Linking YOU to
Databases That May Enhance Your Genealogy Research
Clayton Library Center for Genealogical Research
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Enslaved: Peoples of the Historical Slave Trade
by Rodney Sam
Enslaved: Peoples of the Historical Slave Trade, also known as Enslaved.org is a digital repository of records relating to enslaved persons. These records are gathered from university archives, libraries, and state archives from all over the United States and the world. It successfully launched in 2021, and the goal of the project is to reconstruct the lives of enslaved people into a biographical index useful to historians interested in learning about the history of slavery. Enslaved.org is also useful to African American genealogists looking to piece together the fragmented lives of their enslaved ancestors. The database is searchable by place, ship name, people, social status, and year range.

For example, if I wanted to search for information on a particular person in a particular place, Enslaved.org will search for all references to that person in each of the digital archives and provide brief biographical information in results that could mention anything from age, color, ethnic identity, slave owner, place of birth, and even occupations. Sources used to abstract information about this person come from a search of census enumerations (registers of slaves), emancipation, deeds, wills, newspapers, ship manifests, and runaway ads. Sometimes people will appear across multiple sources that may be unknown to a researcher, which will be very helpful in uncovering information about the origins of an ancestor.

Currently, Enslaved.org includes 633,788 records on over 400,000 people. There is a chart on the website, where data is kept on what percentages of enslaved people belong to which ethnic group or how many of the records include wills and inventories. The Clayton Library Center for Genealogical Research has hundreds of books in our collection relating to the history of African Americans in slavery. Some of those books include published abstracts of names of enslaved people gathered from wills and deeds of sale. We have histories about African Americans in different places and their involvement in historical events that could supplement the rich storehouse of information included within Enslaved.org. Clayton Library's microfilm collection includes sets like “Records of the Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations from the Revolution through the Civil War”, which contains deeds, wills, inventories, and correspondence relating to slavery in the Southern United States valuable to any African American genealogist looking to find information regarding their enslaved ancestors.

Learning about our family history is more than just gathering names, dates, and places. Family history involves learning about the historical events that affected the lives of our ancestors. Learning about the history of slavery allows you to place your ancestors within context to understand their world and ourselves. If you want to learn more about the Enslaved project, check out Enslaved.org and this article published in Smithsonian magazine: Who Were America’s Enslaved? A New Database Humanizes the Names Behind the Numbers. If you have data about the historical slave trade, know of any other data-sets that Enslaved.org should include, and, or have questions about the project, you can email them at enslaved.org@gmail.com. They are open to discussing all projects, data types, and contributions.

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Exploring Databases

The Houston Public Library subscribes to nearly 150 online databases. Many of these are NOT located in the “Genealogy Category” listed on the Resources by Category page of
It is our goal by reviewing some of these non-genealogy databases that your research will be expanded, you will discover new sources, understand the history your ancestors were part of, and offer background information that will help you write your family story.

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**Universal Class**
by Mitch Clendening

If video learning appeals to you, HPL makes available more than 500 online courses in a premium resource called *Universal Class*. The Universal Class can be found on the *Leisure and Do-It-Yourself Resources* category page of the HPL website.

Normally only available with a paid subscription, this valuable instruction is available for free to all HPL MYLink card holders age 13 and older at home or in an HPL location, when open. You must create an account on *Universal Class* using your HPL MYLink card number and a password.

While *Universal Class* mainly features academic and trade skill courses, there are quite a few that should appeal to genealogists and family history researchers. With titles such as "Genealogy 101," "Basic Research Skills," and "Freelance Writing," family researchers have a lot to choose from. The course "Genealogy 101" is comprised of thirteen lessons. They range from Lesson 1: Introduction to Genealogy to Lessons 5-7: Official Records (Parts 1-3). There are also lessons on other topics, such as looking for clues, research organization, and writing a family history.

Many courses offer a choice between earning Continuing Education credits through classwork and peer interaction, or a video-only path with no certificate or grading. The courses are self-paced, and usually consist of five or more lessons. For example, the "Genealogy 101" course contains nine (9) hours of video instruction and delivers 0.9 Continuing Education Units (CEUs) when completed. Several history courses are also offered, if you need to brush up on your knowledge of an event or era, or if you need an introduction to a subject. There are courses on the major American wars, from the Revolution to the Gulf War. There is even a course covering the Salem Witch Trials. Courses on photography and writing skills can also help you in your genealogical pursuits.

Universal Class has something for everyone in this time of online and at home learning. **Courses range through the topics of:**

- Business
- Computer Training
- Crafts & Hobbies
- History
- Homeschooling
- How To / Do It Yourself
- Office Skills
- Personal Development
- Pet and Animal Care
- Self-Help
When you’re ready to dig deep into understanding a record and the forces that moved your ancestor into a particular place at a certain time – it’s time to use JSTOR. This library-subscription database provides access to more than 12 million academic journal articles, books, and primary sources. JSTOR is available to all HPL MYLink card holders remotely or within an HPL location, when open.

You can hunt for articles by performing either a general search or an advanced search. Most of the time you will want to combine a geographic term with a subject term, such as Illinois settlers or Mexico land grants. Try using broad terms, such as Midwest, and more specific terms, like Morgan County Ohio, and compare the results. Similarly to searching in a genealogy database, you may have to try variations on your search terms to find what you’re looking for.

You can also browse JSTOR’s holdings by subject, title, or publisher. If you browse by subject, you’ll see an alphabetical list of subjects, such as African American Studies. Click on it to view lists of journals and books on that subject available on JSTOR. In this example the results include the journals The African American Review and The Journal of African American History, as well as the multi-volume book series The Black Worker: From Colonial Times to the Present. Unfortunately, only a portion of the books on JSTOR are accessible with the library’s subscription. Look for the phrase “Open Access” next to a book title; this will indicate you can view the book online.

Hopefully, you will find an article that will illuminate your ancestors’ lives, whether it’s insight into their migration, profession, or cultural practices. When you find an article or book you like, you can download and save a PDF version with just a few clicks. With the availability of these free tools, you can get started sharing your family’s story.

**Obituaries: The Last Announcement**

by Irene B Walters

An obituary or death notice may be the last mention of your relative that you will find within the course of their life. Finding these biographical write-ups of your ancestors can lead to a fuller picture of them in your heart and mind, or it may only give you just one more tiny piece of the puzzle that was their lives.

A death notice usually gives just the bare minimum of information about a person’s death. Such as this one from my 3x great grandfather John Johnson: “The funeral of John Johnson was held at his home in Lyonsdale, Wednesday.” This death notice was from a
February 21, 1889 newspaper, so I can determine that his funeral was most likely on Wednesday, February 20, so he probably died around February 18th or 19th, 1889.

An obituary usually is longer and gives more information to help those genealogically inclined. No matter the amount of information on an individual you might already have, these write-ups on them often provide additional clues to their lives beyond the date of death.

Other information found in an obituary about the deceased can include: dates and places of birth, occupations, religious affiliations, name of cemetery, date and place of the funeral and burial, names of the towns lived, how long they lived in each location, information on immigration or naturalization. You might get relatives' information, such as their spouse(s) along with the age of spouse at death and how long ago that was, or names of children, where they lived, and their position in the family’s birth order, parents’ names, siblings names, along with the names of grandchildren, if there are only a few at the person’s time of death. There might be details on the longevity of parents, grandparents, and a count of descendants, by generation. Military service confirmation can also often be found along with illnesses or injuries sustained during service. Details on other illnesses your relative endured may also be described or inferred from a mention of a place donations can be sent are included. Newer obituaries may include one or more pictures of the deceased. Sometimes the picture is an older, from a happy event in their life, their wedding, or high school senior picture, or it might be of them within the last years of their life. Few obituaries will reveal all this information, but the worst ones usually still give you more than a death notice will.

Many death notices and obituaries can be found electronically these days, so let’s explore where to look for these last announcements. Historically, obituaries and death notices were found in the newspaper that covered the locality your relative lived in. The first place to start is to look for newspapers from the locality and time of the death that have been digitized and are available to search online.

Some of these newspapers are available as databases your library subscribes to, some are:

- 9th Century U.S. Newspapers Digital Archive
- Atlanta Daily World Historical Archive
- Chicago Defender Historical Archive
- Dallas Morning News Historical Archive 1885-1977
- Houston Chronicle Historical Archive 1901-2017
- The New York Times Historical Archive

All of the above newspaper databases are available through the Houston Public Library’s Newspapers Resources page.

Other digitized historic newspapers can be found on websites that are free to search by anyone, such as:

- Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers
- The Portal to Texas History
- Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection
- NYS Historic Newspapers
Some state newspaper collections are either behind a paywall or are restricted in some way to state residents like:

- The Archive of Wisconsin Newspapers

Many other historic newspapers are digitized and available through commercial databases that you would pay for access to, such as:

- Newspapers.com by Ancestry
- Genealogy Bank
- Newspaper Archive

A great place to check to see, if the newspaper for your ancestor’s locality has been digitized and where it can be found, is the Ancestor Hunt’s Newspaper Links page. The author of the Ancestor Hunt blog has assembled information on thousands of digital newspapers across America and brought it together with links to show you where to find the digitized versions of these newspapers, whether it is through paid or free access. If you cannot find a digital version of your ancestors’ newspaper, then try contacting the local library to see who has either microfilm or paper copies of the newspaper that you can search for an obituary. The local library, historical society, or genealogical society might have an obituary service they offer, where they can assist in finding the obituary.

Once you have access to a local newspaper, start searching for the obituary or death notice of your ancestor. If your ancestor was named Joseph Reuben Smith for example you may find his obituary writing his name as; Joseph Reuben Smith, Joseph R. Smith, Joseph Smith, Reuben Smith, J.R. Smith, or just Mr. Smith. His wife Mary Ann may be found using her name or as Mrs. Joseph Reuben Smith or its variants. I’ve seen many women’s records that never actually give her first name. Digitally, you will want to try searching for all these variants of the name and try limiting your date range searched to a month on either side of the death if you have the exact date of death. If you do not have the exact date of death, then try to limit your search with as narrow a time frame as you can, the year of death up to the decade after you last find them in the census records.

Also, printed materials like newspapers have been digitized and made searchable using a process called Optical Character Recognition or OCR. Due to the nature of newspapers, the OCRing that is done on them does not always end up with a good rendering of the text, so you may still have to read through the images like you were reading through microfilm to find the information. My John Johnson’s death notice from above is rendered through OCR as: “Tba funeral of John Johnson was held at bis borne in Lyonsdale, Wedoedsdy.” Luckily in this case his name was read by OCR perfectly. If you are having to search the actual paper on microfilm or in paper, then the same narrowing down applies. Though I would start with the week of death to two weeks afterwards if you have the exact date, and possibly searching the whole year if you only have the year of death. If you do not have the year of death and the paper has not been digitized, then work on other records to try to pin down the year of death. Otherwise, you are in for a lot of old news reading. As you search old newspapers you will notice that many of them published obituaries near each other in the paper. Sometimes they are always on page three (3), for example, or in a section called “Obituaries” or “Deaths,” or “Death Notices.” Often, your ancestor’s death may be in multiple places in an issue. It might be on the “Obituaries” page and may have just a notice or a full write up in the local column as well. Local “gossip” columns may have information on who went to a particular funeral, which can lead you to additional relatives, or point you to a different town or county in which your relatives full obituary might be found, as people go to funerals in that
Occasionally, an obituary was repeated in the next issue of the paper, if the funeral hadn't happened when the first issue came out.

**Another place to look electronically for more recent relatives' obituaries** is the website of the funeral home that took care of the funeral arrangements. Most funeral homes today have a website that at least lists the upcoming funerals they are handling. Most give access to obituaries for these funerals and many of the businesses have been doing this for years. Scanlon Funeral Home in Croghan, Lewis County, New York has been in business for over 56 years, and has offered online obituaries since at least December 2011. It appears that you can find all the obituaries Scanlon Funeral Home put online by searching their website. I have personally found other funeral home obituaries that extend back to the early 1990’s. This appears to be the earliest time period to find online funeral home obituaries for as, home computers entered the market in 1977, became common during the 1980s, Windows 1.0 was released in 1985 and the World Wide Web (WWW) started in 1989. So, before 1990 more people would be looking in a physical newspaper for an obituary than online. Many of these online funeral home obituaries can also be found in a local newspaper up until the last few years.

**Obituaries have also been indexed or abstracted by genealogists** for a long time. These indexes and abstracts can be found in databases or books. Some of the databases where you can search obituaries for ancestral connections are:

- [Legacy.com](https://www.legacy.com) (Obituaries connected to funeral home websites)
- [Tributes.com](https://www.tributes.com) (Obituaries connected to funeral home websites)
- [Obituary Depot](https://www.obituarydepot.com) (A volunteer Regional Obituary Indexing Project, started in 1999)
- [The Ancestor Hunt](https://www.ancestorhunt.com) (Links to obituaries/obituary indexes by state or Canadian province)
- [Obituary Central](http://www.obituary-central.org) (In their words: “The headquarters for finding obituaries and performing cemetery searches”)


Ancestry.com and Ancestry Library Edition have over 1,700 databases devoted to obituaries. Along with the **Obituary Daily Times database** above there are state specific listings and “U.S., Newspapers.com Obituary Index, 1800’s-current” to help you determine if a Newspapers.com subscription will help you find your relatives' obituaries. A keyword search in the Ancestry Card Catalog for “obituaries” will pull up most of these databases. A second search of “obituary” will pull up about 100 more. To find books a library owns that abstract obituaries, a keyword search in the online catalog for “obituaries” and a second search of “obituary” will pull up lists of titles. Adding the state, you are looking for will help narrow down your search. Here at the Clayton Library we have around 800 books that abstract or index obituaries. These books cover many different time periods and places, like the Fulton County (KY) Genealogical Society, title “Obituaries: [years]” whose volumes cover 1992-1997 or the “Aberdeen obituaries, 1748-1854” by Frances McDonnell, which abstracts Aberdeen Scotland obituaries.

If you need help in narrowing down a death date, a newspaper, or a funeral home to search for these records, please call Clayton Library **832-393-2600**, we are glad to help.
Data Axle Reference Solutions formerly known as: Reference USA
by Steven Bychowski

Data Axle Reference includes present-day residential listings through its “U.S. Standard Whitepages” and “U.S. Consumers/Lifestyles” databases, as well as business listings for current and historical businesses dating back to 1997. There are both an “In Library” version of the database as well as a “Remote Users” version (to which, you can connect from home with a HPL MYLink library card). There is no difference between the two versions other than the link through which they are accessed.

Genealogists might want to use this database, if they are trying to determine the whereabouts of present-day people. Perhaps you have read a will or an obituary that mentions the heirs of the deceased, and you are trying to determine if any of the heirs are still living (and if so, where). Data Axle Reference allows users to search residential listings by city or state. Information provided from the database typically includes the name and address of the resident, but could also possibly include a telephone number or even the age or birth date of the resident.

As examples, a search for the last name Smith in the “U.S. Standard Whitepages” database, narrowed down to the city of Houston, TX, pulls up 5,763 entries (which can conveniently be sorted alphabetically by first name, or geographically by zip code). A similar search in the “U.S. Consumers/Lifestyles” database pulls up 17,903 results organized the same way. A search in the “U.S. Businesses” database for the Houston Chronicle shows 4 entries, including the company’s location information, industry profile, business demographics, and management directory.

Clayton Library invites you to explore these resources in your family history research. For help with the database contact a Clayton Library staff member.