



Documenting Family History in Georgia

How to Begin

Before you begin

When compiling a family history, remember that any piece of information—oral or written—that links a name, place, and date together may help you in establishing kinship lines. As you begin to gather data, record it on preprinted forms (ancestral charts and family group sheets) or use one of the many commercial computer programs available.

For each ancestor, you will wish to determine the following: birth place and date; parents; when and where they attended churches, synagogues, and schools; occupation; when, where, and to whom married; names of children and when and where children were born; death date, death place, and burial place.

Cite the source for all information. A photocopy of a document is of little value unless you know where the original is located. We recommend the following formats:

- **For original governmental records:** Series Title, Record Group numbers, Name of Institution. For example: *File II Names, RG 4-2-46, Georgia Archives.*
- **For private papers:** Collection Title, Accession Number, Name of Institution. For example: *Henry Dickerson McDaniel Family and Business Papers, ac 1966-0400m, Georgia Archives.*

For citations of published, microformat, or electronic materials, we recommend you consult the following:

- *The Chicago Manual of Style*. 15th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Lackey, Richard S. *Cite Your Sources: A Manual for Documenting Family Histories and Genealogical Records*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1985.
- Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence! Citation & Analysis for the Family Historian*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1997.

When planning a research trip, arrange the information you have gathered and develop a plan of research. Know for whom you are looking and the type of information you are seeking.

Home-Based Research

Record the facts you already know. Use a pencil when working with forms, since this makes later corrections much easier.

- Record names, dates, and places on a genealogical chart.
- Record additional information for each family on a family group sheet.
- Interview older family members.



THE GEORGIA ARCHIVES

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- Transcribe all audio and video interviews. (Remember that magnetic media are not permanent.)
- Ask general questions, but let your relative do most of the talking.
- Question gently, especially when interviewing older relatives who are sharing their life story with you.
- Get as many names, dates, and places as possible.

Review documents and photographs in your family's possession and make notes about all information you discover (be certain to cite the source).

- Bible records (these often note births, baptisms, marriages, and deaths)
- Letters
- School report cards and diplomas
- Membership cards and certificates for clubs, lodges, and other organizations
- Insurance policies
- Birthday, sympathy, wedding, and other occasion cards
- Marriage, death, and divorce records
- Previously compiled family history

Local-Area or Community-Based Research

- Church and synagogue records (including minutes and membership lists)
- Cemetery records and tombstones
- Public libraries (usually have a local history room)
- Historical and genealogical societies

Governmental Records

City halls, county courthouses, and state archives provide a wealth of information for the genealogist. In Georgia, most of the important official records that serve to document family history are created as a function of county government. Among the county records of particular interest to the genealogist are:

- **Probate (formerly known as Ordinary or Inferior) Court**
 - Marriages
 - Estate records (wills, letters of administration, inventories, annual returns, sales, and guardian bonds)
- **Superior Court**
 - Deeds
 - Criminal and civil cases, including divorces
 - Registers of physicians, dentists, lawyers, and other professionals authorized to practice in a particular county.
 - Voter registration lists (sometimes found under the Probate Court)
 - Property tax digests

Most pre-1900 Georgia county records (except for civil and criminal case files) are available on microfilm at the Georgia Archives. With a few exceptions, notably tax digests and some marriage records, county records created after 1900 are not available for research at the Georgia Archives. Information or copies of post-1900 records may be obtained by writing county officials (judge of probate court or clerk of the superior court) directly or by visiting the courthouse.

Birth and Death Records

With few exceptions, there are no birth and death records in Georgia prior to 1919. For more specific information, please see the Georgia Archives information sheet, "Georgia's Vital Records."

Georgia Archives Research

The Georgia Archives, a division of the Office of the Secretary of State, is the official repository for permanent records created as a function of state government. The Georgia Archives also serves as a repository for some official county records and private records of individuals and organizations that illuminate state and local history. Some genealogically significant sources are:

- **Official county records:** Pre-1900 records of Superior Court and Probate (formerly Ordinary or Inferior) Court for most of Georgia's 159 counties.
- **State government records:** Confederate Pension Applications (RG 58-1-1), Executive Department Incoming Correspondence (RG 1-1-5), Department of Revenue Tax Digests (RG 34-6-1).
- **Books:** Family histories, local histories, out-of-state material, indexes to various records such as census records.
- **Vertical Files:** Family folders, military records, church and cemetery files.
- **U. S. records:** Census; Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands; Confederate Service records; Bureau of Indian Affairs.
- **Newspapers**
- **Private manuscript collections:** Letters, diaries, account books, organizational records, Bible records, and church records.

On-site Research

The Archives is open for research Tuesday through Saturday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. (original records are not retrieved after 4 pm.) The Archives is closed on all state and most federal holidays. When the holiday falls on a Friday or a Monday, the Archives is also closed on the Saturday following the Friday holiday or immediately preceding the Monday holiday. For additional information or directions, please visit www.GeorgiaArchives.org or call 678-364-3700.

Off-site Research

- Information may be requested by mail for a non-refundable fee of \$15 for Georgia residents and

\$30 for non-Georgia residents. Details of our mail reference services are available on our web site, www.GeorgiaArchives.org under How We Can Help You

- Telephone reference service is not available but you may obtain general information by visiting our web site www.GeorgiaArchives.org and selecting "How May We Help You" then "Ask an Archivist."
- Our website also contains information about our holdings and links to our on-line catalog and descriptive inventories.

Genealogy on the Internet

When using the Internet for research, it is crucial to understand that much of the information available on the Internet is **not verified**. In other words, you need to treat your research through the Internet as a secondary source, much as you would a published book. The reliability of the information is equivalent to that of any published source—excellent to poor—and should be used as clues to guide you to the primary, or original, record that would substantiate the genealogical information.

When working with the Internet, it is extremely important to notice who is creating and displaying the information. Is it the official page for a historical society, or is this the contribution of an individual? Traveling from link to link can sometimes take you to sites where it may not be clear who the author is.

In addition to the Georgia Archives web site, some basic, general reference sites on Georgia genealogy that are good to go to for further information include:

- **Georgia Genealogical Society:** <http://www.gagensociety.org>
- **Georgia GenWeb Project:** <http://www.rootsweb.com/~gagenweb>
- **Genealogical Computer Society of Georgia:** <http://www.mindspring.com/~noahsark/gcsga.html>
- **National Genealogical Society:** <http://www.ngsgenealogy.org>
- **National Archives & Records Administration Genealogy Page:** http://www.archives.gov/research_room/genealogy/index.html

Ready to Begin? Plan your research strategy.

- Oral interviews
- Home-based research
- Fill in genealogical chart with the names, places, and dates that you know
- Begin your records research with the most recent U.S. census record available for the family you are researching. The 1930 census is the most recent census available for the public to use and is available free at the Georgia Archives and through many public libraries. It is also available through a person subscription to Ancestry.com. For more information on census records, please see the Georgia Archives information sheet, "Using the Federal Census in Georgia" available on the Archives web site under "What We Have."

African American Family History

Black family ancestry begins with the same resources and techniques as with other genealogy: start with the present and work backward one generation at a time. Once you have traced your ancestor through oral history and census, death, and county records back to slavery, family relationships are established through slave records. Prior to emancipation, most African Americans were considered personal property, and it is very difficult to use these records unless you know the owner's name.

When you have followed family lines back to the 1870 census, you will find that many former slaves took the name of the slave owner. Link them together by looking at slave owners with the same surnames in the 1850 and 1860 slave schedules and noting the number of slaves owned and their ages. A few manuscript collections include the records of plantation owners who kept diaries or journals that mention slaves, recording information about births and deaths, health and illnesses, productivity, and personal anecdotes.

County deed records may show slave sales or contain executors' deeds, listing the names of slaves deeded to each heir. Estate records contain wills and inventories of property that may contain names and ages of slaves, sometimes grouped by families. The rare will includes instructions to manumit, or free, slaves. Registers of free persons of color, who usually were freed slaves, exist for some counties. Newspapers name runaways and slaves for sale or hire.

This summary is not exhaustive. It is intended to illustrate some of the types of records and scope of information available to the African American researcher. Specialized guidebooks to ethnic genealogy will be helpful; the notes, source lists, and bibliographies in the books and articles you read will be of great assistance. A historical understanding of life among blacks and between blacks and whites can be of immense importance when researching African American families. A more complete listing of useful materials for black genealogy is on our website at www.GeorgiaArchives.org, "What do we have?" "African American Resources."

African American Genealogy Guidebooks in the Georgia Archives

Blockson, Charles L. *Black Genealogy*. Baltimore, Md.: Black Classic Press, 1991. (CS21 .B55)

Byers, Paula K., ed. *African American Genealogical Sourcebook*. 1st ed. New York: Gale Research, 1995. (E185.96 .A444)

Childs, Marleta. *Rootsearching*. Lubbock, Tex.: M. Childs, 1978- (E185.93.T4 R667)

Fears, Mary L. Jackson. *Slave Ancestral Research: It's Something Else*. Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, 1995. (E185.96 .F42)

Lawson, Sandra M., comp. *Generations Past: A Selected List of Sources for Afro-American Genealogical Research*. Washington: Library of Congress, 1988. (Z1361.N39 L34 E185.96)

Martin, Joann, ed. *Slave Bills of Sale Project*. Atlanta, Ga.: Afro-American Family History Association, 1986. 2 vols. (E445.G3 S63)

Morton-Young, Tommie. *Afro-American Genealogy Sourcebook*. New York: Garland Pub., 1987. (E185.96 .Y67)

Rose, James. M., and Alice Eichholz. *Black Genesis*. Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1978. (CS21 .R57)

Scott, Jean Sampson. *Beginning an Afro-American Genealogical Pursuit*. New York: Epress Printers, 1985. (E185.96 .S36)

Smith, Jessie Carney. *Ethnic Genealogy, a Research Guide*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983. (CS49 .E83)

Thackery, David T. *Finding Your African American Ancestors: A Beginner's Guide*. Orem, Utah: Ancestry, 2000. (E185.96 .T425 2000)

Walker, James D. *Black Genealogy: How to Begin*. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia, Center for Continuing Education, 1977. (E185.96 .W29)

Witcher, Curt Bryan. *African American Genealogy: A Bibliography and Guide to Sources*. Fort Wayne, Ind.: Round Tower Books, 2000. (E185.96 .W58 2000)

Woodtor, Dee. *Finding a Place Called Home: A Guide to African-American Genealogy and Historical Identity*. 1st ed. New York: Random House, 1999. (E185.96)