

African-American Genealogy & History Sources at The Filson Historical Society Library

Contents of this Guide

The following sections provide information on records held by the Filson Library at the city, county, state & federal levels, as well as sources available through other repositories and the internet. Click on the links below to jump to different sections of this document.

- I. [City of Louisville](#)
- II. [Jefferson County](#)
- III. [State and Federal](#)
- IV. [Maps, Cemetery Records, Newspapers, etc.](#)
- V. [Other Repositories](#)
- VI. [Internet Sources](#)

I. City of Louisville Records

Death Register, 1866 - 1910

Indexed register of deaths occurring within the city limits of Louisville. Information includes date of death, race, age, cause of death, address, birthplace, place and date of burial and undertaker. Microfilm.

Birth Register, 1898 - 1910

Indexed register of births occurring within the city limits of Louisville. Information includes address, date of birth, race, names of parents (including mother's maiden name) and their birthplace. Microfilm.

Records of the City Court. Order books, 1836 - 1897

Also known as the Police Court. After a person was arrested they were brought before this court to determine further disposition of the case. Free blacks and slaves were usually identified as such. These records include the names of hundreds of African-Americans accused of various crimes from breaches of the peace to helping escaped slaves. Many books are indexed. Microfilm.

Louisville City Directories, 1832 - present

Published occasionally until 1864, then annually. Most free African-Americans are identified as "free colored", "FMC", "FWC" (free man or woman of color) or "of color" until 1865. From 1865 until around 1930 African-Americans were identified by an italicized "c". Microfilm (1832 - 1930) and original books (after 1930).

II. Jefferson County Records

Tax Records, 1789-1865

These annual records (a few years are missing) list free blacks and their property, free blacks who paid a poll tax and slaveholders and the number of their slaves over the age of 16. The lists are arranged in rough alphabetical order by tax district. Microfilm.

Wills, 1780 - 1919

Wills for the period 1780 - 1784 can be found in County Order & Minute Book A (microfilm, book). Wills covering 1784 - 1901 are on microfilm. An index covers the period 1784 - 1919. We do not have copies of wills for 1902 - 1919. Wills for 1784-1846 have been transcribed in book form. Wills for the period 1780 - 1865 include wills made by free blacks as well as those made by slaveowners.

Estate Inventory and Settlement Books, 1780 - 1783, 1800 - 1900

An inventory of the deceased's estate was usually taken, whether or not he or she had written a will. Estate inventories included household furniture, farming equipment, animals, etc. and their value. These records also listed the names, value and sometimes the ages and relationships of slaves. Estate inventories for 1780 - 1783 are included in County Court Order Book A (microfilm, book). Records for 1800 - 1900 are on microfiche and include an index.

Marriages, 1784 - 1915

Marriages of free blacks were recorded between 1784 - 1865. All marriages for 1784 - 1853 have been transcribed and indexed. Since marriages of slaves were not legally recognized in Kentucky, they were not recorded in county marriage registers before 1865. After 1865 many former slaves, desiring to legally record their marriages, did so in Book 1-C (some as late as 1903). Information in this register includes the number of years they had been married. After 1865 marriage records were segregated and African-American marriages were recorded beginning with Book 2-C. However, many marriages after 1865 were still recorded in the "white" registers. Microfilm.

County Court Order and Minute Books, 1780-1901

These are complete and indexed for each book. These records contain deeds of emancipation ("free papers") as well as records of indentures and apprenticeships, guardian bonds, cases of African-Americans bought to court for migrating to the state and many other types of cases. Microfilm.

Bond and Power of Attorney Books (Jefferson County Court Records), 1783 – 1805 & indexes ~1830-1850

These records include slave sales and cases where slaves were used as security for debt. The Filson has a microfilm copy for the years 1783-1805. The books have also been transcribed (Cook, Michael L. *Jefferson County, Kentucky Records*, v. 3). Records after 1805 are missing, but The Filson also has indexes to books covering the period 1830 - 1850. When compared with other sources, it is clear that these indexes refer to emancipation records. (1830-1850 indexes currently located in closed stacks on L6.)

Chancery and Circuit Court Records, 1790 - 1885

Indexed by plaintiff and defendant. These are primarily civil cases involving suits to recover debt, settle estates, distribute property, etc. Many free and enslaved African-Americans are included in the entries as plaintiffs and defendants. These can also be important sources of information about a slaveowning family. The actual case files are located in the Kentucky State Archives in Frankfort. Microfilm.

Deeds, 1783 – 1866

Our collection includes deeds from 1783 - 1825. The grantor index covers the period 1783 - 1866. The Filson has the grantor index on microfiche; the deeds are on microfilm. The grantee index is located at the county courthouse.

III. State and Federal Sources

U. S. Census Records for Ky. 1810-1940 (and tax compilations 1790 and 1800)

Free blacks were enumerated from 1810 - 1860. The 1790 and 1800 censuses were destroyed, but the tax lists for those years are a rough substitute for the destroyed censuses. They list the heads of households who were taxed for property. Free blacks who did not own property (and many who did) are not listed in the published lists, but they are usually listed in the original tax rolls. The 1890 Census for Kentucky was also destroyed. Records (1810-1930) available on microfilm, arranged by county. All census records (including the 1940 census and the 1850 and 1860 slave censuses) may also be accessed online at our two workstations through Ancestry Library Edition.

1850 and 1860 Slave Censuses for Kentucky

These list the names of slaveowners and the numbers, sex and ages of their slaves. The census districts match those of the full censuses for these years. All records on microfilm, arranged by county.

U. S. Mortality Census for Kentucky, 1850-1880

1850 (censuses available only for Pendleton through Woodford counties), 1860, 1870, 1880. This is a census of all deaths occurring during the last 12 months of the census year (e.g. for 1860 it would include the period July 1, 1859 - June 30, 1860). Information indicates whether the deceased was free or enslaved, age, marital status and cause of death. All records on microfilm, arranged by county. We have the printed index for 1850 and 1860.

Kentucky Vital Statistics, 1852-1910

Includes births, deaths and marriages. Records are very incomplete for all counties, but many births of free and enslaved African-Americans are recorded, usually showing the names of the child, parents or slaveowner. Not indexed. All records on microfilm, arranged by county.

Kentucky Vital Statistics, 1911 - 1995

Birth records (index only, 1911 - 1988) and death records (index, 1911-1995, plus copies of actual death certificates from 1911-1961). The indexes are on microfiche or accessed on the computer in the microfilm room; death certificates are on microfilm.

County Tax Records

Includes all early tax records beginning with the formation of the county. We do not have many county tax records after c. 1865. Free blacks who owned property are listed, as well as slaveholders and the number of their slaves who were over the age of 16. All records on microfilm, arranged by county.

Freedmen's Savings and Trust Company Deposit Records, 1865-1874

These records of deposit at the Lexington and Louisville branches, although not complete, contain much valuable genealogical information for each depositor (birthplace, age, relatives, residence, former slaveowner (or free), etc. There are hundreds of African American depositors on record, including many who were serving in the U. S. Colored Troops. Not indexed. Microfilm. We also have a searchable CD-ROM that includes all bank branches in the U. S.

American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission Records, 1863-1864

Not to be confused with the Freedmen's Bureau, the Commission reported on conditions among enslaved and free African-Americans throughout the South. The final report became the basis for what became known as "Reconstruction" policy. These records consist of reports and testimony by many different individuals, including slaves, free blacks, soldiers and slaveholders. Many people, including Washington Spradling, were interviewed in Louisville. A few of these interviews have been published in John Blassingame's *Slave Testimony*. Microfilm.

Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kentucky. Vol. II., (Appendix, p. 1-178)

Lists all African-Americans from Ky. who served in the U. S. Colored Troops. Information usually includes date soldier was mustered in, where soldier enlisted, rank, etc. Book.

Various counties - compilations published by local genealogical/historical societies.

All printed Kentucky local histories, abstracts of county court records, cemetery records, etc. are located in the Kentucky Room. Many of these books include wills, marriage, baptismal, death and cemetery records for African-Americans.

IV. Maps, Cemetery Records, Newspapers, etc.

Maps - Jefferson Co. and Louisville

These are a few of the most important maps in the Filson Club library collection:

*1800 to 1865 – The Filson library has a large collection of Louisville maps, showing streets, creeks, buildings, etc.

*Census maps (Louisville, 1850-1910) – These show the city wards for each census year.

*1858 – Bergman Map of Jefferson Co. Shows major property owners.

*1879 – Atlas of Jefferson & Oldham Counties. Shows major property owners by districts.

*1884 – Atlas of the city of Louisville, Ky and environs. Very detailed map of Louisville showing property owners and buildings.

*1913 – Louisville Title Co.'s New Map of Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky. This a Louisville Title Co. Map showing property owners.

*1892 to 1975 – Sanborn Maps. Shows details (number of stories, construction material, windows, etc.) of all structures within the city limits. The library has a microfilm copy for Kentucky cities. Some Sanborn maps can also be viewed online through the Kentucky Digital Library: <http://athena.uky.edu/>

Maps - Other counties

We have a large collection of 19th century maps and atlases of many counties.

Formation of Kentucky Counties

An historical atlas of Kentucky and her counties. Wendell H. Rone, 1965.

This is a very helpful booklet which shows how each county was formed and when. Alternatively, use this online interactive map that shows the divisions of Kentucky's counties: <http://homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~george/countyformations/kentuckyformationmaps.html>

Genealogy How-to Books

Finding a Place Called Home. Dee Parmer Woodtor, 1999. The best book on the subject.

Cemetery Records

Eastern Cemetery, 1844 - 1949

When it was established in 1844, about 3 acres were set aside for burials of free blacks and slaves. Public burials occupied about 2 acres, and lots (known as the 1st, 2nd and 3rd African Divisions) took up the other acre. As the cemetery expanded, other segregated lots and public burial areas were created. The Filson Library has all of the surviving records of Eastern Cemetery for the period 1844 - 1949. Records include lists of interments, public burials, purchases of burial lots and maps. Microfilm.

Greenwood Cemetery, 1898 - 1949

Established as an African-American cemetery c. 1898. The Filson Library has all of the surviving records of Greenwood Cemetery for the period 1898 - 1949. Records include lists of interments, public burials and purchases of burial lots. Microfilm.

Cave Hill Cemetery, 1848 - c. 1980

African-Americans were generally excluded from Cave Hill Cemetery during its early years, although some white families occasionally provided burial plots for their servants. The U.S. National Cemetery at Cave Hill, however, included African-American burials from its inception. The Filson Library has an alphabetical index for all burials as well as the original burial registers for 1879 - 1920.

Catholic Church Records

Lyons Collection

Collection of 19th century Catholic church records (Bullitt, Casey, Hardin, Jefferson, Marion, Meade, Nelson, and Washington counties). Many record baptisms, marriages and deaths of free and enslaved persons. Books. For a complete list see: House, Katherine L., *Notes and Documents: the John A. Lyons Collection in the Filson Club Library*. FCHQ, v. 64, no. 1 (1990).

Newspapers

Indianapolis Freeman, 1886-1916

African American weekly which covered educational, social, political and religious events in Louisville and elsewhere in Kentucky.

St. Paul (Minn.) Western Appeal, 1885 - 1893

Weekly African-American newspaper published in St. Paul, Minn. by John Q. Adams, the son of Louisville Baptist pastor Henry Adams. Because of the younger Adams' ties to Louisville, he devoted a column to social happenings in Louisville's African-American community. Microfilm.

Slave Importation Book, Adams County, MS (Natchez), 1857-1860

This valuable county record was discovered in the Adams Co. courthouse in February, 1999. The record lists the name (sometimes including a surname), physical description and age, and state and county of origin of every enslaved African American taken to Natchez and sold during this period. Most of the persons listed were from Kentucky and there are hundreds of names listed, mostly from Jefferson, Fayette and Shelby counties. A searchable database is available online: <http://ccharity.com/recordbook/>

Published Histories

The American slave: a composite autobiography. George P. Rawick (ed.), 1972. Vol. 16: Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Ohio, Virginia & Tennessee narratives. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) interviewed ex-slaves in the 1930's. Also available online through Library of Congress: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>

The Fascinating Story of Black Kentuckians: their heritage and traditions. Alice Dunnigan, 1982.

History of Blacks in Kentucky, 2 vols. (1992).

History of the United Brothers of Friendship and the Sisters of the Mysterious Ten. [Rare Book Collection] William H. Gibson, 1897. Part 2 is an autobiography (Gibson came to Louisville from Baltimore in 1847) and a history of Louisville's early African-American community.

Ladies Book of the U.B.F. United Brothers of Friendship, 1880.

Life Behind A Veil: Blacks in Louisville 1865 - 1930. George C. Wright, 1985.

Proceedings of the United Brothers of Friendship and the Sisters of the Mysterious Ten, 1888, 1890 and 1895. [Rare Pamphlet Collection]

These pamphlets contain the names of dozens of men and women from all over Kentucky.

Racial Violence in Kentucky 1865 – 1940: lynchings, mob rule, and “legal lynchings.” George C. Wright (1990).

Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of Colored Parkland or “Little Africa”, 1891 - 1916. Joseph S. Cotter, 1934.

Weeden’s History of the Colored People of Louisville. H. C. Weeden, 1897. Contains biographical information about prominent African Americans in Louisville, their occupations, and their businesses.

Slave narratives

Published before and after the Civil War (all ex-slaves from Kentucky).

Fifty Years of Slavery in the United States of America. Harry Smith, 1891, (Nelson, Spencer and Jefferson counties)

Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb. Henry Bibb, 1849, (Shelby and Jefferson counties).

Narratives of the Sufferings of Lewis and Milton Clarke. Lewis Garrard Clarke, 1846, (Madison, Mercer and Jefferson counties).

Slavery Days in Old Kentucky. Isaac Johnson, 1901, (Nelson and Spencer counties)

V. Other Repositories

Louisville Free Public Library - Main Branch

Local newspapers (*Courier-Journal 1869-present, Louisville Defender 1951-present, Louisville Leader 1921-1951* and most 19th c. Louisville newspapers). A historical newspaper database provides keyword searchable access to the *Courier-Journal* and its predecessors (1830-1922). Also, census records, slave censuses, Ky. county vital statistics (19th c.), index to Ky. births and deaths 1911 - 1995, and Louisville city directories.

Louisville Free Public Library - Western Branch

Large collection of slave narratives and secondary sources for the study of African-American history in Ky. and the U.S. The library's collection also includes an extensive archive and the papers of Joseph Cotter.

University of Louisville Archives & Special Collections

Ekstrom Library, Lower Level

Collections include the first Record Book of the Mayor's Court for Louisville (1832-1833) and the 1862 Record of the Police Court.

Metro Archives

Grantor & Grantee Index to deeds, Division Books and Index, Virginia surveys & land grants, tax records, wills, estate inventories, Louisville City death (1866-1910) and birth (1898-1910) registers, Jefferson Co. births, deaths and marriages (19th c.), and Louisville City directories. Their collections include many other records.

Jefferson County Courthouse

Deeds, property maps, marriages, wills, and estate inventories. Records for criminal cases and divorces are located in the Old Jail Annex at 6th & Jefferson Street.

VI. Internet Sources

If you do not have access to the internet at home, school or work, the Louisville Free Public Library provides access. Here are some sites that are excellent "jumping-off" points to many other sites dealing with African-American genealogy and history. Please note that web addresses may change over time.

Cyndi's List of Genealogy Sites on the Internet - African-American

<http://www.cyndislist.com/african-american/>

Excellent site with a wide variety of categorized links, including various GenWeb sites in Ky. and around the U.S.

Afrigeneas

www.afrigeneas.com

This site includes online data, links to other sites and information on how to subscribe to its mailing lists. It also has an archive of messages and uploads (including a surname search). It hosts a number of message boards and many of its members are expert genealogists and historians who are more than willing to answer questions. Great site for learning and networking.

Christine Charity

<http://ccharity.com/>

Maintains a site that has much valuable online data, particularly for Miss., Ala., Tenn. and Tex. Great links to other sites.

Liberia Database

<http://www.disc.wisc.edu/archive/Liberia/index.html>

Searchable database of all emigrants to Liberia from 1820 - 1843. Data lists name, age, state, boat, date of arrival, etc.

Soldiers & Sailors Database (Civil War)

<http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm>

Maintained by the National Park Service. Searchable database of all Americans who served in the Union and Confederate armies during the Civil War, including African American units. Data gives brief information, such as name, rank and unit. The site also includes brief histories of each United States Colored Troops unit.