residence, Social Security number and the state of issuance, state of residence at death, and where death benefit was sent. The index does not contain data about the person's family or birthplace. In addition, the researcher can contact the Social Security Administration directly.

Some areas may have laws that restrict access to vital records. In St. Louis, for example, the general public does not have access to the index of birth and death records; professional researchers may check the index to the latter, but not the former. Family historians, however, may obtain copies of records once they prove their relationship to the person whose records are being sought.

### **Military Records**

African Americans have served in U.S. military units continually since the colonial period, and numerous records document the contributions made by these troops. These resources are available at the National Archives, state archives, historical societies, and libraries. Many

have been filmed and are available through one of the commercial lending programs. The content of the records varies depending on during which time period the person served in the military.

Several sources dealing with the Revolutionary War contain information relevant to genealogists tracing African Americans. A review of Military Service Records (National Archives Trust Fund Board) lists several sets of records in the National Archives. One of them is the *General Index to Compiled Military Service Records of Revolutionary War Soldiers*. Each index card in this file contains a serviceman's name and unit and possibly his rank, profession, or office. Compiled service records are also available and have been microfilmed, as have the indexes. Other groups of records are the *Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files*, and *Selected Records From Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files*. Applications may list an individual's former rank, unit, age or birthdate, residence, birthplace, and names and ages of his wife and children. Applications from a widow who sought pension or land warrants may provide her age, maiden name, place of residence, date and place of her marriage, date and place of her husband's death, or a copy of a marriage record. Another useful source is the National Genealogical Society's *Index of Revolutionary War Pension Applications*. The listings provide access to the pension and bounty land application records. "A simple check of entries, however, tells one that many more servicemen recorded in this source were black men than are so designated" (Eisenberg 1986, 19). Some nonwhites who participated in the war are listed in Debra L. Newman's *List of Black Servicemen Compiled From the War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records*.

Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses also provide information on nonwhites who served during the Revolutionary War. Lists of former slaves who were taken by the British when they evacuated New York in 1783 were created so that the American government could pay reparations to former owners. These "inspection rolls" may show the slave's name, sex, age, and physical description; the former owner's name and residence; and additional remarks. The records are held at the National Archives on roll 7 of *Miscellaneous Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, [M332], and roll 66 of *Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774-1779*, [M247]. These records are available on microfilm through the National Archives or the American Genealogical Lending Library.

During the Civil War, African Americans served in the Union army, navy, and marines. They also contributed to the Confederate cause. African Americans served

in regiments of U.S. Colored Troops; and the *Index to Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with United States Colored Troops*, a group of records in the National Archives available on microfilm at various libraries, contains an alphabetical listing of their names. Index cards provide a soldier's name, rank, and the name of the unit in which he served. For various reasons, the names of volunteer Union soldiers may not appear in the index: the serviceman may have been in a state-level unit, served under a different name, or used a variation of his name; or his record may have been lost or destroyed (National Archives and Records Service, *Black Studies . . .*, 15).

After locating an ancestor in the index, the researcher may check the compiled military records at the National Archives. These papers provide the unit in which a soldier served, his physical description (age, height, complexion, color of eyes and hair), place of birth, occupation, enlistment data (date, place, term), and other remarks. For example, Murray Eging (Higgins or Eggins) was a twenty-three year old farmer in Company G of the 7th U.S. Colored Infantry, Maryland, with black complexion, black eyes, and curly hair, and was born in Calvert, Maryland. Among his papers were a deed of manumission and evidence of title that indicated how and when his last owner had acquired him (Civil War, Record Group 94).

Other Civil War materials for tracing nonwhites are housed at the National Archives. They include a group of records titled *Compiled Records Showing Service in Volunteer Union Organizations*, which provides historical data concerning volunteer organizations. There is also *Tabular Analysis of the Records of the U.S. Colored Troops and Their Predecessor Units in the National Archives of the United States* (National Archives and Records Service), Special List 33, which contains data on regimental records, correspondence, orders, descriptive books, and morning reports; and "Colored Troops Division Records," which include fifty-four volumes of lists of nonwhite volunteers who enlisted in Missouri in 1864. Indexes are available for the lists, showing each person's name, age, physical description, place of birth, occupation, and date of enlistment. Also, in some instances, masters' names for former slaves may be given. Some of these records have been microfilmed and are available at or through the National Archives (Record Group 94).

Valuable information on African Americans may also be found in Civil War pension files. An index, which has been microfilmed and made available at various libraries, contains references primarily to Civil War service. Index cards contain the veteran's name, rank, unit, and term of service, names of dependents, filing date and place (state), and application and certificate numbers.

Information in one such file contained a serviceman's death certificate (which listed a birth date); county of birth; dates of enlistment and discharge; name under which he enlisted; marriage data; and names and birthdates of children. Documents indicated that his first wife died, that he remarried, and that his widow applied for a pension. Her file also contains valuable genealogical information. Another file showed the maiden name of the pensioner's wife, date and place of his marriage, and the names and birthdates of his eleven children.

Four other Civil War collections at the National Archives deserve mention. They comprise part of the holdings of the Adjutant General's Office in Record Group Ninety-four. First, "Records of Slave Claims Commissions, 1864-1866," are claims registers of slave owners seeking reimbursement for slaves who served in the U.S. army in some capacity. Registers for Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Tennessee, and West Virginia are extant. Data include the date, owner's name, and the former slave's name and address. Proceedings of some commissions are also provided. Second, "Register of Claims of United States Colored Troops, 1864-1867," comprise three volumes and contain claims by slave owners from Kentucky, Maryland, and Tennessee. The registers include name and residence of claimant, name and date of enlistment of slave, organization of the individual, and amount of owner's claim. The files are arranged by state, and then alphabetically by owner's name. Third, "Registers of Officers of United States Colored Troops, 1863-1865," comprise six volumes and indicate the officer's name, rank, birthplace, place of appointment, and remarks. This collection is "arranged by arm of service, thereunder by regiment, and thereunder by officers' name entered according to rank" (Pendell and Bethel 1949, 71-72). Fourth, "Descriptive Lists of Colored Volunteers, 1864," consisting of fifty-four volumes, record nonwhite volunteers from Missouri. They list a volunteer's name, age, eye and hair color, complexion, height, birthplace, occupation, date of enlistment, and (if former slave) the owner's name. The volumes are indexed and arranged chronologically.

Similar records that detail the work of nonwhites during the war are located in at least one other repository. After the Union army took control of Nashville in 1862, fugitive slaves sought protection and basic necessities. The Army impressed them for service on the railroad. Impressment rolls, which offer the slave's name, age, and height, and the slave owner's name and residence, are located in the Tennessee State Library and Archives. Nearly 90 percent of the slave surnames were the same as their owners, suggesting, perhaps, that military personnel may have chosen the surnames.

If an ancestor appears in Union army records, the researcher should not assume that he was a free Negro before the Civil War. A number of slaves joined the U.S. army. "Whenever a black citizen disappears from the records of an area in which he previously appeared, the possibility that he was a slave prior to that time should be considered" (Eakle and Cerny 1984, 581).

Slaves and free Negroes also served in the Confederate military. Records of their involvement are located in the War Department Collection of Confederate Records, Record Group 109, at the National Archives: "Record of Details [unit assignments] of Free Negroes, Camp of Instruction at Richmond, 1864," records the date of detail, name of Negro, to whom detailed, date detail expired, and remarks. Entries are arranged chronologically. The "Register of Free Negroes Enrolled and Assigned, Virginia, 1864-1865," includes the Negro's name; age; color of eyes, hair, and complexion; height; birthplace; occupation; date and place of enlistment; by whom enlisted; assignment and date of assignment; and remarks. Entries are arranged alphabetically by name. The "Register of Slaves Impressed, 1864-1865," cites the slave's name, date of impressment, description, and value, and owner's name. References are listed by county, evidently only those in Mississippi, and an index appears in the beginning of the volume.

The names of slaves also appear in Confederate payroll records. "Slave Payrolls, 1861-1865," contain information about slaves who worked on military defenses and include length and place of service, slave owner's name, and slave's name and occupation. "Index to Slave and Other Payrolls, 1861-1865," lists the names of the owner and the individual who signed the payrolls.

Other records at the National Archives generated in the aftermath of the Civil War include those of various claims commissions. The French and American Claims Commission and the Mixed Commission of British and American Claims were created to help French and British citizens in the United States regain property lost at the hands of the Union army. The government handled similar claims through the Southern Claims Commission from residents of the former Confederate states who professed to have been loyal to the Union. The files contain testimony from whites and nonwhites, including slaves and free people of color. "Indeed, the claimants before the Southern commission included not only free Negroes but also the quasi-free and slaves whose masters allowed them to accumulate property" (Gary B. Mills, *Tracing Free People of Color* . . . 1990, 274).

One example from the Southern commission illustrates the type of information the researcher may find in the files. Details in one claim indicated that one man was born a slave, worked as a barber, and borrowed \$2,500 to



purchase his freedom. Because he married a slave who was not for sale, he bought another slave woman, lived with her during the Civil War, and later legally married her. The file contains other information about the man, his family, and the witnesses who testified on behalf of his family.

Claimants before these commissions have been indexed, but only two of the indexes, the Southern and British, have been published (Donna Rachel Mills' *Civil War Claims . . .*; Gary B. Mills' *Southern Loyalists in the Civil War*). An unpublished index to the French commission (Record Group 76) is available at the National Archives. Even if your ancestor did not file a claim, it is possible that he or she testified on behalf of a relative or friend. So searching for the names of any of his or her acquaintances in the indexes may lead to information on your ancestor.

After 1865, African Americans served in the regular army. Several units were organized, and published works detail their involvement. Among these are William H. Leckie's *The Buffalo Soldiers*, Arlen L. Fowler's *The Black Infantry in the West*, and Marvin Fletcher's *The Black Soldier and Officer in the United States Army*. Frank N. Shubert's *On the Trail of the Buffalo Soldier* contains biographical data on thousands of nonwhites, including dates and places of birth and military service.

World War I Selective Service records are available at the National Archives, Southeast Region, in Atlanta. This facility has more than twenty-four million World War I registration cards filed by state and draft boards. To access a particular file, one needs the full name and city and/or county at time of registration. A home street address or other specific location (such as ward) is required for certain cities, such as Chicago or Los Angeles; if necessary, this information can often be gleaned from city directories. The records contain the serviceman's date and place of birth, age, race, and father's birthplace.

Other World War I records may be located in various repositories, including state archives or historical societies. Examples include:

The Missouri State Archives, which has some certificate-of-war service documents that contain the serviceman's name, residence, place and date of induction, place of birth, age or date of birth, organization in which he served (with dates of assignments), and other related information.

The Missouri Historical Society, which has some records from the State of Missouri Adjutant General's Office that contain genealogical information. The records, however, are not complete.

Selective Service System records at the National Archives, Central Plains Region, in Kansas City, Missouri,

which contain lists of men ordered to report to local boards for induction and docket books of the local boards in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. Some of the records may show the county of residence, address, marital status, number of dependents, citizenship, and remarks pertaining to discharge or alien status.

Other twentieth century military records may be located at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis. For example, certain records for army, air force, navy, and coast guard officers and enlisted personnel can be found here. A fire in 1973 destroyed many records, and access may be limited. Records such as the "Separation and Qualification Record" and the "Enlisted Record and Report of Separation Honorable Discharge" may provide Social Security number; permanent mailing address; dates of entry into active service, separation, and birth; military and civilian occupational history; military and civilian education; physical description; decorations and citations; place of separation; race; and marital and citizenship status.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Centers have available on CD-ROM two military indexes that show American military personnel who died in Korea or Vietnam (Southeast Asia) from 1950 to 1975. The indexes may contain dates of birth and death, place of enlistment, country of death, and race. They do not contain information about the person's family or birthplace.

### **Cemetery Records and Tombstone Inscriptions**

The information offered by cemetery records and tombstone inscriptions varies, and many records have been published. Whenever possible, however, the researcher is encouraged to examine the original registers or visit the cemetery to verify the information provided in these sources. In addition, locating the correct section and lot in the cemetery (a task that may present some difficulties, even in large cemeteries where maps are available) may introduce the researcher to other ancestors. However, if the stone is no longer readable, or if it has been destroyed, published accounts can help fill the void. Published cemetery and tombstone inscriptions may be found in libraries, state archives, and historical societies. Cemeteries or churches may retain their own records. If a cemetery or church no longer exists or is small, records may be housed at libraries, genealogical or historical societies, at a particular denomination's archives, etc. These sources of information are particularly important for time periods preceding the national requirement of filing death records. In St. Louis, for example, the books of several smaller Catholic cemeteries have been consolidated and are held in two different places.

These resources can offer a variety of data: place of birth, birth and death dates, age, whether free or slave, race, spouse's name, marital status, cause of death, parents' names, or occupation. In addition, legal descriptions (section, township, range) providing the location of a rural cemetery may be included. If the cemetery is no longer in operation or cannot be readily found, cemetery records may still be extant which describe the location where it once stood.

These records may be organized in several ways. Published accounts may be arranged chronologically and/or alphabetically. Others may list names alphabetically and then by section/lot numbers. For example, if a name is located in an alphabetical list, and section/lot reports are available, the researcher should check those reports for further details. The section/lot accounts indicate who else was buried in the same lot with the ancestor. Thus, additional family members may be located. Other documents may be arranged by section and lot only. In such instances, one should check an index to locate all individuals with the same surname as the one being researched.

As with any other source, cemetery and tombstone materials have their shortcomings. Race may not be noted. Information on tombstones may not be accurate, so other sources should be checked to verify the data. The introduction to one published account cautions its users that "names were copied as found. Many spellings of names in current usage have evolved over the years from different spellings in one or more steps. The index should be checked for these" (Peavy 1991). (Before using any published source, researchers are urged to read the introduction where the author may describe limitations to the work, criteria for inclusion, location of the records, or problems with the original records such as illegibility.)

Examples of the types of data (and problems associated with cemetery records and inscriptions) demonstrate their value:

Published cemetery records for Amite County, Mississippi, provide the location (legal description) of one rural cemetery, list the names alphabetically, and copy dates as they appear on the stone. For example, records of the nonwhite Big Antioch cemetery in Amite County indicate that four individuals with the surname Butler were buried there between 1957 and 1975. Names were listed alphabetically and do not appear in any section/lot format. Thus, researchers would not know the names of other individuals who were buried in the same area as their ancestors (Peavy 1991, 2).

In St. Louis, sexton's records of the period 1862–1863 were used to reconstruct the names of burials at the City Cemetery. These documents distinguished between slave and free nonwhites. For example, the free man of

color, Israel Dyson, born in North Carolina, was fifty-five years old when he died in May 1863. John Alfred, a slave, died in the fall of 1862; his age was not listed (St. Louis Genealogical Society 1987, 159).

Registers for Oakland Cemetery in St. Paul, Minnesota, show names, burial dates, location in the cemetery, place of birth, and date and cause of death. For instance, the records indicate that Amanda Wilkinson was a free woman, that she was "colored," that she was born in Missouri, that she was eighteen when she died on March 29, 1868, and that the cause of death was consumption. Minerva Lewis, "formerly a slave," was from Alabama and died in 1868 (Bruckner, 52–53).

In South Carolina, the inscription on the stone of William Ellison, a prominent free man of color who was buried in the family cemetery, included the phrase "In God we trust" (Johnson and Roark 1984, 296).

In Mobile, the tombstone inscription for Constance Hugon indicated that she was born in New Orleans and died on October 16, 1845. Her race was not identified, but other sources indicated that she was a free woman of color. Church records, however, list a different date of death (Nelson 1963, 18; Church of Mobile, Alabama, "Burials for Colored People, 1828–1877," entry 207, Mobile Church Archives, The Catholic Center).

### Newspaper Ads/Columns

Newspapers are a useful source for genealogical research. Births, marriages, deaths, legal notices (probate court proceedings, civil or criminal court cases, etc.), runaway slave notices, advertisements for businesses or lost relatives, tax lists, city or state laws, manumissions, and registrations of free people of color are some examples of the type of information that has appeared in newspapers. If public records have been destroyed or lost, newspapers may provide the only means available to retrieve this information. Also, an excellent way to learn about affairs in the community where one's ancestors resided, as well as national events of the time, is to read newspapers from the period and area in which one's ancestor lived.

Finding newspapers of past centuries may be a difficult task. However, directories, guides, or county histories may indicate where they are housed. The publication *Newspapers in Microform* (Library of Congress) contains names of newspapers arranged by state and thereunder by town or city, their location, and dates available. Another source is *The Guide to Microforms in Print*. Once pertinent papers are identified it may be possible to order microfilmed copies through the interlibrary loan department of a public or university library. *American Newspapers, 1821–1936* (Winifred Gregory), listing titles and repositories of extant papers.