



## African American Genealogy Resource Guide

The Georgia Historical Society (GHS) Research Center holds a vast collection of material useful to genealogists or anyone conducting family history research. Resources such as the U.S. census, vital records, tax records, military records, cemetery records, and newspapers are some of the most commonly used material, but keep in mind that information about ancestors can be found in many other places. Researchers will find a broad collection of useful resources for the entire state of Georgia – as well as other southern states.

This is not an exhaustive list of all GHS genealogy resources. It is designed to serve as an introduction and to identify several categories of resources. We suggest you search our Research Center Catalogs (<https://georgiahistory.com/research-the-collection/search-our-collection/>) for specific titles and shelf locations, as well as to identify additional resources such as archival collections, books, pamphlets, and serials related to African-American genealogy or ask reference staff for further information.

Published Resources about Genealogy Research: The GHS's Main book collection includes resources that provide instruction in African American genealogy research. For additional titles please search our Research Center Catalog.

- *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* by Herbert G. Gutman (1976). This book provides an exhaustively researched history of Black families in America from the days of slavery until just after the Civil War (Call Number E185.86.G77 I976).
- *Black Genealogy* by Charles L. Blockson (1977). This book explains how Black Americans can trace their ancestry and construct a family tree (Call Number CS21.B55).
- *Black Genealogy* compiled by Loris D. Cofer (1991). This book contains obituaries, memoriams, weddings, church records, marriage records, census records, enslaved people records, and miscellaneous information about African Americans (Call Number F285 .C64 1991).
- *Immigrants to Liberia, 1865-1904: An Alphabetical Listing* by Peter J. Murdza, Jr (1975). This work is the second in a series of publications by the Liberian Studies Association in America of data describing over 15,000 African Americans who immigrated to Liberia post-Civil War 1865-1899 under the auspices of the American Colonization Society. The contents contain vital information of immigrants such as name, family position, religion, place of residence, ship of departure, and destination (Call Number CS1728. A1 M8).
- *New Studies in the History of American Slavery* edited by Edward E. Baptist and Stephanie M.H. Camp (2006). Includes essays by prominent young historians about slavery, enslaved



- women, the Atlantic and internal slave trades, the relationships between Indians and enslaved people, and enslavement in Latin America (Call Number E441 .N53 2006).
- *Slave Bills of Sales Projects* by Joann Martin and the African American Family History Association (1986). Each volume is divided into three sections and is organized by counties or cities (Call Number F285.S57 1986).
  - *Slave Genealogy: A Research Guide with Case Studies* by David H. Streets (1986). This research guide discusses the genealogy of enslaved people with emphasis on the non-plantation enslaved people, and demonstrates - with three case studies drawn from the records of Wayne County, Kentucky - the research methods and types of analysis that must be employed, and the importance of researching both owners and enslaved people (Call Number E185.96 .S817 1986).

Ancestry.com: The GHS subscribes to Ancestry.com which is available at the Research Center's public computers. Ancestry.com is a resource for a variety of genealogical information including vital records, census records, military records, immigration records, and tax records, for example:

- *Georgia Property Tax Digests, 1793-1892*: This resource is located on Ancestry.com and allows researchers to locate an ancestor by county, where other important records may also be located (note, the digests list taxes according to where property was owned rather than where the payee lived). The digests do not often indicate family relationships, but they do offer details about a taxpayer and his (or her) estate. Free persons of color were logged separately on a one-page form that recorded: name of freeman, name of employer, polls, acres (and location) value of land, value of city or town property, personal property, household items, stock, tools, and merchandise.

Census Records: United States Census records are available for Georgia and other southern states for the years 1790 (reconstructed), 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930. The Georgia federal censuses for 1790, 1800, and 1810 were destroyed by fire. Records are available in print, on microfilm, or via GHS's subscription to Ancestry.com (available at the public computers). Georgia county census indexes are also available at the Research Center.

- Before 1865, census material pertaining to slaves is available in the form of United States Census Slave Schedules, as well as the United States Census Mortality Schedule. For free persons of color, information is available in the United States Census.
- *Georgia Slave Schedule Index (1850, 1860)*: These schedules include registers of alphabetical names listed in the original record, the county from which the record comes, state name, and city. Some materials are available on microfilm. See reference staff for assistance.



Vital Records: Georgia did not keep a statewide official registry of births or deaths until 1919, or official marriage records until 1805. GHS has some published records of births, deaths, and marriages for Chatham County that predate 1919, as well as records, abstracts, and indexes from other counties. Vital records may be available for other counties and locations, please search our Research Center Catalog for specific holdings. Ancestry.com is also a resource for vital records.

- An index to Georgia death certificates for 1919-1994 is available on microfiche. Other death information is available in the Main book collection: *Early Deaths in Savannah, Georgia, 1763-1803: Obituaries and Legal Notices* (Call Number F294 .S2 E37), the *Register of Deaths in Savannah, Georgia* series (Call Number F294 .S2 R35) for dates 1853-1938, as well as in multiple cemetery indexes at call number(s) F294 .S2 B65; C37; L28. GHS also holds the *Chatham County Health Department Death Cards, 1803-1893* (GHS 1712) and *Chatham County Coroners Inquests 1845, 1877-1965* (GHS 5125).
- Marriage records are available in the Main book collection for dates 1748-1877 in *Marriages of Chatham County, Georgia* (Call Number F292 .C37 M37, volumes I & II). For dates 1964-1971 and 1973-1992, please see our microfiche holdings.
- Will abstracts and indexes from various counties are available at GHS, but we hold few original wills. The ownership of enslaved people was often transferred from one generation to the next in wills. Use our Research Center Catalog to conduct an Advanced Search with the subject term “Wills” and county name as a keyword or other identifying information to search for these items.
- The City of Savannah Research Library and Municipal Archives holds original Savannah-Chatham County vital records that predate 1919; the Georgia Archives in Morrow also holds microfilm copies of some county records prior to 1919. Certified copies of vital records after 1919 can be obtained either from the Georgia Department of Public Health or the county where the event occurred.

Cemetery Indexes: GHS has printed indexes for the four large Savannah cemeteries, as well as records from cemeteries from numerous other counties. Search our Research Center Catalog for specific holdings.

- *African-American Cemeteries Newspaper Article Notebook*: This resource is located with GHS's Ward Notebooks (see reference staff for assistance). This notebook contains newspaper articles relating to Laurel Grove Cemetery in Savannah as well as selected obituaries as early as 1818 up until 1998. This resource also contains a short index of newspaper articles in the *Savannah Morning News* from 1818-2000 referencing Laurel Grove South.

- *Laurel Grove Cemetery General Index* (Call Number F294.S2 L282 1993): Laurel Grove South Cemetery was historically separated from the white Laurel Grove North Cemetery in 1853. Laurel Grove South consists of four acres set aside at Laurel Grove Cemetery for African American burials; many graves were moved from an earlier African American cemetery. In 1857, an additional 11 acres were reserved. In 1859 the city council increased the size of Laurel Grove South to 30 acres. Tombstones range from small markers with little or no ornamentation to monumental markers with elaborately carved figures. Inscriptions on many of the tombstones record African American history not included in written histories of the region. For grave listings, search the Laurel Grove Cemetery General Index or the online *City of Savannah Burial Information System* web page (see listing of Additional Resources at the end of this document).

City Directories: Savannah City Directories are available in either hardcopy or on microfiche for most years from 1848 to 2001. Information can include name, name of spouse, occupation, and work and home address. Early city directories are available on microfiche for Atlanta, Augusta, Columbus, and Charleston, SC. Researchers searching for African American households and businesses should be advised that early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century directories included separate listings for “Whites” and African Americans. *African American sections are titled with period racial terminology.*

Land and Tax Records: These include print, microfilm, and manuscript sources from Savannah, Chatham County, and other Georgia counties. Search our Research Center Catalog to identify these items. Ancestry.com is also a source for land and tax records.

Newspapers: Georgia and Savannah-area newspapers from 1763 to present are available on microfilm. Printed indexes for Savannah-area newspapers are available for the periods 1763-1844, 1850-1891, and June 1929-1985. Indexes for 1891-1895 are available on microfilm. Indexes for Savannah-area newspapers do not exist for September 1895-May 1929. GHS does, however, have the newspapers for these non-indexed years on microfilm.

Church Records: There are a variety of church records available in archival collections searchable by denomination, geographic location, and under the subject heading “African American Churches”. Researchers should be advised that many church congregations in Georgia consisted of both Black and White members. Church minutes often list members to include race and or legal status (free/enslaved). Search our Research Center Catalog to identify these items.

Savannah Area Neighborhood Documentation Resources: The GHS’s Main book collection includes resources that provide neighborhood documentation and cultural history. Maps also provide information about the geographical location and size of neighborhoods. Search our Research Center Catalog for additional holdings.

- *Black Savannah 1788-1864* by Whittington Johnson (1996). This book focuses upon efforts of African Americans, free and enslaved, who worked together to establish and maintain a



variety of religious, social, and cultural institutions, to carve out niches in the larger economy, and to form cohesive Black families in a key city of the Old South (Call Number F294.S2 J63 1996).

- *Ebb and Flow: Life & Community in Eastern Savannah* by Martha Keber (2011). Provides a written history of five eastside Savannah neighborhoods: East Savannah, Hillcrest, Pine Gardens, Savannah Gardens, and Twickenham (Call Number F294 .S2 .K24 2011).
- *Low Land and the High Road: Life and Community in Hudson Hill, West Savannah, and Woodville Neighborhoods* by Martha Keber (2011). Provides a written history of neighborhoods consisting of land boarded by East Lathrop Avenue on the east, McKenna and West Bay Street on the north, Highway 80 and Market Street on the west, and Louisville Road on the south (Call Number F294.S2 K43 2008).
- *Out of Yamacraw and Beyond: Discovering Black Savannah* by Charles Hoskins (2002). A history of Savannah from the African American perspective (Call Number F294.S2 H68 2002).

Vertical Files: The GHS's Genealogy and Biographical vertical files contain miscellaneous genealogical information, including family trees, Bible records, county cemetery indexes, unpublished family histories, newspaper clippings, research notes, and bibliographies. Subject vertical files cover a variety of subjects relating to African American history (focused on Chatham County) including: Civil Rights, race relations, economic conditions, education, holidays, religion, societies and clubs, the NAACP, slavery, and African-American suffrage. Indexes to the vertical files are available in the Research Center. See reference staff for assistance.

Archival Collections: Please see GHS's Select African American History Archival Collections resource guide for additional listings of archival collections containing bills of sale for enslaved people, plantation journals, correspondence, pamphlets, photographs, scrapbooks, ship manifests, and other materials or search the Archival Collection Finding Aids Database; search the Digital Image Catalog for photographs and other archival materials that have been digitized.

- *Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands Records, 1865-1869* (GHS 5915): This collection contains photocopies of letters and lists from the Bureau of Refugee, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands' branch in Savannah, Georgia from 1865 to 1869. These records detail the efforts of this agency to assist the newly freed slaves throughout coastal Georgia including Chatham County, McIntosh County, Glynn County, Liberty County, Ossabaw Island, and St. Catherine's Island. The originals of these documents may be accessed at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.
- *Chatham County (GA) Records, Series I: Board of Registers, 1904-1959, 563 volumes* (GHS 5125 BR): This collection contains voter oath books containing oaths signed by residents of Chatham County affirming that they were qualified to vote in that county.





Each voter wrote their name, district, ward of residence, address, occupation, age, and on most forms from 1931-1949, date of birth. Books are arranged first chronologically and then by race, voting district, and finally alphabetically, by surname. Please include these four components when requesting voter oath books.

- *City of Savannah (Ga) Records, Series I: Clerk of City Council, 1837-1864* (Microfilm 5600CL-130): This collection contains the Registers of Free Persons of Color on microfilm. According to a city ordinance of 1839, owners of enslaved people and guardians of free persons of color were required to register and obtain badges from the clerk of council before hiring out or permitting the employment of their charges. The collection contains two volumes of information which includes name, place of birth, date of arrival, occupation, name of guardian, and date appointed.
- *Georgia Infirmary Records, 1833-1973* (GHS 0301): The Georgia Infirmary records contain minute books, patient registers, birth records, and miscellaneous administrative materials. The minute books (5 volumes), January 15, 1833-October 10, 1960, contain minutes, treasurer reports, resolutions, and newspaper clippings. Patient registers (13 volumes) contain the names, addresses, date of admission, date of discharge, age, nativity, occupation, diagnosis, doctor, births, and deaths of patients admitted to the hospital from 1911 to 1973. Birth records are contained in one volume that dates from 1945 to 1956.
- *Victor G. Schreck Collection of Chatham County Property Records, 1730s-1920s* (GHS 1906): This collection contains chains of title prepared by Lawyers Association of Savannah, abstracts of title, court proceedings, correspondence, marriage settlements, wills, and other records related to property in Chatham County, Georgia. The records were collected by Victor G. Schreck when preparing a history of Chatham County land records.

#### Additional Resources:

- Chatham County Board of Assessors Property Cards  
<http://boa.chathamcounty.org/Home/Search-Property-Record-Cards>
- City of Savannah Burial Information System (Search for grave listings in Laurel Grove Cemetery.) <http://web.savannahga.gov/cembase/>
- Digital Library of Georgia (Includes digitized collections from GHS and of statewide repositories.) <http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/>
- Digital Public Library of America (Includes digitized archival collections from GHS and around the nation, including African American collections.) <http://dp.la/>
- Library of Congress: American Memory (Includes African American history, oral histories, church histories, music, legal documents, and more.)  
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>
- National Archives: African American Records <http://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/>



# GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Savannah

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## Atlanta

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- Umbra: Digitized African American (Includes archival collections from GHS and around the nation.) <https://www.umbrasearch.org/>