

# Piecing Together the Story: Analyzing Records and Drawing Conclusions

## *Class 5: Forgotten and Underrepresented Voices in Records*

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### **The Challenge**

- Many genealogical records can be found for individuals who owned property, were allowed to vote, and left wills after their death
- This leaves other groups more underrepresented and sometimes forgotten including the following:
  - Women
  - Enslaved persons
  - The impoverished
  - Native Americans

### **Women**

- First person-records like diaries, letters, family histories
- Second-hand records like manuscript collections and business records
- Follow men in their life and use the FAN Club principle
  - F = Family
  - A = Associates
  - N = Neighbors
- Records like probate records, deeds, and court records may give more information about women in relation to their husbands or fathers or other male relatives.
- Guardianship
  - Someone was appointed to oversee a minor child's inheritance from an estate – this was not the same as parental custody of a child.
  - Mothers were usually appointed as guardians of minor children when their husband died but it was not guaranteed they would oversee their children's inheritance – it may go to a family friend or business partner of her husband.
  - Fathers were usually appointed guardians if the children inherited from their deceased wife's family.

- Femme Sole - A single woman who functioned on a legal par with men in property rights
  - Separate Estate—by inheritance, dower, marriage contract

## Enslaved Persons

- Slavery in North America goes back to the 1500s with the Spanish colonies enslaving indigenous persons and Africans.
- 1870 Brick Wall
  - A commonly repeated myth in genealogy is that you can't go beyond the 1870 federal census for African American research, the first census which lists the names of all free persons post-Emancipation (1865).
  - Identifying the enslaver is crucial to finding the details of your enslaved person as enslaver's records often record the first name and sometimes age and other genealogical details about their family in records like probate, deeds (bills of sale), court records, church records, and more.
- Slave Schedules
  - The 1850 and 1860 U.S. Census had separate schedules to enumerate the number of enslaved persons per owner.
  - Details include sex, race, and age.
  - These records do not list the names of the enslaved persons.
    - 1850 Slave Schedule - <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/collection/1420440>
    - 1860 Slave Schedule - <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/collection/3161105>
- Compiled Slave Births
  - Virginia Slave Births Index, 1853-1866 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/3326815>
  - Additional Vital Records available on FamilySearch Wiki:
  - Slave Birth Records - [https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United States, Slave Birth Records %E2%80%93 FamilySearch Historical Records](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States,_Slave_Birth_Records_%E2%80%93_FamilySearch_Historical_Records)
- Freedman's Bureau Records
  - The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (also known as Freedmen's Bureau) was created by Congress in 1865.
  - They established hospitals and schools, supervised the creation of labor contracts, assisted with locating lost family members, providing clothing, and other assistance.

- They ceased operations in Virginia on January 1, 1869, and the Freedmen's Bureau was abolished by law on June 10, 1872.
- Freedmen's Bureau Records 1865-1872 - <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/collection/2721171>
- Bills of Sale
  - A bill of sale is when a buyer and seller agree on the purchase of goods in exchange for cash or trade. Enslaved persons may be included in these sales.
  - Search the grantor indexes in the county land deeds for bills of sale by the enslaver's family. Many of the land deeds can be found on FamilySearch.org.
- Cohabitation Registers
  - A list of married couples or children for individuals who gained freedom after the Civil War. Since marriage was not legal for enslaved individuals, these registers legalized marriages that occurred prior to emancipation.
  - The registers include names of the enslavers, where they resided, and where they were born.
  - Cohabitation Records (FamilySearch Wiki) - [https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Cohabitation\\_Records](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Cohabitation_Records)
- Runaway Ads
  - Advertisements placed in local and regional newspapers describing the runaway enslaved person with details to help others identify them and bring them back to their owner.
  - Ads include name of enslaved person, physical description, possible route they were taking, name of enslaver, where the enslaved person escaped from, etc.
  - Freedom on the Move - <https://freedomonthemove.org>
  - Runaway Project - <https://runawayproject.info/>
- Manumission Records
  - Manumission records released an enslaved person from servitude
  - These may be recorded in land deeds, probate records, and court records
  - State archives, universities, and libraries hold many of these records in their digital collections
  - Examples:
    - Manumitted: The People Enslaved by Quakers - <https://manumissions.haverford.edu/about>
    - Library of Virginia Deeds of Emancipation and Manumission, Virginia Open Data Portal - <https://data.virginia.gov/dataset/deeds-of-emancipation-and-manumission>
- State-Level Emancipation Acts

- When northern states made slavery illegal, they often created documents to ensure the law was followed.
- Pennsylvania passed “An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery” in 1780 which specified that those born into slavery would be freed once they reached the age of 21 years old. Enslaved persons were registered and those not recorded were to be freed. FamilySearch has records at the county level on microfilm.
  - Ex. Bedford County – Slave Records, 1780-1834 - <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/catalog/479709>
- The District of Columbia passed the Emancipation Act of 1862 which gave monetary compensation to ex-slave holders.
  - Details include Claimant, names of those in their service freed under the law, and amount of compensation awarded.
  - Former slaves, including where they were born and occupation are listed.
  - Records of the petitions for compensation as part of this law have been compiled into a published volume, *Compensated Emancipation in the District of Columbia: Petitions under the Act of April 16, 1862*
- WPA’s Slave Narrative Collection
  - During the Great Depression one of the projects set up during the New Deal was the Federal Writers' Project
  - One of their projects was interviewing formerly enslaved persons between 1936 and 1938
  - Collection was done from the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia
  - Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936 to 1938 - <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection>
    - Also available on Ancestry.com (\$) at <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1944/>
- Massachusetts Vital Records (1620-1850)
  - The names of enslaved persons were often recorded at the back of a town's vital record books
  - They recorded baptisms, marriages, and deaths of enslaved and free Negroes and indigenous persons

- Available at AmericanAncestors.org (FREE) at <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/190/massachusetts-vital-records-1620-1850>
- Mission of the 10 Million Names Project
  - We seek to recover the names and restore information to families of the estimated 10 million men, women, and children of African descent who were enslaved in America before 1865 through a collaborative network of expert genealogists, cultural organizations, and community-based family historians.
  - AmericanAncestors.org Databases: Use keyword “10MillionNames” - <https://www.americanancestors.org/browse-database?databasename=10MillionNames&size=50&page=1>
  - Share Family History Documents <https://nehgsweb.atlassian.net/servicedesk/customer/portal/5>
  - Volunteer Coordinator = Danielle Rose
    - Email: [10MN@americanancestors.org](mailto:10MN@americanancestors.org) to get involved with volunteering

## The Impoverished

- It's a commonly repeated myth that you can't find records on the poor as they didn't leave any financial assets behind
- While they may not appear in traditional records such as land deeds and probate records, they do create a paper trail as they were supported by their local governments and institutions
- Colonial Poor
  - Colonial Poor Laws mirrored British law with a strong Puritan influence to help the poor but not the “idle poor” (vagabonds, beggars, and drunkards), and not those outside their community
  - The colonial poor were often children, orphaned or in pauper families, sick individuals, the aged, blind or had a crippling injury. There was also the transient poor such as those with seasonal employment, or day laborers, immigrants, or widows. The mentally ill were frequently poor.
  - Colonies quickly established principles for addressing poverty in their communities. First a person’s family was required to care for an individual, parents, grandparents, children. An applicant for poor relief needed to be an established member of the community. Persons capable of work were required to do so. And children could be apprenticed in lieu of the town covering their expenses.

- Towns appointed Overseers of the Poor to levy taxes to raise funds and identify those who needed assistance. They also could “warn out” people who were not wanted in the town.
  - Boston Overseers of the Poor Records (1733-1925) at Massachusetts Historical Society - <https://www.masshist.org/collection-guides/view/fa0144>. Microfilm also held at American Ancestors (1733-1925) - <https://library.nehgs.org/record=b1058713>.
- Private charities also provided relief. Examples include the following:
  - Episcopal Charitable Society of Boston (1724), South Carolina Society (1737), Scots Charitable Society (Boston, 1657), Charity Irish Society of Boston (1737), and Fellowship Society of Charleston (1762)
- Outdoor Relief
  - Non-institutional, offered in a home setting
  - Funded by town or city taxes to provide food, fuel, medicine, boarding in someone’s home, indentures/apprentices for children
- County Poorhouses
  - County poorhouses were passed by law to shift responsibility from individual towns and churches to the responsibility of the county to assist their residents.
  - The 1880 Census Schedule for “Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent” listed paupers and indigent persons, homeless children, prisoners, as well those with mental health and physical disabilities (blind, deaf, etc.). They are often listed in institutions which housed them.
    - Ancestry.com (\$) - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1634/>
  - Some states like New York had separate census records of those in almshouses and poorhouses
    - New York, U.S., Census of Inmates in Almshouses and Poorhouses, 1830-1920 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1083/>
  - Searching Poorhouse Records
    - Check genealogy web sites like FamilySearch.org under the county where the person resided.
      - Note: Not all of these records have been digitized and may be at county or state archives and historical societies.
    - County poorhouse records may NOT have an index
    - Use the approximate dates for when they may have been admitted
- Pauper Burials
  - Usually paid by the local Overseers of the Poor, town governments, or churches

- Depending on the town these may be recorded separately from other deaths/burials
- Paupers were often buried in "potter's fields" and may have unmarked graves

## Native Americans

- Native Americans are one of the most marginalized groups in the United States. They were forcibly removed from their lands and have experienced loss of culture through governmental policies that forced assimilation.
- First, identify the tribe of your ancestor. This involves multiple records like vital records, census records, tribal enrollment records, and more.
  - DNA can be used as a tool to assist you.
- Native Americans were not always recorded in the federal census prior to 1860
  - If they lived on reservations or out in the West (known as "wild"), they were not recorded.
- 1910 Federal Census had specific instructions around "Indians" – Columns 33-46
- Dawes Act
  - Passed in 1887 under President Grover Cleveland
  - Allowed the federal government to divide tribal lands. Native Americans who accepted the division were allowed to become U.S. citizens.
  - 160 acres of farmland or 320 acres of grazing land was granted to the head of each Native American family.
  - To receive allotment, enroll with the Office of Indian Affairs. Their name went on the "Dawes rolls".
  - Dawes Final Rolls of the Five Civilized Tribes (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole) Index - <https://accessgenealogy.com/native/final-rolls-index.htm> (FREE)
  - U.S., Native American Applications for Enrollment in Five Civilized Tribes, 1898-1914 on Ancestry.com (\$) - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2397/>
- Massachusetts: Earle Report of Native Americans, 1861 – available on AmericanAncestors.org (FREE)
   
<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/2777/massachusetts-earle-report-of-native-americans-1861>
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
  - Oversaw boarding schools to Americanize native children
  - These schools started in the early 1800's. Children were removed from their families and their homes on the reservations.

- Ex. Carlisle Indian School
- School records can be found under the State or Town where the school was established

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