



SURFING FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN RECORDS

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Discover the growing number of online resources geared to reunite African Americans with their ancestral roots.

But first...

Set a good foundation.

Reach across the generations with patience and accuracy. Avoid the pitfalls of “skipping through to a slave ancestor” before assessing the vital information of descendants.

Place ancestors within a historical timeline.

Get familiar with the history & time-period you are searching. Review the time-period for local, state, and U.S. events and county/city histories.

Understand the documents & search with a purpose!

Research which documents have survived for the time-period and locality. Identify the creation, rightful uses, and information collected for documents pursued.

Locate the surviving resources.

Cemeteries	Historical Societies	Special Collections
Census Schedules	Military Records	State Archives
Funeral Homes	Newspapers	Vital Records
Genealogical Societies	Oral Histories	

Let’s review some case studies!

Interpreting and extracting useful information for several common & underused records:

Birth register	Cemetery headstone	Family letters	Miscellaneous
Birth certificate	Death certificates	Family photos	Newspapers
Black license	Death registers	Marriage licenses	Probate file
Census records	Funeral home file	Marriage registers	Wills

Additional Resources & References

Black Roots: A Beginner’s Guide to Tracing the African American Family Tree (Burroughs)

Evidence! Citation & Analysis for the Family Historian (Mills)

Courthouse Research for Family Historians: Your Guide to Genealogical Treasures (Rose)

Cyndi’s List, African American <http://www.cyndislist.com/african-american>

The Timetables of African-American History (Harley)*

Where to write for vital records <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w.htm>

Texas State Historical Association (TSHA), “Texas Handbook,” <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook>



cotton pickers ca. 1935, Library of Congress

Surfing for African American Records

Toolbox Supplement – Select Dallas County, Texas Resources

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Historical Timeline Highlights

Texas Statehood: 29 Dec. 1845

Present Day: 254 Counties

“Juneteenth” — 19 June 1865 Emancipation

Proclamation, General Order No. 3

Texas History Timeline, Bullock Museum

Explore Texas by Historical Eras, PBS

[Official.]
HEADQUARTERS DISTRICT OF TEXAS, }
GALVESTON TEXAS, JUNE 19, 1865. }

General Orders, No. 3.
The people are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property, between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them, becomes that between employer and hired labor. The Freedmen are advised to remain at their present homes, and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts; and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere. By order of
Major-General GRANGER.
(Signed,) F. W. EMERY, Maj. & A. A. G.

Emancipation of Enslaved 19 June 1865. General Orders, No. 3, The Galveston Daily News, 21 Jun 1865, pg. 1

[Source: [newspapers.com](https://www.newspapers.com)]

RECORD COLLECTIONS

COUNTY OFFICES

Dallas County Clerk, <https://www.dallascounty.org/services/record-search>

- Vital Records Division, <https://www.dallascounty.org/government/county-clerk/vital-records/public-record-search.php>
- Vital and Records Management System: Official Records Search: 1800 to 2024, <https://dallas.tx.publicsearch.us>
 - Property, deeds, wills, misc.: 1800 to 2024
 - Marks & Brands, cattle: 1977 to 2024
 - Marriages: 1854 to 2024
- Mail/In-person requests with acceptable ID
 - Births: 1928; statewide short forms for birth & Deaths: 1930

Kofile QuickLink! — AR CA CO FL GA KY MI OH OK TX (49 TX counties)

Dallas County Texas QuickLink <https://kofilequicklinks.com/dallas>

- Corporation deeds: 1846 to 1962
- Individual deeds, grantor/grantee: 1842 to 1963

City of Dallas Bureau of Vital Statistics

https://dallascityhall.com/departments/community-care/Pages/vital_statistics.aspx

- Births & Deaths: April 1983 to 2024
- Statewide Short form birth certificates: 1926 to 2024

REPOSITORIES & LIBRARIES

Dallas Public Library: Genealogy

<https://catalog.dallaslibrary.org/polaris/Search/misc/esources.aspx?ctx=1.1033.0.0.6&Category=372>

Texas State Library and Archives Commission, <https://www.tsl.texas.gov>

- Local Records, <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/arc/index.html#Local%20Records>

Texas State Historical Association (TSHA), <https://www.tshaonline.org>

- Handbook of Texas (digital state encyclopedia), <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook>

African American Genealogy at the Texas State Library and Archives,

<https://www.tsl.texas.gov/ref/africanamericangenealogy>

GENEALOGICAL & HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

Dallas Genealogical Society, <https://dallasgenealogy.org>

- Local Records, <https://dallasgenealogy.org/local-records>
- McGowan Funeral Home Database, <https://dallasgenealogy.org/local-records/mcgowan-funeral-home>
- Ed. C. Smith Funeral Home Records, <https://dallasgenealogy.org/local-records/ed-c-smith-funeral-home-records> see [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org)
- Local Resources, Repositories & Organizations listings, <https://dallasgenealogy.org/local-records/other-local-resources>
- American Ancestors & New England Historic Genealogical Society 10 Million Names, <https://10millionnames.org>

FEDERAL RECORDS & REPOSITORIES

Library of Congress

- William A. Gladstone Afro-American Military Collection (1773-1987), <https://www.loc.gov/collections/gladstone-african-american-military-collection/about-this-collection> See the [Finding Aid](#)
- WPA and the Slave Narrative Collection, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/articles-and-essays/introduction-to-the-wpa-slave-narratives/wpa-and-the-slave-narrative-collection>
- Slavery in America: A Resource Guide, <https://guides.loc.gov/slavery-in-america/digital-collections>

ONLINE COUNTY RECORD INDEXES & DATABASES

Ancestry.com (\$)

- Wills and Probates, 1833-1974: Texas, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2115>
- Dallas, Index to Probate Packets, 1846-1904
Memorials and Petitions, 1834-1929, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2218>
 - i.e. Poor relief, free persons of color settlement requests

- Voter Registration Lists, 1867-1869, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2274>
- Court of Criminal Appeal Indexes, 1892-1947, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2147>
- 1890 Veterans Schedules of the U.S. Federal Census, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8667>
- Texas Vital Record Indexes
 - Birth Index, 1903-1997, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8781>
 - Marriage Index, 1824-2019, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8795>
 - Divorce Index, 1968-2015, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8794>
 - Death Index, 1903-2000, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/4876>

FamilySearch.org <https://www.familysearch.org>

- African American Resources for Texas Wiki, https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/African_American_Resources_for_Texas
- Ed C. Smith & Brother Undertaking Company, 1909-1933, Dallas Texas, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/567144?availability=Family%20History%20Library>
- Inquest dockets and minutes, Dallas County, Texas, 1893-1969, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/767227?availability=Family%20History%20Library>
 - Death inquests and various court proceedings notes of interest i.e. cause of deaths, death certificates, minor guardianships.

STATE & COUNTY MAPS

- Atlas of Historical County Boundaries, The Newberry Library (interactive maps), <https://digital.newberry.org/ahcb/pages/Texas.html>
- Interactive Map of Texas County Formation History, Maps of Us <https://www.mapofus.org/texas>
- [A Gazetteer of Texas](https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/27908), <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/27908>
 - Note: While this is a useful site, be mindful of the Google Ads and videos that are interspersed with the map information. Many ads can be closed by clicking the “X” on their right corners.
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1867-1970
 - ProQuest, Dallas Public Library access, <https://digitalsanbornmaps.proquest.com/barcode?accountid=7528>
 - University of Texas Libraries, <https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/texas.html>
 - The Portal to Texas History, Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/explore/collections/SANBORN>
 - Sanborn Maps, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/about-this-collection>
 - Fire Insurance Maps Custom Search, Texas Digital Archive,
 - <https://tsl.access.preservica.com/tda/reference-tools/fireinsurancesearch>
 - Union List of Sanborn & Other Fire Insurance Maps, Texas (Hunt, Woodruff, Hoehn), https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/EART/sanbul_TX_P.html

RECONSTRUCTION ERA

National Archives

African American Heritage, <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans>

Freedmen's Bureau, <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/freedmens-bureau>

- Established in the War Department by act of Congress, March 3, 1865; abolished in 1872.
- Highlights of research interest especially from June 1865 to December 1868.
- Field Offices, <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/freedmens-bureau#wed>
 - AL, AR, DC, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, DE, MS, MO, NC, SC, TN, TX, VA
- Texas, <https://www.archives.gov/files/research/microfilm/m1912.pdf>
- See Familysearch.org, Freedmen's Branch Records, 1872-1878, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2333780>
- See Smithsonian, National Museum of African American History & Culture, Freedmen's Bureau Search Portal, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/freedmens-bureau>

Contracts

- Contracts of Employees With the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Creator: War Department. The Adjutant General's Office. 1821-4/28/1904, <https://catalog.archives.gov/search?q=%22SIL%21mig%2Ffb%22>

Marriage Records

- Marriages collected from 1861 through 1869 first by the Union Army and then by the Freedmen's Bureau in its field offices in the Southern States and the District of Columbia
- Marriage Records of the Office of the Commissioner, Washington Headquarters, <https://www.archives.gov/files/research/microfilm/m1875.pdf>
- Freedmen's Marriage Certificates, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/595003> also see [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org): United States, Freedmen's Bureau Marriages, 1861-1872, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1414908>

Black Soldiers and Sailors

- Adjutant General's Office Records, <https://catalog.archives.gov/search?q=m2029&levelOfDescription=series>
- <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm>
- See National Park Service, Soldiers and Sailors Database, <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm>

Additional topics of interested to African American research:

- The Great Migration i.e. <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/migrations/great-migration>
- Sharecropping i.e. The University of Texas at San Antonio, Institute of Texan Cultures, History of Sharecropping, <https://texancultures.utsa.edu/cabin/history>