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How to Map Your Roots with DNA

Our **COMPLETE GUIDE** to Ancestry.com's Cutting-edge Genetic Migrations **PAGE 18**

Found Your Family Crest?
THINK AGAIN

3 Essential Newspaper Searches for Enslaved Ancestors

9 Ways to Do Genealogy on Facebook, Twitter & Pinterest

13 Tips to Save Grandma's Jewelry



From the moment they were snatched from their homeland to the auction block, separation was a reality that confronted millions of enslaved Africans.

THE ENSLAVEMENT OF many African-Americans before the Civil War shut this group from legal personhood and the records this status entails. That includes newspaper mentions we're accustomed to finding on white ancestors: real estate transactions, probate notices, death announcements, and others.

But mainstream newspapers didn't entirely ignore those who were enslaved—especially when they tried to get away. And after the war, African-American-owned papers would run touching pleas from freedmen seeking family members who'd been sold away from them. Recognizing the historical significance of slavery, papers also sought to preserve and share memories of those who'd been enslaved. It's getting easier for you to locate these news items, thanks to the digitization of historical newspapers and projects to create free databases of newspaper items that name these rarely recorded people. We'll show you what you could discover about your African-American family tree and offer tips to help you find it.

Fugitive slave ads

The first widespread mentions of African-Americans by name in newspapers were the pre-Civil War fugitive slave or "runaway" advertisements. Slaveholders would place these, often offering rewards for the return of what they considered to be valuable property. Historians estimate that upwards of 100,000 of these advertisements appeared in newspapers from the Colonial period through the end of the Civil War. See an example on the next page. You'll also find similarly descriptive notices seeking slaveowners of captured African-Americans.

To help readers recognize the escaped slave, ads would offer loads of details about the individual: name (first only, as enslaved people didn't have legally recognized surnames), age, height, build, complexion ("bright" indicating a person of lighter skin) and markings (often the result of severe punishment). Further detail might include personal and family history details, such as when and where the person was

bought or sold. Some ads venture a guess about where the enslaved person might be headed and why. You'll also see the slaveholder's name, which can help you follow your enslaved ancestor back in time (learn about this process at <familytreemagazine.com/premium/african-american-slave-ancestors>). This level of information contrasts with the anonymity of enslaved individuals in other records: US censuses, for example, merely count the enslaved.

You can find many of these ads in digitized newspapers using keyword searches, such as *fugitive*, *ran away* or *absconded*, plus the name of a person (the slave or the slaveowner) or place. You also can narrow the time period to 1865 and earlier. Ads might appear in states beyond the location of the runaway's home, so don't narrow the geographic scope too much. Try newspaper databases such as GenealogyBank <genealogybank.com>, Newspapers.com <newspapers.com> and the free Chronicling America <chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>.

Freedom on the Move: A Database of Fugitives From North American Slavery <freedomonthemove.org> will make it easier to locate runaway notices. Cornell University associate professor of history Edward E. Baptist is leading the ambitious project to compile, digitize and index fugitive slave ads in North American newspapers.

Crowdsourcing efforts to build the database include class assignments in which professors and students analyze ads, as well as providing individuals and historical or genealogical societies with opportunities to participate. The process involves correcting errors introduced by optical character recognition technology in "reading" the ads. The project, which received a National Endowment for the Humanities grant in August, could lead to better knowledge of the routes African-Americans used in their attempts at self-liberation.



TIP: When searching digitized newspaper collections, remember that optical character recognition software can keep good matches out of your search results. Try using shorter search strings and swapping often-confused characters.

During the Civil War, enslaved individuals like these men in Baton Rouge, La., seized opportunities to escape to Union lines.

REGISTER OF RUNAWAYS.

CORRECTED WEEKLY.

— LOUISIANA —

Calcasieu Parish.

JACK—Griff complexion. 6 feet 3 inches high, committed 30th Jan; says he belongs to Dr. Harris, near Centreville, on Bayou Teche. .29.

Parish of St. Landry.

LEWIS—Griff color, about 30 years old, 5 feet 7 inches high, committed Feb 4th; says he belongs to Mrs. Sarah Eveline Vernon, on Bayou Boeuf, in the Parish of Avoyelle. .29.

TOM—Griffe color. 5 feet 5 inches high, committed Dec. 19th. says he belongs to Mrs. Anne Tanner, in the Parish of Avoyelles. .25.

Parish of East Feliciana,

CEASAR—Dark Brown complexion, about 29 years old, 5 feet 5 inches high, committed 23d December; says he belongs to J. L. Calcote, of Natchez, Miss. .27.

New Orleans—1st District.

BILL—Black complexion. 5 feet 11½ inches high, committed Feb. 14; says he belongs to Samuel Horton, of Nashville, Tenn. .29.

WILLIAM—Black complexion, 40 years old, 5 feet 5½ inches high; says he belongs to Mr. James Laslet, of Natchez. .26.

WILLIAM HENRY SAWYER—Mulatto, about 16 years old; 5 feet 7½ inches high; says he is free, but is supposed to be a runaway slave. .26.

CELESTINE FERNANDEZ—Mulatto, 19 years old, 5 feet 4 inches high; says she is free, but is supposed to be a runaway slave. .26.

RACHEL—Black complexion, 70 years old, 5 feet 6 inches high; says she belongs to William James, of Iowa. .26.

SAM or THOMAS SCOTT—Black complexion, about 25 years old, 5 feet 2½ inches high; says he belongs to Mr. Wave, but is supposed to be the slave of Capt. Robert Newport, of Port Hudson. .26.

JOSEPH—Mulatto, about 40 years old, 5 feet 7 inches high; says he belongs to Mr. Brown, pilot of the steamer New Latona. .26.

WILLIAM ARMSTEAD—Mulatto, 30 years old, 5 feet 8 inches high; says he is free, but is supposed to be a runaway slave. .26.

MATILDA—Mulatto, 19 years old, 5 feet 2 inches high; says she belongs to Mr. Frederick Boyd, of Natchez. .26.

Parish of West Feliciana.

BEN—About 27 years old, about 6 feet 7 inches high, committed Feb. 20th; says he belongs to Cuge Harris, of Clinton, La. .31.

PLEASANT—Black complexion, about 35 years old, 5 feet 10 inches high, committed Feb. 6; says he belongs to the estate of Thos. McDowell, near Liberty, Miss. .30.

GOYDMAN—Light complexion, 18 years old, 5 feet 6 inches high, committed Jan. 20; says he belongs to Mr. Edward Whitaker, near Natchez. .26.

BENARD—Light complexion, about 16 year old, about 5 feet 2 inches high, committed Jan. 20; says he belongs to Mr. Edward Whitaker, near Natchez. .26.

— MISSISSIPPI —

Washington County.

DICK, at first calling himself **HENRY**—Brown complexion, about 20 years old, 5 feet 10 inches high, writes a plain and fair hand; says he belongs to a Mr. Caliway, in Tennessee, and is now hired to a Mr. J. G. Dent, near Jackson, Miss. .30.

DICK—Black complexion, about 45 or 50 years old, 5 feet 8 or 10 inches high; says he belongs to Hector McNeill, of Bolivar county Miss. .27.

Warren County.

about 30 or 35 years old, com-

SEVEN HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD.

ABSCONDED from the subscriber, on the 2d October, about 10 o'clock, a Negro Woman, named Melinda, about 24 years of age, about 5 feet 7 or 8 inches high, large and well made, took several articles of bedding and clothing—said slave was very hoarse from a bad cold. Also, three men, two women and a girl, belonging to Maj. John Dougherty, who is now absent at his agency.

JOE, is about 35 or 37 years of age, supposed to be 5 feet 6 or 8 inches high, stout built, and has a large scar on one cheek, believed to be the right.

JOSEPH, is about 24 or 25 years of age, 5 feet 9 or 10 inches high, well made.

DAN, is about 22 or 23, rather yellow for a negro, has a slow walk, is about the height of Joseph.

JINNEY is about 34 years of age, rather corpulent, and it is believed has lost several of her teeth.

HANNAH is about 25 or 26, slender made, and rather forward in her manners—has had several children, and has with her a child, nine months old.

SARAH, a girl about 12 years of age, slender and active, has a scar under the chin.

Said slaves took with them considerable clothing, and a number of blankets. The description of the last six negroes may not be strictly accurate, in every particular, as it is made from a casual observation of a neighbor.

The above reward will be paid for the apprehension of said negroes, if taken out of this state, or \$100 for either of them, or \$50 for either, if found within this state and after this date. It is believed they have been enticed away by a base white man, supposed to be 24 or 25 years of age, 5 feet 10 or 11 inches high, black beard and hair, and will most probably make their way to Canada. A liberal reward will also be given for the apprehension and conviction of any white man who may be in the exercise of pretended ownership over said slaves.

St. Louis, Oct. 14, 1835.—031

LEWIS BISSELL.
3w1aw

3,000 DOLLARS REWARD.

THE above reward of \$3,000 together with all reasonable expenses, will be paid by the Union Bank of Louisiana.

In the Nov. 7, 1835, New-Orleans Commercial Bulletin, Lewis Bissell described a group of enslaved individuals who absconded with a "base white man."

The Concordia Intelligencer of Vidalia, La., regularly ran listings of recovered slaves needing to be claimed. The one at left appears in the March 3, 1854, edition.

Issaquena county.

GEORGE—Black complexion, about 50 years old, 5 feet 8 inches high, committed 9th Jan; says he belongs to Alexander Montgomery, of Washington county, Mi. .27.

Adams County.

AUGUSTUS—Mulatto, about 21 years old, 5 feet 7½ inches high, committed 19th Feb; says he belongs to Doct. Nec. No. 193 Royal street, New Orleans. .31.

GEORGE—Light Black complexion, about 29 years old, 5 feet, 5½ inches high; says he belongs to Alphonso Bougere, at Union Point, La. .26.

Lawrence County.

CHARLEY—About 5 feet, 10 or 11 inches high, committed Nov 25th, says he belongs to Mr. Wm. Alexander, of Adams county Miss. .25.

Historians estimate that upwards of 100,000 runaway slave advertisements appeared in newspapers from the Colonial period through the end of the Civil War.

The narratives drawn in the ads may serve to emphasize the individual nature of each slave's escape. Not all—perhaps even a minority—adhere to the dominant narrative of escape along the Underground Railroad.

Reflections on enslavement

Even before the Civil War, some abolitionist newspapers ran autobiographies of formerly enslaved people. These narratives became more popular after the war, mostly in the black-owned press but sometimes in mainstream newspapers, too. They related the personal reflections of people who had persevered through the slavery era.

Joe Clovese, at 105 the last surviving African-American member of the Grand Army of the Republic, recounted his 20-plus-year search for his mother to the *Indianapolis Times* and *Indianapolis News* in 1949. A chance conversation with another patron of the French Market in New Orleans had led him to his mother's home only a few blocks away.

Articles like those about Joe have been overshadowed somewhat by the narratives and oral histories produced by the Depression-era WPA Writers Project <loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection>. Many of these newspaper autobiographies and narratives, though, were published closer to the time of enslavement and therefore might be less subject to faded memories. Search for these articles in the aforementioned newspapers websites with the person's name.

Information wanted notices

But as compelling as antebellum ads for runaways and postbellum reflections on slavery are, they pale before the heartache of a third type of distinctly African-American newspaper item: notices from people who sought family members torn from them during slavery.

From the moment they were snatched from their homeland to the auction block, separation was a reality that confronted millions of enslaved Africans throughout their lives. Even attempts to escape North or into the lines of advancing Union armies continued the cycle of separation. War didn't help their situation: Perceptive slaveowners sold their chattel in advance of the freedom they saw on the horizon. Others removed African-Americans to distant locations they deemed safer.

Postwar chaos displaced people all over the South. This experience is detailed in *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* by Heather Andrea Williams (University of North Carolina Press).

The peace at Appomattox set the majority of newly freed African-Americans into motion with the objective of finding their families. Although not tasked with reunifying families, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands (better known as the Freedmen's Bureau) nonetheless received scores of requests for help. Surviving bureau records include correspondence and transportation vouchers for those in search of parents, spouses and children. But the agency also slowed the reunification process by transporting freedmen away from their communities to labor opportunities both north and south of the Mason-Dixon Line.

It's somewhat serendipitous that the African-American press is the instrument through which many former slaves found family. Generations of enslaved people were denied the opportunity to learn how to read and write. Defying this prohibition could lead to brutal consequences. The freedmen's pent-up desire for knowledge manifested itself in the formation of newspapers. The *Black Republican*, *Colored Tennessean* and *South Carolina Leader* came into existence the year that hostilities ended, 1865. The New Orleans *Louisianan* began semi-weekly publication in 1866 and the illustrated Indianapolis *Freeman* started in 1888.

According to the 1913 edition of the *Negro Yearbook*, 288 newspapers served a primarily black audience. Over the whole of American history, the Library of Congress' US

PERSONAL.—INFORMATION
WANTED of JOHN PERRY, a colored boy, about nine years of age, formerly slave of John MacFarland, of this city, and sold in the summer of 1864, by Mr. Robert H. Davis, of this city, to a gentleman in Alabama. Any information as to his present whereabouts will be thankfully received by his mother. Address **KATY PERRY,** care Mrs. A. Nesbitt, Richmond, Va.
do 27—31*

A mother, Katy Perry, searched for her son in the Dec. 28, 1865, *Richmond (Va.) Dispatch*. In addition to details about 9-year-old John, another research clue is the name of the woman to whom messages for Katy could be sent.

Gentlemen are respectfully
examine his stock before purchasing elsewhere.
Particular attention paid to cutting.
Canton, Nov. 2, '65. tf.

INFORMATION WANTED.

Any information of the whereabouts of Easter Bowers, (colored) of Hardeman county, Tennessee, will be thankfully received by her daughter Sicily, who formerly belonged to Dr. W. M. Towler, Canton, Mississippi. She desires to find out her mother's place of residence, so that she can go to her. Letters containing information, should be addressed to Dr. Towler, my former master, which will insure my getting them.
Mar. 1-1f SICILY.

The March 24, 1866, *American Citizen* (Canton, Miss.) carried Sicily's ad for information on her mother's whereabouts. Like many freedmen, she maintained ties—at least temporarily—to her former slaveowner.

published inquiries from these soldiers and others who were looking for families. Notices were generally shorter than 100 words, and typically named both the relatives and a slaveowner. This example appears on page 4 of the Aug. 3, 1899 edition:

Information wanted of Moses Marlow or Howard, who belonged to John Howard in Leflore county, near Smith Mill, and about nine miles from Greenwood, Miss. His mother was Ersia Howard. His father was Matthew Howard. His mother had three sisters: Jane Pierson, Silva House, Clarendia Miller, and two brothers: Louis Moore and Robert Moore. Mrs. Clarendia Miller is the mother of the writer, Ersia Jurault, of Whaley, Miss. Ministers at Vicksburg please read to congregations.

Notices also often specify locations, and might even state when and to whom slaves were sold. Judith Giesberg, professor and director of the graduate program in history at Villanova University, is working with Mother Bethel AME Church in Philadelphia to digitize and transcribe the *Christian Recorder* advertisements. The site, Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery <informationwanted.org/about>, has more than 1,500 entries so far and now includes other newspapers, too. You can browse by newspaper or search transcribed information using the search box on the left. Look on digitized newspapers websites, too, searching for names and other terms associated with your relatives. Try including the phrase “*information wanted*,” which appears in many of these ads.

Most newspapers charged for the ads, but the *Herald of Kansas*, published in Topeka, is an exception. Its Information Wanted section states “Notices under this heading, not exceeding ten lines, will be published free of charge.”

No one knows how many such advertisements resulted in reunions. In the 1890s, when the Indianapolis *Freeman* printed ads in a column titled “A Searcher Locates Place USA: Lost Relatives,” it stated that, “The *Freeman* goes to all parts of the world and has been the means of bringing hundreds of Lost Relatives and friends together.” A search of the newspaper turns up only a few success stories reported on. The Last Seen website and other sources also reveal a scattering of triumphs.

Writer Dionne Ford's great-great-grandmother Tempy Burton placed an ad in the June 4, 1891, *Southwestern Christian Advocate*. She sought her mother, siblings and aunts. Just over a month later, Tempy again wrote the paper, joyfully reporting that she'd found her sister. Ford shares the story on her blog at <dionneford.com/treasure-chest-thursday-another-enslaved-ancestor-found>.

Newspaper Directory <chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/search/titles> shows more than 2,000 entries for African-American papers. Read more about these papers in *The Negro Press in the United States* by Frederick G. Detweiler (free at <catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/O08584563>).

The *Christian Recorder* was the official newspaper of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. It gained fame during the Civil War for publishing the letters of soldiers who were serving with the US Colored Troops. Postwar, the paper

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The 5-4-3-2-1 on African-American Newspapers

ONE weekly issue

Most African-American papers published on a weekly, not daily schedule. The first outlier was the *New Orleans Tribune*, which moved from a triweekly to a daily in 1864.

A Tale of TWO Newspapers

Indianapolis has been home to two well-known African-American newspapers, the *Freeman* and the *Recorder*; the latter is still in operation today. Despite their common hometown, their approaches to out-of-town news were distinct. The *Freeman* prided itself on covering the social news of cities in as many states as possible, whereas the *Recorder* stayed centered on communities within Indiana.

THREE large collections of digitized African-American newspapers

1. GenealogyBank <www.genealogybank.com/static/african-american-heritage.html> (by subscription)
2. Chronicling America <chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>: Search 65 African-American papers for free, and use the US Newspapers Directory to locate more papers in libraries.
3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers—Black Newspapers (available through major research libraries)

FOUR essential websites to learn about African-American newspapers

1. The Ancestor Hunt <www.theancestorhunt.com/newspaper-research-links.html>: Look under Special US Collections.
2. Newspapers at University of Georgia Libraries <guides.libs.uga.edu/newspapers>: Download an expansive, chronological listing of the library's microfilmed African-American newspapers and get research tips.
3. African American Newspapers in Genealogical Research video <www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2VVEgdLKFQ>: Watch Timothy N. Pinnick's talk at the Kalamazoo Public Library.
4. Black Press Resource Collective <blackpressresearchcollective.org/resources/scholarship-archives>: Read articles on African-American newspapers and find out about holdings accessible online and at universities.

FIVE popular African-American newspapers you should research

1. *Pittsburgh Courier*
2. *Chicago Defender*
3. *Freeman* (Indianapolis, Ind.)
4. *Norfolk Journal and Guide* (Virginia)
5. *Cleveland Gazette*

The ads were also a common way to search for relatives who became separated after the war. Ellen Tate, a wife, mother and AME church member, placed a notice in the Information Wanted column of the March 26, 1887, *Cleveland Gazette*. She sought her 28-year-old son:

Any information of the whereabouts of Fred Tate, who left his home in Zanesville, O., May, 1884, will be thankfully received by his mother, Mrs. Ellen Tate, No. 109 Muskingum avenue, Zanesville, Ohio.

You'll find that African-American newspapers often had a larger geographic reach than mainstream papers. Publishers were keenly aware that much of their audience had kin in other areas, and therefore focused more of their "out-of-town" news on the places from which their closer geographic base had migrated. As with most genealogical research, the newspaper notices we've described can be helpful even if

they don't name your ancestors. An ad for a runaway from the same plantation as your ancestor, for example, might give clues about your relative's conditions of enslavement. A distant relative's reunion ad might mention other family you weren't aware of.

After centuries of separation and dislocation, the increase in digitized newspapers and emerging databases of advertisements are expanding the access and reducing the difficulties in finding these distinctive references to African-Americans. It's all resulting in new ways for researchers to discover family and overcome the genealogical barriers of slavery. ■

JAMES M. BEIDLER is the author of the new book *The Family Tree Historical Newspapers Guide* <familytreemagazine.com/store/historical-newspapers-guide>. **TIMOTHY N. PINNICK** is author of the book *Finding and Using African American Newspapers* <blackcoalminerheritage.net/aanewspaper_book>.