

# Genealogy Research in a Time of COVID

Wednesday, April 21st at 11:00am.

## Introduction:

*Right now, travelling to archives, libraries, and genealogical societies is extremely challenging so it is important for your users to get the most out of the wealth of information posted on the web, from both their library and other free databases. Discover the lesser-known resources available to help your users find what they are looking for without leaving home, including elusive records for Black and Native American genealogy. Finally, the importance of Census records in genealogy and the lasting impact of the pandemic and politics on what our descendants may or may not find in the 2020 census.*

## Outcomes:

1. Participants will gain tools for helping library users research their genealogy without ever leaving home.
2. Participants will discover resources for hard-to-find information on African American & Native American records.
3. Participants will consider potential impact on the 2020 federal census from the pandemic and the political climate of these times.

## African American

### *Additional Resources:*

**Vital Records** - were not kept consistently until the late 1800s to early 1900s; each state had different rules for what was kept so you may have to look in several places. Vital records pertaining to blacks may be separate or may be in with everyone else's. Marriage and birth records may have been filed at the time of the event or much later. Before Emancipation, free blacks are listed in any existing vital records. Births of slaves were sometimes recorded at the county courthouse as part of records pertaining to property or in the slaveholder's personal papers. Slave marriages were illegal, so were not recorded, but family relationships may show up in other records, such as diaries, letters, legal transactions.

Slave Schedules - Enslaved ancestors were not enumerated alongside their masters but slaves were sometimes mentioned in separate tallies. The following is an excerpt from an article on Special US Censuses, How to Research Slave Schedules, written by genealogy expert Sunny Jane Morton:

"In 1850 and 1860, Southern states and Washington, D.C., submitted schedules of slaves; New Jersey did in 1850 as well. These schedules list slaveholders and information about each enslaved person. Though slaves are not named, they may be able to help you

identify a family's slaveholder. Record content - Slaveholders are listed in the same order as on the population schedule. While population schedules do not indicate who owns slaves, the 1860 census lists a person's personal property value, which included slaves. A white person with a relatively high personal property value in 1860 may appear as a slaveholder in the slave schedule. The slave schedule may indicate whether multiple slaveholders or a trust was involved in "ownership." Unfortunately, nearly all the enslaved are described only by age, gender, and color (black or "mulatto") under the slaveholder's name. Only rarely will you find more data about the enslaved, such as a name, occupation or physical or mental disability. Without additional research, it is usually impossible to know whether a slave listed is really your ancestor. Under each slaveholder's name also appears a tally for the preceding year of manumitted (freed) slaves and fugitive slaves not yet recaptured. Again, you will not know for sure if these figures include your enslaved ancestor without more research."

**Ancestry.com, HeritageQuest, and Family Search** all have the 1850 and 1860 slave schedules. Microfilmed slave schedules are at NARA, and the Family History Library has books with slave schedules and/or indexes from various states. Check the FamilySearch Catalog or search the digital books collection for more information.

**Explore historical and genealogical societies** in the area where your ancestor lived. These organizations may have projects that compile this sort of data.

**African-American Newspapers** - Tim Pinnick, author of *Finding and Using African American Newspapers* (Gregath), says, "In my belief, African-American newspapers hold the key to genealogical research success. They represent one of the few sources where the daily activities of black communities are documented. These communities are full of former slaves, US Colored Troops soldiers and scores of ordinary folks who did extraordinary things. But they got captured in the black newspapers, not the mainstream newspapers." Black newspapers published details about births, deaths, marriages, military service, church affiliation, employment, migration and former slavery status. Also included were photos, social column comments and African American viewpoints that would not have been represented in the mainstream press. Look for black ancestors in the Chicago Defender (indexed at ProQuest Historical Newspapers, a service available at many libraries), a national newspaper with columnists and reports from all over the United States, along with local gossip.

**Freedom's Journal** was the first African-American owned and operated newspaper published in the United States. Founded by Rev. John Wilk and other free black men in New York City, it was published weekly starting with the 16 March 1827 issue until March 1829.

**Library of Congress' Chronicling America** website is a good source for historical newspapers.

**History books and compiled biographies** - History books and compiled biographies are top-notch resources. Search for local histories through the Library of Congress' online

catalog (follow the search format Cook co for a county and Chicago (Ill.) for a city). Look on **WorldCat** for books available through interlibrary loan. You can find many out-of-print editions at **Google Books, Internet Archive and FamilySearch.org** (click on Books).

**1870** is an important date for African American research because the majority of African Americans living in the United States prior to the Civil War were enslaved. The 1870 federal census is the first one to list all Black people by name. To get your African American ancestors back to that date you should research your ancestors in the standard genealogical records - records such as cemeteries, wills, census, vital records, social security records, school records, tax records, military records, voter records, newspapers, etc. There are also a number of post-Civil War records that specifically document thousands of African Americans, including the Freedman's Bureau Records and the records of the Southern Claim Commission.

According to historian Ira Berlin in his book, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (initially published in 1974, and reissued by the New Press in 2007, at least one out of every 10 Black people (more than 200,000 in the North and another 200,000 in the South) were free when the Civil War broke out in 1861. If you are not sure whether your ancestors were enslaved prior to the Civil War, then you may want to start with the U.S. Free Population Schedules of the 1860 census.

Most of Americans of African ancestry in the United States are descendants of the 400,000 enslaved Black people forcibly brought to the New World prior to 1860. Most of them came from a small section (approximately 300 miles long) of the Atlantic coast between the Congo and Gambia rivers in East Africa. Much of African culture is based on oral tradition, but records such as sales of enslaved people and advertisements for those sales may give a clue toward the origins of this institution in Africa.

**Read,**

**The African-American Migration Story, The African Americans, Many Rivers to Cross** with Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

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## **Native American/American Indian and Alaska Native Genealogy**

Search **Google** by tribal affiliation **for specific websites**. As of 2016, according to the National Congress of American Indians, there are 566 Federally recognized tribes currently in the United States.

**Federal Population Censuses:** *Few American Indians are identified prior to 1900.*

- **1790–1840:** American Indians are not identified by race.
- **1850:** People are identified as white, black, or mulatto.  
**1860:** This Census includes Indian Territory (at the end of the Arkansas schedules), but no American Indians are identified.
- **1870-1880:** American Indians in the general population are identified by "I" or "In." Some reservations and Indian agencies are identified, but the schedules mostly list white or non-Indian residents
- **1900-1910:** American Indians on reservations and in the general population are identified. The special Indian schedule contained additional questions to the general schedule.
- **1920:** American Indians are identified, but there are no special Indian schedules.
- **1930:** American Indians are identified. The degree of Indian blood and tribe are noted. There are no special Indian schedules.
- **1940:** American Indians are identified. No mention of blood or tribe.

📖 There are several articles from *Family Tree Magazine* that have been gathered into one ebook, **Trace Your Native American Ancestry**. It contains four guides:

**Guide #1:** Native Sons and Daughters

This handy guide will show you key resources for discovering your ancestor's tribal ties.

**Guide #2:** Indian Territory

Explore the truths and myths of Native American heritage and get great tips and strategies for tracking down your American Indian ancestor's records.

**Guide #3:** Hawk Eyes

This article contains three tips for busting that Native American brick wall.

**Guide #4:** First Families

This article offers even more resources and strategies for finding your family history among America's first residents.

📖 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' Family History Library (FHL) catalog at **familysearch.org** lists microfilm which you can search at Family History Centers.

- ❓ **Newspapers:** American Indians had special-interest newspapers, for example, missionaries in Dakota Territory published *Iapi Oaye* (which meant “Word Carrier”) from 1871 to 1939. **Library of Congress, loc.gov**, has digitized American Indian newspapers to look at online under *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*
  
- ❓ **Vital Records:** Many American Indian births, deaths and marriages were not documented at vital-records offices until the 20th century. Most Bureau of Indian Affairs’ vital record keeping on reservations began in the late 19th century. The **National Archives (NARA)** has many records, most are not digitized on the website, but you can find clues to your heritage. **Ancestry.com** (\$) has many, as does **Familysearch.org** (free).
  
- ❓ Before subscribing to sites that claim to have many Native American records, such as **Genealogy Bank**, try a free trial to see if there are enough to make it worth subscribing; exhaust all the free resources you can first.
  
- ❓ **Allen County Public Library**, Fort Wayne, Indiana Special collections include a Native American Gateway; you can find their holdings on **HeritageQuest** and order photocopies if available.
  
- ❓ **Rootsweb**, pretty much the first online genealogy site, has free mailing listservs you can search or subscribe to – a treasure trove for connecting to others who are searching for the same information you are and are willing to share their findings.