

# African American Genealogy & History Sources Of The Filson Historical Society Library

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## Contents of this Guide

The following sections provide information on records held by the Filson Library at the city, county, state, and 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.

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## 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.**

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## **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 (call no. **976.991 J45w**) and 1784-1833 in volume 6 of the Filson Club History Quarterly. Wills for the period 1780 - 1865 include wills made by free blacks as well as those made by slave owners.

## **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 from 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** (call number **976.991 B674**) (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 brought 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 & indices ~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 **indices to books** covering the period 1830 - 1850. When compared with other sources, it is clear that these indices refer to emancipation records. (1830-1850 indices currently located in **closed stacks on L6**. See Special Collections for access to these documents.)

## **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 slave owning family. The actual case files are located in the Kentucky State Archives in Frankfort. **Microfilm**.

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## **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 patron workstations through Ancestry.com Library Edition.

### **1850 and 1860 Slave Censuses for Kentucky**

These list the names of slave owners 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 slave owner. 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 indices are on microfiche or **accessed on the computer**. 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.

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## **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 slave owner (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. **Microfilm**. (A few of these interviews have been published in John Blassingame's *Slave Testimony*.)

## ***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. Reading Room, **Book** (Call number **973.7469 L752**).

## **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:

- Louisville: 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. (call no. **Large Map 976.991 B449 1858**)
- 1879 – Atlas of Jefferson & Oldham Counties. Shows major property owners by districts. (call no. **OSB 912.769 B415 1879**)
- 1884 – Atlas of the city of Louisville, Ky and environs. Very detailed map of Louisville showing property owners and buildings. (call no. **OSB 912.769 L888h**)

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- 1913 – Louisville Title Co.'s New Map of Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky. This a Louisville Title Co. Map showing property owners. (call no. **OSB 912.769 L888I**)
- 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/>. Original books must be viewed in Special Collections.

## **Maps - Other counties**

We have a large collection of 19<sup>th</sup> century maps and atlases of many counties.

## **Formation of Kentucky Counties**

*An historical atlas of Kentucky and her counties.* Wendell H. Rone, 1965. (call no. **912.769 R772**)

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: A Guide to African American Genealogy and Historical Identity.* Dee Parmer Woodtor, 1999. The best book on the subject. (call no. **929.1072 W898**)

## **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 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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, (arranged by burial date, however, they do not indicate the ethnicity of the deceased). **Books on L4**

## **Catholic Church Records**

John A. Lyons Collection

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Lyons authored a series of 19<sup>th</sup> 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. **Microfilm.**

### **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.**

## Adams County Papers:

Slave Auctions: 1827-1830 and List of Sales of Slaves: 1833. **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/>.

## New Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser, 1805-1816, 1819, 1820

### Natchez Advertiser

### Mississippi Messenger

### Mississippi State Gazette

**Microfilm.**

## Published Histories

**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) call no. **Rare Pamphlet 326.092 S649**, 1891.

*Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb.* Henry Bibb, 1849, (Shelby and Jefferson counties). RB 326.092 B581, 1849; Reprint call no. **326.92 B581**

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*Narratives of the Sufferings of Lewis and Milton Clarke.* Lewis Garrard Clarke, 1846, (Madison, Mercer and Jefferson counties). (Call no. **Rare Book 326.092 C598**, 1846)

*Slavery Days in Old Kentucky.* Isaac Johnson, 1901, (Nelson and Spencer counties) (call no. **B J67**)

*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 1930s. (call no. **326.92 A512**). Rawick's work is contained in a larger database by the American Memory Project available online through Library of Congress:  
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>.

### Other Publications:

*The Fascinating Story of Black Kentuckians: their heritage and traditions.* Alice Dunnigan, 1982. (call no. **976.9 D924**)

*History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 2 vols. (1992). (call no. **976.9 L933**)

*History of the United Brothers of Friendship and the Sisters of the Mysterious Ten.* William H. Gibson, 1897. (call no. **Rare Book 366 G451**) 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. Pamphlets. (Constitution and bylaws: **Rare Pamphlet 366 658s**, 1880; Initiatory Rituals and Lectures, call no. **Rare Pamphlet 366 U58si**, 1880)

*Life Behind a Veil: Blacks in Louisville 1865 - 1930.* George C. Wright, 1985. (call no. **976.9911 W949I**)

*Proceedings of the United Brothers of Friendship and the Sisters of the Mysterious Ten, 1888, 1890 and 1895.* (call no. **Rare Pamphlet 366.05 U58p**, 1888)

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). (call no. **364.134 W949**)

*Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of Colored Parkland or “Little Africa”, 1891 - 1916.* Joseph S. Cotter, 1934. (call no. **Rare Pamphlet 976.9911 C847**, 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. 976.9911 W394. (call no. **976.9911 W394**)

*The Kentucky African American Encyclopedia.* Smith, Gerald L., Karen Cotton McDaniel, and John A. Hardin, eds., 2015. (call no. **976.9003 S648**)

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## V. Other Repositories

### **Louisville Free Public Library - Main Branch** [\(502\) 574-1611](tel:5025741611)

Local newspapers (*Courier-Journal* 1869-present, *Louisville Defender* 1951-present, *Louisville Leader* 1921-1951 and most 19<sup>th</sup> 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 (19<sup>th</sup> c.), index to Ky. births and deaths 1911 - 1995, and Louisville city directories.

### **Louisville Free Public Library - Western Branch** [\(502\) 574-1779](tel:5025741779)

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** [\(502\) 852-6752](tel:5028526752)

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.

### **Louisville Metro Records Management and Archives** [\(502\) 574-3508](tel:5025743508)

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 (19<sup>th</sup> c.), and Louisville City directories. Their collections include many other records.

### **Jefferson County Courthouse**

Deeds, property maps, marriages, wills, and estate inventories, **502.574.6220**. Records for criminal cases and divorces are located in the Old Jail Annex at 6<sup>th</sup> & Jefferson Street. **502-595-3034**

## 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 (updated Oct, 2015).

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

[http://www.cyndislist.com/African American/](http://www.cyndislist.com/African%20American/)

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



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## Family Search

<https://familysearch.org/african-american-genealogy>

FamilySearch provides FREE access to valuable African American genealogy records.

## Afrigeneas

[www.afrigeneas.com](http://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.

Other Websites of Interest:

## National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)

<https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/>

## Records of Death and Interment at Camp Nelson, Kentucky, 1864-1865

<http://www.accessgenealogy.com/military/records-of-death-and-interment-at-camp-nelson-kentucky-1864-1865.htm>

You must register for access, but registration is free.