

Records for African American Research

| Record Type | Description | Information in Record |
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| Census | <p>Federal: Taken every ten years beginning in 1790. Until 1850, the census only listed the head of household and tabulated the ages of household members by age categories. From 1850 onward, the census became a much more useful source of genealogical information.</p> <p>State: Some states conducted their own censuses in between federal census years.</p> | Name, age, race, and gender of each family member. Occupation, birthplace, and other information included depending on the year. |
| Slave Schedules | Separate tally of enslaved people for the 1850 and 1860 censuses. They are organized by enslaver; enslaved individuals are not specifically named. | Provides the age and gender of enslaved people. |
| Vital Records | This includes the recording of births, marriages, and deaths by governmental entities such as towns or states. Government record-keeping of vital events became universal in the 20 th century. | Name, date, place and sometimes parent's names, including mother's maiden name. |
| Church Records | Records kept by religious institutions of parishioners, including marriage certificates, baptisms, confirmations, burials, birth records, and other materials. These are important substitutes for vital records. | Name, date, place and sometimes parent's names, including mother's maiden name, and witnesses. If pre-emancipation, the names of enslavers may be included as well. |
| Bible Records | Records kept by families. These serve as vital record substitutes. | Name and date and sometimes place. |

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| Cemeteries | Tombstones vary in the amount of information captured but may be used as substitutes for vital records. Many historically Black cemeteries have organizations or projects that help to maintain them and catalog information. | Name, date of birth, date of death. Sometimes the maiden name and the place of birth are included. |
| Probate | Records generated by the process of settling an estate after death. If a person made a will, they are said to have died “testate;” without a will, “intestate.” | Wills mention relationships: husband, wife, children. Enslaved people may also be named, as they were considered property. |
| Land and Property | Records generated by the purchase and sale of property, such as warrants, deeds and mortgages. Grantor refers to individual(s) selling property, and grantee refers to individual(s) purchasing. | Names of grantor/grantee, wife, family members, neighbors, and enslaved people. |
| Manumission Documents | Legal documents that granted emancipation. Can be found in probate, land or property, or court files. | Name of enslaved person and enslaver, and location. |
| City Directories | Listing of residents of a town or city; good census substitute for between census years. Some directories had an entirely different section for people of color; others used abbreviations (“C” or “Col.”). | Name, spouse (varies by community), occupation, location of business and home address. |
| Newspapers | Birth, marriage, and death notices are the principle uses of newspapers by genealogists although some ancestors generate news articles. Black newspapers can provide context to life as an African American across time. Pre-Emancipation, enslavers placed ads for sales or runaways. | General: Names, dates of events, location, family members. Sales or runaway ads for enslaved: Enslaved individual’s name, physical description, age, skills, and enslaver’s name. |
| Military | Records generated for an individual’s involvement in the armed forces, including draft registration cards, | Draft: Name, age, place of birth, occupation, residence, next of kin. |

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| | service records, pension records, and bounty land records. | Service: Name, age, dates of service. Pension: Name, date of birth, death, family members. |
| Taxation | Records generated to track receipt of taxes paid to the government. These can serve as census substitutes. | Enslaver's name and property. Names of enslaved individuals are rare but may exist in some counties. |
| Voter Registrations | Records relating to registered voters in an area (county or state). In some cases, these can be the earliest record for newly freed African American men. | Name, place of residency, place of nativity. |
| Freedmen's Bureau Records | Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (or Freedmen's Bureau), which oversaw providing relief and education to refugees and newly emancipated individuals after the Civil War. They include a wide range of records, including marriage registers, local census lists, work contracts, medical records, bank records, and much more. | Names of newly emancipated individuals, family members, ages, names of enslavers, places of residence, occupations. |