The Freedmen’s Bureau Preservation Project

By Bill Tresenriter
Reference Assistant

President Clinton on November 6, 2000, signed into law the Freedmen’s Bureau Records Preservation Act of 2000 (Presented in the 106th Congress H.R. 5157 and now Public Law 106-444). The Act reads:

“The Archivist shall preserve the records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, commonly referred to as the ‘Freedmen’s Bureau’, by using—

(1) microfilm technology for preservation of the documents comprising these records so that they can be maintained for future generations; and

(2) the results of the pilot project with the University of Florida to create future partnerships with Howard University and other institutions for the purposes of indexing these records and making them more easily accessible to the public, including historians, genealogists, and students, and for any other purposes determined by the Archivist.”

There were appropriations authorized to carry out the Act in the amount totaling 3 million dollars for fiscal years 2001 through 2005.

The passing of this Act will preserve some of the most valuable records of Blacks from the time of the Civil War through the Reconstruction and will be available on microfilm at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). These are the records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. This is a five-year project to prepare, preserve, duplicate, and publish these records. These records help document the social and economic experiences of Black individuals and communities during the mid-1800s.

The Freedmen’s Bureau was established March 3, 1865, as part of the War Department, who provided assistance to help make the transition from slavery to freed people by the issuance of food, clothing, medicine, education, legalizing marriages, supervising labor contracts between the freedmen and planters, and to secure back pay, bounty payments, and pensions to those who served in the military or to their heirs.

Many of the records contain registers that may provide names of individuals and family members; birth, marriage, and death information; the names of the last slave owner; places of residence; and occupations. The majority of the pre-Bureau (Continued on page 2)
records are intermixed among the Freedmen’s Bureau field office records. (Prologue, v.39 no.2, Summer 2007, p.58).

The Freedmen’s Bureau marriage registers, certificates, and licenses can provide such information as the date of marriage, the minister who performed the ceremony, previous marriages, number of children from these marriages, or provide documentation of long-standing relationships.

Some of the registers and records are: applications of individual freedmen and families, who received rations and labor contract agreements, contracts of indentures, freedmen court records, freedmen hospital registers, and school reports. Also within these records the researcher can learn the reasons for the black economic condition, the federal government actions to prevent starvation and poverty post Civil War, free labor policies, and efforts to reconstruct the South.

The Act will alleviate such problems as:
Researchers having to go to Washington to view the records
The original records becoming more fragile from frequent handling
Lack of name indexes causing extensive hours viewing records that may or may not contain information on a given ancestor.

The time period covered for most of these surviving records are the last days of the Civil War to the end of the bureau in 1872.

Check out the April issue for more info on the Freedman’s Bureau


“H.R. 5157, 106th Congress, 2nd Session, to amend title 44, United States Code, to ensure preservation of the records of the Freemen’s Bureau.” http://www.freedmensbureau.com/hr%205157.htm

Rebecca K. Sharp. “Their...Bedding is wet Their floors are damp.” Prologue, v.39 no.2 (Summer 2007)


Harry N. Keeling, Ph.D., Department of Systems and Computer Science, Howard University


“Freedmen’s Bureau Records Preservation Act Signed into Law” (The Genealogist, v.41 no.2, (June 2001)


NARA Staff. National Archives and Records Administration, Kansas City, MO. (December 2009)

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Questions? You can email us or call (816) 252-7228!

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John and our guest speakers will be talking about passenger lists and other records that document the passage to America. Topics will cover Passenger Arrival Records, 1820-1957, Passenger Arrivals 1825-1957 Advanced Problem Solving, and The Seventeen Million Stories of Ellis Island.

Register early! Registration $65.00 (payment made between February 1st-28th). Cash, check, or charge. Optional catered lunch $8.00 Call 816-252-7228.

DISCOVERY CLUB!

Discovery Club is a education, creative, and fun program geared to children ages 7-12.

Upcoming programs include:

February: HARD TIMES
February 10: What we learned to live with out in WWII.
February 24: Dear Mrs. Roosevelt...Letters to the First Lady

March: THE NEW FRONTIER
March 10: Then: To the Moon, To the Moon!
March 24: Now: To Mars and Beyond!

Our Club Meetings are held on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month at 3:00 PM (unless otherwise noted).

Reservations are required! Call Suzanne if you have any questions: 816-252-7228.

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Spence Lowry Family History
http://spence-lowry.blogspot.com
A blog to connect the dots on my tree with solid lines! Researching my African American genealogy in Pasquotank and Camden counties of North Carolina.

Researching African-American Family History
Despite the special difficulties involved in tracing African-American roots back to the time of slavery, there are some free, online resources available that can be very useful. Information can be found on both slaves and slave owners.

Forefathers Traces Tours Blog
http://blog.polishorigins.com
Read about adventures experienced by Polish ancestry travelers and watch pictures from their Forefathers Traces Tours to Poland!

Northern New York Historic Newspapers
http://news.nnyln.net
Northern New York Historic Newspapers contains more than 1.8 million searchable, full text, online newspaper pages (46 titles) published in Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Lewis, Jefferson, St. Lawrence, and Oswego counties. Use of the site is free.

English Family History Research
http://englishfamilyhistory.blogspot.com
Hints, tips and findings from a professional researcher specializing in the English counties of Devon, Cornwall and Somerset.

The Becker Collection
http://idesweb.bc.edu/becker/
Eyewitness drawings from over a dozen different artists that chronicle both the Civil War and life in the mid- to late-19th century.

Periodically Speaking
Charlotte McIntosh
Reference Assistant

Counting Periodically…every ten years.

In March, 120 million questionnaires will be delivered to residential addresses in the United States. Where did they get the actual residential addresses? I am glad you asked. In the Spring of 2009, Census Bureau workers walked every street in the nation to match residential addresses with lists provided by the U.S. Postal Service and local governments. Well, now you know what this mass mailing is all about…the 2010 census.

How did I acquire all this knowledge (and so much more I have not shared with you)? I read it in a periodical! Actually, the September/October and November/December 2009 issues of the AAHGS News (The Bi-Monthly Newsletter of the Afro-American Historical & Genealogical Society) featured two articles on preparations by the Census Bureau. Did you know the Census Bureau will hire approximately 1.4 million people to help conduct the 2010 census?

People in the know read the genealogy periodicals provided by the Midwest Genealogy Center! Stand up and be counted!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>CLASS</th>
<th>TEACHER</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday 1 March</td>
<td>10:00 am</td>
<td>Tax Help for Seniors (Free from AARP)</td>
<td>AARP Tax-Aid Representatives</td>
<td>AARP Tax-Aide representatives will be at the library to assist seniors with moderate incomes with tax questions and tax return preparation. Please contact the branch for an appointment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 2 March</td>
<td>10:00 am</td>
<td>State and Special Census</td>
<td>Gary Toms</td>
<td>Explore the range of possibilities beyond the Federal population schedules. (Intermediate level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 2 March</td>
<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td>Beginning Genealogy</td>
<td>Ellen Miller</td>
<td>Learn the fundamentals of beginning a genealogical research project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 4 March</td>
<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td>Thomas Garrett, Stationmaster on the Eastern Branch of the Underground Railroad</td>
<td>Midwest Genealogy Center</td>
<td>Thomas Garrett, one of Harriet Tubman’s closest friends and allies, aided more than 2,700 slaves to freedom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 6 March</td>
<td>1:00 pm</td>
<td>Dear Jane Quilt Group</td>
<td>Midwest Genealogy Center</td>
<td>Dear Jane’s quilt is the ‘mother of all quilts.’ We invite quilters and non-quilters to join us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 11 March</td>
<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td>Publish Your Genealogy Book</td>
<td>Midwest Genealogy Center</td>
<td>Learn the ins and outs of publishing your research for family, friends and others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday &amp; Sunday 13 March 14 March</td>
<td>Saturday 9:00 am, Sunday 1:00 pm</td>
<td>They’re Coming to America: Immigration Records</td>
<td>Midwest Genealogy Center</td>
<td>They came to America; for freedom, for land, for self-determination. Speakers will be talking about passenger lists and other records about the passage to America. See the article in this month’s News Bytes for more info!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 18 March</td>
<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td>When the Internet Census Indices Fail</td>
<td>Midwest Genealogy Center</td>
<td>Websites have indexed the census records, but there are errors. We will discuss working with the &quot;old-fashioned&quot; census indices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 23 March</td>
<td>10:00 am</td>
<td>Writer’s Block</td>
<td>Angela McComas</td>
<td>This group will discuss the writing and publishing process with guest speakers and each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 25 March</td>
<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td>Ten Year Count: Census Research</td>
<td>Midwest Genealogy Center</td>
<td>This class will explore the United States Federal Census from its beginning in the Constitution to the 1930 census, including the process, what information was gathered, and common errors in reading and interpreting data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday 26 March</td>
<td>9:30 am</td>
<td>Beginning Genealogy</td>
<td>Tiffany Perkins</td>
<td>Learn the fundamentals of beginning a genealogical research project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 30 March</td>
<td>10:00 am</td>
<td>Storing and Protecting Family Heirlooms</td>
<td>Midwest Genealogy Center</td>
<td>This class will teach you simple, inexpensive ways to preserve your family heirlooms. Please feel free to bring one (one only please) family heirloom for a special archival show and tell.</td>
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To register, please call 816-252-7228