



SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Selected Resources for tracing African American History at the South Carolina Historical Society

City Directories

City directories were published intermittently in Charleston starting in 1782. Only after the Civil War were they produced on an annual basis. Free persons of color were occasionally listed in the directories beginning about 1800. The 1822 City Directory was the first to include separate lists of white and “coloured” residents. **Ask for assistance to locate. Some directories on microfilm.**

Slave Lists

A number of eighteenth- and nineteenth- century estate settlements include a list of slaves among the descriptions of the property in question. These lists, which frequently mention names, ages, and familial relationships, may be useful in researching family history. A published list of manuscript collections that include slave lists is available (*Slave Records in the Manuscript Collection of the South Carolina Historical Society: a catalog*).

Capitation Tax Records

Prior to emancipation, free persons of color in the city of Charleston were required to pay an annual “capitation tax.” These microfilm rolls include the following information for free African Americans: name, residence, age, occupation, real estate, stocks and goods, interest of bonds, slaves, income, amount of commissions, horses and mules, capitation amounts (based on gender and age), amount of taxes paid, and other miscellaneous data. **(Roll 45/288: ca. 1811-1840, with gaps; Roll 45/289: 1841-1860, with gaps; Roll 45/372: 1852, 1861-64.)**

Manuscript Collections

A number of manuscript collections at the South Carolina Historical Society contain information about African Americans. Search under specific family, church, or organizational names. The Society also holds the records of many local churches. Churches often recorded births, deaths, and marriages for “colored” as well as white members. Also search under the subject headings “African Americans,” “Slaves,” “Slavery,” and “Slave records.”

Freedman’s Bank Records [CD-Rom]

Congress chartered the Freedman’s Savings and Trust Company in 1865 to benefit ex-slaves. After former slaves deposited more than \$57 million in the bank, it collapsed because of mismanagement and outright fraud, devastating the African American community. In an effort to establish bank patrons’ identities, bank workers at the time recorded the names and family relationships of account holders, sometimes taking brief oral histories. In the process they created the largest single repository (480,000 names) of lineage-linked African American records known to exist. **Please ask for assistance to view the CD.**

Vertical Files

The South Carolina Historical Society’s vertical files contain miscellaneous documents such as newspaper clippings, research notes, and correspondence. Files cover a wide variety of subjects including family surnames, localities, churches, cemeteries, and miscellaneous topics. A subject guide to the files is available in the catalog room. **Please ask for assistance.**

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Newspapers

Local newspapers often ran advertisements for the sale of slaves. The ESCN Database Reports Series Index (**F272 .E274**) lists slaves names mentioned in S.C. newspapers for the years 1732-1775. **Ask for assistance to locate.**

Wills

The ownership of slaves was transferred from one generation to the next in wills. The names of slaves are mentioned in these documents. The SCHS library contains several books of will abstracts (**F268 .M67**). SCHS also has will transcripts by county (1782-1868) on microfilm (**45/294**). Many wills at the SC Dept. of Archives and History can be found online (<http://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/>). 'Wills' can also be searched as a subject in the SCHS online catalog.

Birth/Death Records

Birth and death records for Charleston residents can be found in the Charleston Death Register (1821-1927), and birth register (1877-1927) (**45/326 on mfe.**). Some rolls specifically for "white" or "colored" citizens.

Published Resources

The genealogy section of the library includes some books that provide instruction in the search for ancestors. A few focus on researching African American ancestors (**E185.96**). Other local records books by county may also prove useful (**F277**).

Some other books that may prove useful:

- The African American history section of the library. Many books in this section document the history of slavery (**E185**).
- Black Charlestonians by Bernard E. Powers, Jr. (**F279.C49 N4 1994**)

Online Resources

- Lowcountry Digital Library. Digitized collections of local area repositories. Some collections of interest to those researching African American history. <http://lowcountrydigital.library.cofc.edu/>
- Lowcountry Africana. Searchable database of records that document the family and cultural heritage of African Americans in the historic rice-growing areas of South Carolina, Georgia and northeastern Florida. <http://lowcountryafricana.net/>
- SCIWAY: South Carolina's Information Highway. Resources for African American history and culture. <http://www.sciway.net/afam/>
- Library of Congress: American Memory. African American History. Oral histories, church histories, music, legal documents, and more. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>

Other Repositories

- Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture. The mission of the Avery Research Center is to document the African American experience, especially as it pertains to Charleston and the Lowcountry. Located in Charleston at 125 Bull Street: <http://avery.cofc.edu/archives/>.
- South Carolina Historical Repository Directory: information about repositories in South Carolina holding significant primary source material. <http://shrab.palmettohistory.org/repository/repositories.htm>