

African American Records

plete set, indexed by slave owner.

The Godfrey Memorial Library

<http://www.godfrey.org/>

The Godfrey Memorial library has an extraordinary collection of American genealogy and biography publications and online databases to which members can gain access from home. Membership rates run from \$35 to \$110 per year, depending on which "package" of resources you want.

The resources include digital newspapers, obituary databases, vital record indexes, military record indexes, local history publications and biographical databases. Some of the resources are particularly helpful for African American research, including digital reproductions of six major 19th-century African American newspapers and the African American Biographical Database, which includes profiles and full-text sketches telling the story of both famous and not-so-famous Black Americans' lives.

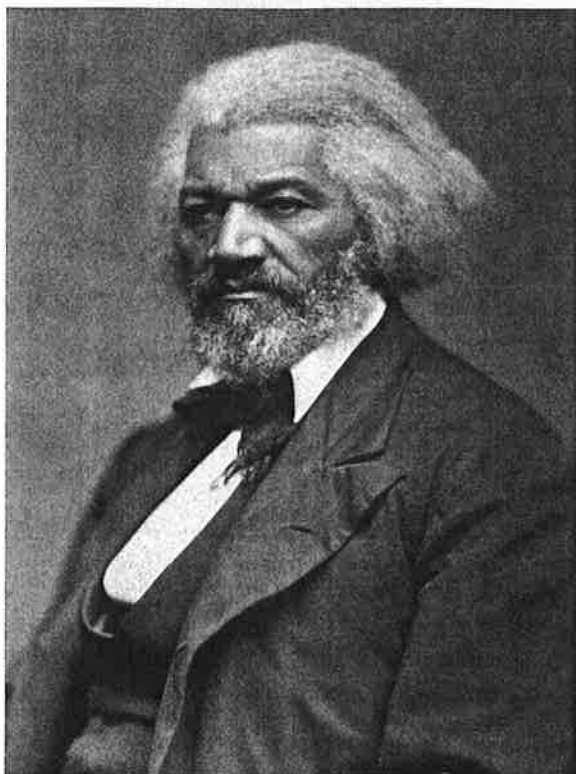
The Freedmen's Bureau

One very special and valuable set of records for African Americans is the records of the Freedmen's Bureau, a governmental agency charged with the responsibility of providing relief and education to freed slaves following emancipation, as well as to supervise abandoned and confiscated property. The Freedmen's Bureau provided tangible assistance, such as food, clothing and medicine, administered refugee camps and hospitals, founded schools, negotiated labor contracts and helped former slaves appearing in court.

Several websites offer access to some of the Freedmen's Bureau records, but not one is comprehensive, as the records are voluminous. The largest site I've found is the Freedmen's Bureau Online, <http://freedmensbureau.com/>. This site makes transcripts of records, such as court cases involving freedmen, labor contracts, marriage registers, reports of indigent

freedmen and bank records freely available online. There is no search engine on the site, so you have to go to the page for the relevant state, and then search the page using your browser's word search function.

Several excellent descriptions of the Freedmen's Bureau records can be found on the website of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). This link, www.archives.gov/publications



Frederick Douglass, publisher of the North Star newspaper, which is available through the Godfrey Memorial Library.

</ref-info-papers/108/index.html>, will take you to one of them (and includes links to the others).

The Freedman's Bank

Officially named the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company, the Freedman's Bank was created to assist newly freed slaves during and after the Civil War. It was founded in 1865 and collapsed in 1874 due to fraud and mismanagement. However, during its operation, the bank created a series of records that are invaluable to the genealogist researching black Americans in the Civil War period. The bank's registers of signatures

of depositors collected a wide range of information, including depositors' name, age, place of birth, residence, occupation, names of parents, spouse, children, brothers and sisters, and in some cases, the names of former slave owners.

Ancestry.com has scanned and indexed the bank depositor records, so once you find a relevant entry, you can see the actual register with the handwritten information and the depositor's signature.

If you find your ancestor's name among the depositors, the information in the register will help you make the jump to the pre-Civil War era. If the register also names your ancestor's former owner, you will have the one crucial piece of information you need to access a wide variety of earlier records.

CIVIL WAR RECORDS

As a great many African Americans served in the US Civil War, you may wish to learn more about your ancestors' service. The Civil War Soldiers & Sailors System, at www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/, is the best site I've found for identifying a soldier's service in the Civil War with its database of information on about 3.5 million soldiers (from both sides of the conflict) taken from the General Index Cards in the Compiled Military Service Records at NARA.

The information provided in the database includes the soldier's name, his rank at the time of enlistment, the unit with which he served, the date he left the service and his rank at that time. You can then learn more about the regiment, including the battles in which its members participated, and get a list of all the soldiers who served in the unit.

The site provides instructions for how to order copies of soldiers' original service and pension records from NARA. Pension records are especially helpful, as they often include a great deal of personal information about the

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