

“Did Your Ancestors Own Slaves?”

Do you have ancestors who might have owned slaves? Did they live in U.S. pre-1860s? This presentation discusses researching censuses, wills, court proceedings, business records and newspapers for information. What economic impact did owning slaves have on your family?

- I. Introduction – What do you know?
 - a. Names of ancestors – parents, siblings
 - b. Locations lived
 - c. Occupation – farmer, merchant, shipbuilder, etc?
 - d. What records do you already have that might indicate ownership of slaves?

- II. Make a research plan - Identify what you want to find out
 - a. Who are you researching – which line was likely to have owned slaves?
 - b. Which location to start search?
 - c. What records are likely to be helpful? Where are they located?
 - d. What specific slave owning documents are available?

- III. Brief history of slavery
 - a. Slave Laws
 - b. Economics of slavery
 - c. Revolutionary War
 - d. Gradual emancipation in new Northern States
 - e. Outlaw importation from Africa
 - f. Emancipation Proclamation; end of Civil War

- IV. Helpful Records For Identifying Slave Owners
 - a. Federal Census
 - i. 1860, 1850 slave censuses - owners list how many slaves, gender and age
 - ii. 1840 and before – slaves in household indicated by “tic marks”
 - b. Probate – will, guardianship, estate inventory and settlement
 - c. Court records – debts, slave sales, manumission
 - d. Military – USCT (colored troops) listed slave owner, usually using slave owner’s last name
 - e. Tax records – taxed on land and other property, including slaves
 - f. Property/land records – gifting slave to family member, sale/trade; recorded as “property”
 - g. Plantation business records – archives, special collections

- h. Slave inventories
 - i. Newspapers – ads/sale, escaped slave announcement
 - j. Family papers - Archives, special collections, still with current family members; letters, diaries, business records, etc
- V. Can you connect with families of those enslaved by your ancestors?
- a. Do you want to connect? What does that mean to other family members?
 - b. Do you know any names from ancestors' documents to begin to locate current descendants?
 - c. DNA – any matches with African Americans? Right location? Shared DNA number indicating approximate level of expected relationship (shared ancestors lived 150+ years ago)?

References:

Burroughs, Tony. *Black Roots: A Beginner's Guide to Tracing the African American Family Tree*. New York: Simon & Shuster. 2001

Hone, E. Wade. *Land and Property Research in the United States*. Provo Utah: Ancestry Publishing. 1997.

Woodtor, Dee Parmer. *Finding a Place Called Home*. New York: Random House. 1999.