Phyllis Hamner Room

321 South 4th Street
Ironton, Ohio 45638
740-532-1124

Hours:
Monday—Thursday
9:00 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Friday & Saturday
9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

African American Genealogy

The Basics

Like all genealogy research, in the beginning you need to write down all the information you know. Start with yourself... write down your complete name, birth date, place of birth, and parents' names. Remember when listing married females, list them under their maiden name. Then, list your parents' information and your grandparents and so on.

Use pencil when doing your research. As you proceed, you may find things you knew are not accurate and you will need to erase the information. Once you have the all the correct information, you can transpose the information into ink or onto a computer.

When doing genealogy research you will want to collect the following information on everyone:
1. Complete name (first, middle, last) – nicknames should be listed as well

2. Birth Date
3. Birth Place (city, township, county, state, and/or country)
4. Marriage Date
5. Place of Marriage (city, township, county, state, and/or country)
6. Name of Spouse (s)
7. Death Date
8. Place of Death (city, township, county, state, and/or country)
9. Place of Burial (name of cemetery, city, township, county, state, and/ or country)
10. Name of Parents (remember to list the females' maiden name)

Of course, sometimes you might not find all of the information listed above on some of your ancestors. That is to be expected. Just fill in the information you have and add more information as you continue.

Talking with your older relatives

The next step is to talk to your older relatives about your family. Record your conversation, if they will allow it. Ask questions like:

* Where are our relatives buried?

* Do you know when great-grandma was born? Died? Married? etc.

* Do you know any stories about our family? (These answers are the most important because much of this information is not readily available anywhere else.)

* Do you know anyone else I can talk to?

* Has anyone else done any genealogy research for the family?

* Do you have a family Bible? (Bibles are a wealth of information on families and are a great starting point.)

* Do not be surprised if some of your older relatives do not want to participate. For some elderly people, the past is not something they want to discuss especially if there are any skeletons in the closet.

Once you have gathered as much information from your family, you need to start searching for other resources.

The Search

Begin searching records at your local library. The Hamner Room has a variety of records to search. The types of records include:
1. Census records- information from 1820-1930. Depending upon the census, you can find names, year and month of birth, occupations, siblings, children and income.
2. Birth Records – indexed from 1868-2000. Birth Records lists the baby's full name, parents' names, birth date, and place of birth.
3. Death Records – indexed from 1868-2000. Death Records list the per

son's name, death date, and possibly the cause of death.
4. Marriage License – available from 1817-2002. Marriage License, depending upon the license, may list groom's name, bride's name, age of the couple, and names of the parents (available after 1899).
5. Cemetery Listings and Indexes – These records will have the place of burial, date of death or internment, funeral home, parents' name, and sometimes placement in the cemetery.
6. Wills from 1800-1999
7. Deed Records from 1816-1876
8. Early Court Records
9. Newspapers on Microfilm from 1851-present
10. City Directories – The directories can tell you where people lived and where they worked.
11. Family Surname Books
12. Books on Lawrence County
13. Local school yearbooks
14. Other State and County Books

Other sources you might want to find include military records, church records, and birth certificates, and death certificates. Military records are available through the National Archives. Church records are not always accessible, but they can include birth dates, death dates, marriages, baptisms, etc. Birth Certificates and Death Certificates are available through the Health Department for a fee.

What's in a Name

When researching your family tree, be aware of the names you are searching and variations of those names. Many people were not literate, so names were spelled how they sounded. Other people chose to keep records in their nickname or middle name because that was the name they used regularly. Lastly, people creating indexes are often completing a large project, so they might misspell a name, mix up letters, be unable to read part of the record, or other similar problems.

Things Become Difficult

Ohio African American Genealogy research is much more difficult due to the scant nature of record keeping for African Americans before the American Civil War. This is why African American like Native Americans has separate sections in libraries and records. Ohio is not unique in this aspect. Many states did not have keep records on African Americans.

From 1790 to 1840, only the head of household was provided in the federal census. In the 1850 and 1860 census, names of all free African Americans were listed. By the 1870 census, all African Americans were listed.

Slavery and Your Ancestors

Prior to the American Civil War, slaves were not counted as people. They were seen as property. Therefore, birth places, parents, etc. were not recorded in official records.

In census records, slave owners used numbers to describe their slaves not names. From 1790 to 1840, only the head of the household was listed and the number of slaves he owned. In 1850 and 1860 census, the slave owner's name was listed as well as the number of slaves by gender, age, and designation of black or mulatto.

Marriage was often allowed by slave owners. However, the marriage was not actually legal and usually not recorded. The Freedman's Bureau, created after the Reconstruction, were the first to allow slave marriages to be recorded.

After the end of the Civil War, former slaves often changed their name. They were celebrating their freedom. Some kept the name given to them by their master, while others chose soldier's names as their own.

Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad was an informal system of escape routes which began in the south, went through the north, and ended in Canada. The escape routes' name supposedly came from the escape of Tice Davids. Tice was an escaped slave from Kentucky. His owner chased him to the Ohio River, but Davids had disappeared. His owner said it was if he had "gone off on some underground railroad."

The Underground Railroad was active for over a hundred years. It reached its peak from 1830to 1865. Because of the secrecy used in the railroad, the number of escaped slaves helped is unknown. The route they took to reach the Ohio River is also a mystery.

At the time of the Underground Railroad, the Ohio River was only three to five feet deep. One of the main river crossing points was between Four Pole Creek and Twelve Pole Creek on the Virginia coast (present day West Virginia) and near Burlington, Ohio. Slaved would then go to Polk Patch, which was thirty-five miles north of the Ohio River. Salves would walk the ridges on the hills and churches along the way would often offer aid.

Route 45 connecting Ashtabula with the Ohio River was one of the routes of the escaped slaves.

Lawrence County, Ohio had three major crossing places. One was located where Ironton, Ohio was founded. The second was at Burlington, Ohio. And the last was located ten miles east of Proctorville.

Ironton and its founders wanted it to play a role in the Underground Railroad. The city was laid out in a way which would make it useful in hiding slaves.

United States Colored Troops (USCT)

War records from the American Revolution and the War of 1812 are filled with African American servicemen. When war broke out between the states, many men of color joined the ranks.

185,000 African American men served with the United States Colored Troops during the American Civil War. A major collection of records are located in the stacks of the National Archives and Record Administration (NARA). These records are rarely researched and are an untapped fount of information.

After the Civil War

After the Civil War, many records were created concerning the former slaves. As stated before, the Freedman's Bureau, officially known as the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, started creating records of slave marriages.

The National Archives, also, contains records from the Commissioners of Claims (Southern Claims Commission) and Freedman's Saving and Trust Company.

All three of the sources mentioned above could contain information like family relations, marriages, births, deaths, occupations, places of residence, names of slave owners, information concerning black military service, plantation conditions, manumissions, property ownership, and migration.

African American Cemeteries

Cemeteries for African Americans have their own problems. Many of the cemeteries in the south have been lost to development. The Chicora Foundation is one group determined to prevent that destruction.

But why are African American cemeteries different? Many of the cemeteries have been used longer than people would realize. Only the most recent burials are noticeable to the everyday person.

They often look abandoned because they are not cleaned on a regular basis. Often they are only cleaned up yearly or when a new burial occurs.

Graves are not clearly marked. Many graves are marked with flowers, plants, or trees. Some grave markers did not stand the test of time like wood planks or stakes. Other markers were not conventional like railroad ties or iron pipes.

African American burials often include grave goods. People were buried with bottles, shells or other funerary items. Removing these items is grave robbery.

Like many of the original small family plots, African American cemeteries were not deeded or otherwise recorded as cemeteries. Like the cemetery discovered by Dr. Dave Lucas on Porter Gap Road, these sites might be lost over time. Only research can uncover their hidden

location.

Melungeons

The Melungeons are a group of people located in northeastern Tennessee and southwestern Virginia. What makes this group so unique is its mysterious origins. At one time the group was believed to be only legend and boogeymen to scare children. In the mid 1800's, Melungeons existence was confirmed when numerous articles were written about them.

The group also is made up of people from an unknown race. Many people believe they are a combination of African Americans, Native Americans, and Caucasians, however no one is sure this is accurate. Some also link the groups with Portuguese immigrants.

The physical characteristics are not easily attributed to one race. Some Melungeons would have hair and skin color normally associated with African Americans, but no other physical attributes are found. Other Melungeons are pale with blond hair and blue eyes with other physical features associated with African Americans or Native Americans.

Because of the unique nature of the group and its ethnicity, they are identified by family names. Some surnames associated with Melungeons are Collins, Gibson, Mullins, and Bowlin.

African American Genealogy Resources

Black Census of Lawrence County, Ohio 1880 by Paul E. Nitchman
      Main Branch   *REF 312.09771 Ni

Black Genealogy: How to Discover Your Own Family's Roots and Trace
      Your AncestorsBack Through an Eventful Past, Even to a Specific
      African Kingdom by Charles
      L. Blockson
      Main Branch   *REF 929.1 Bl

Black Indian Genealogy Research by Angela Y. Walton-Raji
      Main Branch   *REF 929.1 Wa

Blacks in Ohio, 1880, in the Counties of… by Paul E. Nitchman
      Main Branch   *REF 977.1815 Ni Volume 1,3,4,6-10 *located in the closet*

Down from the Mountain: the Oral History of the Hemings Family: Are
      They the Black Descendants of Thomas Jefferson? By Judith P.
      Justus
      Main Branch   973.46 Ju

Entitled!: Free Papers in Appalachia Concerning Antebellum Freeborn

Negroes and Emancipated Blacks of Montgomery County, Virginia
compiled and with an introduction by Richard B. Dickenson
Main Branch   *REF 929.3 Di

Family Historian #21: African American Genealogy (computer file)
        Main Branch   CD 929.1 Fa #21

Finding a Place Called Home: A Guide to Africa-American Genealogy and
        Historical Identity by Dee Palmer Woodtor
        Main Branch   929.1 Wo   REF 929.1 Wo   *REF 929.1 Wo
        Chesapeake Branch   929.1 Wo

Finding Oprah's Roots: Finding Yours by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
        Main Branch   929 Ga
        Chesapeake Branch   929 Ga

Finding Oprah's Roots [videodisc]: Finding Your Own
        ChesapeakeDVD 929 Fi

Finding Your People: An African-American Guide to Discovering Your
        Roots by Sandra Lee Jamison
        Main Branch   *REF 929.1 Ja

Free African Americans of North Carolina, Virginia, and South Carolina
        from the colonial period to about 1820 by Pail Heinegg
        Main Branch   *REF 929.1 He 1 *REF 929.1 He 2

How to Trace Your African-American Roots: Discovering Your Unique
        History by Barbara Thompson Howell
        Main Branch   929.1 Ho

Index to the Cherokee Freedmen Enrollment Cards of the Dawes
        Commission, 1901-1906 by Jo Ann Curls Page
        Main Branch   *REF 929.1 Pa

Pittsylvania County, Virginia Register of the Free Negros and Related
        Documentation transcribed, extracted and compiled by Alva H.
        Griffith
        Main Branch   *REF 929.1 Gr

Register of Free Blacks, Rockingham County, Virginia, 1807-1859 by
        Dorothy A. Boyd-Rush
        Main Branch   *REF 929.1 Bo

Slave Ancestral Research: It's Something Else by Mary L. Jackson Fears
        Main Branch   *REF 929.2 Fe

Somerset Homecoming: Recovering a Lost Heritage by Dorothy Spruill

Redford with Michael D'Orso
Main Branch   929.3 Re

African American Genealogy Research Websites

African American Cemteries Online
http://africanamericancemeteries.com/
     You can search African American Cemeteries online by name, and state. Ohio, Kentucky, and West Virginia had some cemeteries listed.

African American DNA Roots Project
http://www.uml.edu/dept/biology/rootsproject/
     This non-profit website helps African Americans trace their ancestral roots in Africa.

African American Monuments, Museums, and Cultural Sites
http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Troy/1228/index.html
     This site has links to museums, monuments, and other important sites on African Americans.

African Americans in Southeastern Ohio
http://www.seorf.ohiou.edu/~xx057/
     African Americans in Southeastern Ohio is a website that links to others about African Americans in Southeastern Ohio.

AfriGeneas
http://www.afrigeneas.com/
     This website helps African Americans with genealogy research by providing information about solving common problems. It also features message boards and links to helpful sites.

Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum
http://www.fieldtrip.com/pa/55740380.htm
     The Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum was the first museum opened who focused only on African American history and traditions.

Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society
http://www.aahgs.org/
     This group focuses African American Genealogy research. It has a message board, newsletter, and other resources for African American genealogists.

Association for the Study of African American Life and History
http://www.asalh.org/
     Founded by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the ASALH founded Black History Month to preserve African American History.

Christine's Genealogy Website
http://ccharity.com/
    This website has helpful hints on finding your relatives and a huge list of links to information.

Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System
http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/
    The government site tells of African Americans who served in the Union Army during the civil war. Information is available for regiments, cemeteries, Medal of Honor, battles and prisoners.

Cyndi's List
http://www.cyndislist.com/african.htm
    Cindi's list is a great resource for genealogists. The site does have a specific list of resources for African Americans. The link above is to the African American section of Cindi's List.

Freedmen's Bureau
http://freedmensbureau.com/
    The Freedmen's Bureau was created after the end of slavery to assist former slaves by giving them things like rations, cloths and medicine. The site includes marriage records and records of attacks on the former slaves. All the records were created by the bureau.

Friends of Freedom Society
http://www.ohioundergroundrailroad.org/
    This organization researches the Underground Railroad in Ohio. The group is also involved in preserving and documenting Underground Railroad sites. Their website has great information about the Underground Railroad and its importance in Ohio.

Genealogy Quest
http://www.genealogy-quest.com/collections/African-American-Medal-of-Honor.html
    This link will take you to a site that lists African American Medal of Honor recipients.

History of the American Negro
http://www.wvculture.org/history/histamne/titlcont.html
    The History of American Negro was a book published in West Virginia in 1923. An electronic copy of the book is available on-line at the above site. The book has biographies of African Americans.

Multicultural Genealogical Center
http://www.mgcenter.org/
    The Multicultural Genealogical Center is a group located in Chesterville, Ohio. This group is trying to record the African American experience in Ohio and specifically in Athens County, Ohio. Currently, they have links to other websites and some helpful information on ge-

nealogy research. They will have obituaries on their site in the future. They would be a good contact if your ancestors spent time in Athens County, Ohio.

My Slave Ancestors
http://www.myslaveancestors.com/
My Slave Ancestors lists helpful hints about finding information specifically on former slaves.

Wayne National Forest and Paynes Crossing
http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/wayne/history/heritage/index_heritage.shtml
This site was developed by the archaeologists at Wayne National Forest. In cooperation with other organizations, they developed this website. It features birth and death records, cemetery readings, funeral records, census information, family summaries, marriage records, and other resources. Primarily, these source focus on the Paynes Crossing region.

Websites on the Melungeons

Cyndi's List: Melungeons
http://www.cyndislist.com/melungeons.htm
This site is from Cyndi's List. You will find links to articles and websites on Melungeons.

Melungeons.com
http://www.melungeons.com/
This website has an overview of the Melungeon people, genealogy information, and articles on Melungeons.

Melungeon Heritage Association
http://www.melungeon.org/
The Melungeon Heritage Association has a variety of articles on the Melungeons as well as links to other websites.

Websites on the Underground Railroad

Aboard the Underground Railroad
http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground/
This site is sponsored by the United States government and lists sites associated with the Underground Railroad.

National Geographic's Underground Railroad
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/
This website basically takes you step-by-step through a slaves experience on the Underground Railroad. This a great site for kids to understand what the road freedom was like for the passengers.

The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center
http://www.freedomcenter.org/learn/underground-railroad/people/people.html
        The link above has a list of people who assisted runaway slaves. The list is not complete, but it is updated.