

# Finding Slave Records

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## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

*Government & Heritage  
Library  
State Library of  
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**Phone:**  
919-814-6790

**Web Page:**  
[http://  
statelibrary.ncdcr.gov/ghl/  
resources/genealogy.html](http://statelibrary.ncdcr.gov/ghl/resources/genealogy.html)

## HOURS

**Monday-Friday**

**9:00-5:00**

**Saturdays**

**9:00-2:00**

*Closed*

*Sundays*

*State Holidays/Holiday*

*Weekends*

## **BACKGROUND**

Efforts to find records of ancestors believed to have been enslaved require thorough preparation before beginning research prior to 1865. The 1870 federal population census schedules, the first on which the former slave is listed by name, must be studied carefully for other individuals of that surname who may be possible family members and potential former owners. Even if one knows that an ancestor was born during slavery, he must study all subsequent census schedules carefully and systematically from the latest available (currently 1940) backwards.

Births, deaths, and marriages should be searched for all known and suspected family members. Co-habitation records not only indicate the number of years a couple have lived together as man and wife but also confirm the family tradition that the ancestor "was born in slavery." The family researcher should look for other county records such as deeds, estates, and tax lists; cemetery records; Bible records; and church records. Freedmen's Bureau, Freedman's Savings and Trust Company records, and WPA slave narratives may also prove useful.

## **CENSUS RECORDS**

Slaves were enumerated on all federal census records, 1790—1860, but not by name. From the 1870 census, the researcher should proceed backwards to the 1860 and 1850 separate slave schedules which list, under the name of the owner, each slave by sex, specific

age, and color only; no slave names are given. The researcher will be looking for a male or female, and his family if appropriate, who is 10 and 20 years younger than the individual(s) he identified on the 1870 census schedule. 1790, 1800, and 1810 census schedules indicate only the total number of slaves; while 1820, 1830, and 1840 schedules list them by sex and age range. This data presents possible former slave owners, for it is the records of the slave owners that descendants of enslaved ancestors must search and analyze for information about slaves before 1865. The researcher will need to learn as much as he can about the owner and his family: his wife and in-laws, his children and whom each married, even the church he attended. One could acquire slaves through purchase, inheritance, marriage, and natural increase (children, grandchildren, etc., of slaves acquired earlier).

## **PUBLIC RECORDS**

Records of ownership can be found in public records. Public records are those created by the owner as required by local, state, and national governments. Local records, i.e., the county records in N.C., are the most fruitful for genealogists. These are the records of marriages of owners, deeds of gift or deeds of trust of slaves, purchase or sale of slaves, transfers of land among family members, wills and/or settlements and divisions of real and personal property at the death of a person, lists of taxable property, and records of actions in the local

The miscellaneous records of some N.C. counties include some slave records. William L. Byrd III and John H. Smith have transcribed these records for a number of counties in the series *North Carolina Slaves and Free Persons of Color*, published by Heritage Books. Most of N.C.'s county records are housed in the State Archives of North Carolina. *Guide to County Records in the North Carolina State Archives* (12th rev. ed., Office of Archives and History, 2009) lists for each county those records, original and microfilmed, which are available in the Archives search room. An earlier edition of this guide is downloadable at [http://archivesncdcr.gov/FindingAids/co\\_guide.pdf](http://archivesncdcr.gov/FindingAids/co_guide.pdf) *Preliminary Guide to Records Re-*

*lating to African Americans in the North Carolina State Archives* (Archives Information Circular No. 17) is available as a PDF file on the Archives website at <http://archives.ncdcr.gov/FindingAids/Circulars/AIC17.pdf>

### PRIVATE RECORDS

These records are those kept by the owner or owners (family Bibles recording births, deaths, business ledgers, contracts, leases, and other records relating to the health and work of their slaves). Since these are personal records kept by the owner for his own use they may be difficult to find. Those that have survived may still be in the possession of the family, in a manuscript collection, or in

an archives. *Guide to Private Manuscript Collections in the North Carolina State Archives*, edited by Barbara T. Carin, Ellen Z. McGrew, and Charles E. Morris (3rd ed. Raleigh North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1994) is a guide to collections of private papers deposited there. The Southern Historical Collection at UNC-Chapel Hill and Perkins Library at Duke University also have outstanding manuscript collections. Records of white churches, generally held in their respective church repositories, are another category of private record which should be sought, as slaves were often members of the local white churches or were permitted to worship at their owner's churches.

### FURTHER READING

- Burroughs, Tony. *Black Roots, a Beginner's Guide to Tracing African American Family Tree*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001.
- Catterall, Helen Tunnicliff. *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro*. 5 volumes. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie institution of Washington, 1926-37.
- Cooper, Jean L. *A Genealogical Index to the Guides of the Microfilm Edition of Records of Ante-bellum Southern Plantations from the Revolution through the Civil War*. Bloomington, Ind.: 1st Books, 2003.
- Federal Writers' Project [WPA]. *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States, from Interviews with Former Slaves*. 17 Volumes. Reprint, St. Clair Shores, Mich.: Scholarly Press, 1976. [Volumes 13 and 14 are North Carolina.]
- Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938*. Online (American Memory) <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html> Manuscript Div. and Print and Photographs Div. Library of Congress.

### ARTICLES

- Brasfield, Curtis G. "Tracing Slave Ancestors: Batchelor, Bradley, Branch, and Wright of Desha County Arkansas." *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 93 (March 2004): 6-30.
- Jupiter, De. E. "From Agustina to Ester: Analyzing a Slave Household for Child-Parent Relationships." *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 85 (December 1997): 245-275.
- Lennon, Rachal Mills, and Elizabeth Shown Mills. "Mother Thy Name is Mystery! Finding the Slave Who Bore Philomene Daurat." *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* (September 2000): 201-224
- McBride, Ransom. "Searching for the Past of the North Carolina Black Family in Local, Regional, and Federal Record Resources." *North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal* 9 (May 1983): 66-67.