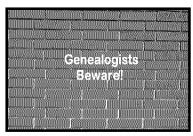
Making the Case for Newspaper Research

Brick walls. Everyone who has spent a decent amount of time in the pursuit of their ancestors has accumulated a few of them. These pesky barriers stymie even the most skilled researchers, and more often than not, require a tiny piece of information hidden in a primary source



document tucked neatly away in the remote recesses of an archive that will not become microfilmed or digi-

tized for another generation. However, we can be thankful that the solution to a particular research challenge seldom resides in a single document.

After nearly twenty-five years of conducting African American research, I am thoroughly convinced that newspapers hold the key to genealogical success. They represent one of the few sources where the daily activities of black communities, both large and small, are documented. These communities are full of former slaves, USCT soldiers, and

scores of ordinary folks—our collective ancestors!

beginning genealogy Anv worth anything will tell the reader that it is imperative to locate every possible record on your ancestors; you just never know where the key piece of information will be found. Plus, it is often the case in genealogical research that it is the careful analysis of an accumulation of source documents that ultimately yields the answers we seek. However, in my travels around the country, both physically and on the internet, I haven't come across many people that profess they are independently wealthy. Conversely, they are agonizing over whether to purchase a particular document, say of someone in a collateral line, the primary deterrent being cost. Recently I was at a meeting of the Patricia Liddell Researchers in Chicago, and afterwards a member of the group and I discussed "prioritizing" the documents he needed so that he could purchase the ones with the most potential first. The truth of the matter is when you look at the rising cost of acquiring vital records, the impending increase in the cost of pension files, the escalating price of gasoline, and other factors associated with genealogical research,

something has to give. And as I see it, it is not a matter scaling back, but one of redirecting your efforts into newspaper research. While you wait to win the lottery, or more realistically scrape together the cash to secure a needed birth, death, or marriage record, invest your time in reading news of the communities of your ancestors in African American newspapers. Some of the potential benefits of doing so could be:

- finding an exact or nearly exact event date (birth, death, or marriage) of an ancestor, therefore enhancing the odds of a successful outcome when the eventual request for the vital record is made. Remember, some places will only search a short span of years in their index, and charge you whether they find the record or not.
- additional information on the event that will not be found on the vital record. (See the report on the death of Tom Moore on the next page.)

WYOMING

Rock Springs, Wyp.

Jan. 29 Tom Moore passed away at the family jesidence on Main street after a prolonged illness. was horn in Poanoke, Va. later going to Tennessee, thence to Ohlo and com-He is suring to Wyoming in 1890. vived by a wife and one son. services were held dn. Feb. 1 from the A. M. E. church on North street, which was largely attended by both with many beautiful, flowers covering the casket. Charles Brooks of Hanna was in flown Thursday to attend the ful neral of Tom Moore. Mrs. Ethel Ma lone of Salt Lake City is in town, having come to attend the funeral of her grandfather. Mits George H: gave a kitchen shower for Miss Estella Epps on Feb. & and the bride+to-be received many brantiful and useful gifts Mrs. R. C. Dickerson Is at home lafter her negent operation at the Wydming General hospital kind is rapidly recov-Mrs. Mattle Brown slipped and fell on the Ice and split her right arm open to the Bone and has been confined to her home several days.

A portion of the Rock Springs, Wyoming, social column in the *Chicago Defender*, February 17, 1923.

the discovery of the names and locations of immediate family members, including the married names of daughters/sisters.

Another very valuable advantage to using these papers in tracking down vital statistics data is the ability to counterbalance the time periods when vital records were not kept. There will be many cases where the newspaper will be the only source of this information. For those of us with ancestors in Virginia around beginning of the 20th century, we are well aware of the gap in the recording of birth and death records between 1896 and 1912. I can still vividly remember the sense of loss and bewilderment I felt when I first uncovered this unexpected chasm in those vital records.

The need for African American genealogists to overcome the obstacles wrought by the institution of slavery is a grim reality most have come to endure firsthand. The task of identifying the slave owner is a formidable one, and it is amplified in the case of researchers that must travel this road without any leads in the form of family legends or lore reaching back into the antebellum

period. The identifying of potential slave owners in the county of your ancestor using slave schedules and other methods, and then plowing through courthouse wills and other probate records to narrow the field, is a grueling, time consuming and expensive process. I would not recommend it to the faint of heart, or the economically challenged. Truthfully, after committing a substantial amount of energy and resources, you very well could end up short of your goal of linking your slave to his master. Once again, black newspapers may be a way of revealing the slave owner you seek by:

- printing an article that associates an ancestor with a specific white family, thus giving you a solid lead.
- actually giving the name of an owner in an obituary for a deceased former slave. This occurrence is more common than most would think.
- the publishing of a notice by an slave ancestor seeking information on family member(s) from which they were separated by

sale, or the turmoil generated by the Civil War. These announcements appeared in papers after the war and well into Reconstruction.

Information Wanted.

My son Freeman Clark, was sold by Caleb Clark to Till and Glasgow Cherry, about the year 1857 from Leadville N. O. and sent to Georgia. Any informa tion about him will be bankfully and liberally rewarded. Chark,

Care Old Dominion Steam-Ship, Co., tf. Norfolk, Va.

A former slave mother's search for a long lost son in the *Peoples Advocate*, January 3, 1880.

In the guest to identify the slave owner, another resource that has proved highly successful in accomplishing this difficult undertaking is military records. Many of the survivors of the Civil War, or their immediate families, at some point in time deemed it appropriate to apply for a military pension. The Bureau of Pensions set rigid standards to reduce occurrences of fraud, and in response soldiers frequently called on longtime friends from slavery days to validate their identity. These affidavits often vielded the name of the slaveholder. However, if a researcher has no evidence of military service, determining this can

be problematic, especially if the ancestor has a fairly common name or filed for the pension in a state of residence unknown to the researcher. This obstacle can possibly be overcome by locating a social column for the community of the Through it one may learn of ancestor. the ancestor being recognized for his military service, that he is a member of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) or other veteran organization, or learn he spent time in one of the military homes for disabled or aged service members.

In spring of 2006, I was working on a research project dealing with the African Americans in an all-black GAR post in Chicago. Scanning through the microfilmed images of the Defender for the year 1912, I became sidetracked when I came across a social column for the tiny town of Braidwood, I was stunned to see what I Illinois. insignificant thought to be such an community in the pages of the Defender, but very excited since it was the place all of my great-grandfathers had come in the latter part of the 19th century. read column after column it was a very moving trip through history, my personal history, as the stories of the lives of my ancestors unfolded before me. In the

February 24, 1923, issue, the third of four items in the Braidwood column reported this bit of news: "Herbert Pinnick's wife is the proud mother of a baby boy." That was my dad! He was born on February 12th. It was such fun to make copies of the announcement and share them with my father, brother, and A mainstream newspaper in Joliet, a large industrial city about twenty miles away from Braidwood, carried a column but it had not recounted the event, and there are no existing extant) Braidwood papers covering that time period.

Black newspapers are great for providing migration clues. Our ancestors constantly returning to hometowns and other locations where family and friends resided; most of the time it was for friendly visits, but frequently it was due to notification of illness or death. In the numerous social columns of the West Virginia coal mining towns filling the pages of the McDowell Times, you find talk of folks returning to Virginia and North Carolina on a frequent basis for both business and pleasure. For coal miner Sherman Finney of Keystone, West Virginia, it was balancing of old and new that kept him in

Locals

Miss Alberta Robinson return ed Sunday from a two weeks trip to Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio.

Dr. G. N. Marshall left the city Sunday night for Wheeling to attend the annual session of the K. of P.

Hon. B. Hampton Gray was in Keystone Wednesday conferring with his friends.

Miss Evelyn Simpson, who was operated on for apendecitis at the Lomax Hopital is doing nicely.

Sherman Finney returned Saturday from his Henry county farm where he has been looking after his crops and cattle since July 2nd. He reports crops in splendid condition in Henry and Franklin counties.

In the *McDowell Times*, Sherman Finney was discovered to be both a Virginia farmer and West Virginia coal miner. (August 7, 1914)

motion, as can be seen in the Locals column of the *Times* on August 7, 1914. P. D. Thomas in reporting the Racine news for the August 13th, 1892, edition of the *Wisconsin Afro-American* remarked that "Racine is receiving quite an addition to her colored population. Mr. and Mrs. Scott, of Chicago, came recently, and many others from the state of Kentucky."

I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to address the topic of obituaries in more depth. For inexperienced researchers it is the only time they use newspapers of any type. To some degree their zeal is understandable, for if one were to locate a lengthy obituary it can do some serious damage to that And, it is often through brick wall. obituaries that we are reminded that our ancestors were evewitnesses to history, encountering such renown figures as Ulysses Grant, Frederick Douglass, and Abraham Lincoln. Tony Burroughs, a prominent Chicago-based genealogist, in his publication Black Roots has done an excellent job of outlining a five point strategy for finding African American obituaries in the chapter, Going to the Library.

African American newspapers are a wonderful way to broaden, or jumpstart, your research!

Chicago Defender, December 7, 1929

Woman Who Knew Abe Lincoln Dies

Mrs. Sarah Campbell, mother of Mrs. Mary E. Taylor, died Wednesday at the home of her daughter and son-in-law, A. J. Taylor, 4152 Indiana Ave. She was ill two months. Funeral services were held Saturday at St. Elizabeth's Catholic church. A large number of admiring friends were in attendance. Interment in Holy Sepulchre cemetery.

Mrs. Campbell was born in St. Mary's county, Maryland. During her early life she came in contact with Abraham Lincoln while a slave on the plantation of George Broome in St. Mary's county, and always talked of the meals she served the president.

Fighteen: years ago she and her husband, now deceased, came to Chicago and make their home with the Taylors. She was the mother of 17 children, seven of whom survive her. They are Mrs. Mary Taylor, Chicago; Mrs. Nannie Barnes, Philadelphia; Mrs. Lessie Briscoe, Chicago; Mrs. Jennie Allen, Chicago; Mrs. Ruth Briscoe, Philadelphia, and Ignatus and James Campbell, Philadelphia. She had a host of grandchidren and great-grandchildren, five son-in-laws and one daughter-in-law. Mrs. Allen and Mrs. Taylor nursed their mother during her illness.

Note: Obituaries recounting a meeting with Lincoln are not uncommon for slaves with Maryland, District of Columbia, and Virginia places of birth, free people of color living in Illinois during the 1850s, and United States Colored Troops veterans.