

The 1870 U.S. Census: Tracing Emancipated Families

By Andre Kearns

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My ancestors are responsible for the greatest act of collective parenting the world has ever seen
– Barry Jenkins, academy award winning film director

Slavery split families apart. Emancipation created new families. The 1870 census is the first in which formerly enslaved people appear. These emancipated households often represent blended families. Research is required to understand how household members connect with one another. I will share how I analyzed the 1870 census for my formerly enslaved second great grandmother Caroline, and used records and DNA to uncover her family story.

Session Outline

- Introduce Caroline Henderson Harvell, my second great grandmother
- Introduce significance of the 1870 census for emancipated families
- Ask what can we uncover about her emancipated family of 8 in the 1870 census for Mecklenburg County, North Carolina
- Show how to analyze the 1870 census looking for: inferred relationships, age and race, how children are grouped, where parents were born, and neighboring households
- Present research approach to revealing relationships within 1870 emancipated households by examining: slave records, marriage records, death records, subsequent census records
- Apply the research to each member of Caroline's 1870 household and reveal how they connect with one another
- Walk through each member of Caroline's 1870 household to reveal: Head of house Jesse Henderson was Caroline's stepfather. His wife Isabella was her mother. They married in 1869, blending their families. Jesse brought three children. Isabella brought three children including Caroline, half-sister to Isabella's other children.
- Show how DNA supports relationships revealed through this research
- Close with Harvell Family Reunion, bringing the family together

Presentation content will be accessible to beginners who are researching African American families

Resources

- Ancestry: www.ancestry.com
- Familysearch: www.familysearch.org

- 1870 US Federal Census on Ancestry
- US Census Slave Schedules on Ancestry
- US Wills and Probates on Ancestry and FamilySearch
- US Marriage Records on Ancestry and Family Search
- US Death Records on Ancestry and Family Search

Reference and Useful Links. DNA test services and tools

- AncestryDNA: www.dna.ancestry.com
- 23andMe: www.23andme.com
- FamilyTreeDNA: www.familytreedna.com

About the Presenter

Andre Kearns is a genealogist, public speaker, commentator, and writer with deep roots in the American south and a passion for discovering new ancestors and learning their stories. As an African American, he knew he descended from enslaved persons and likely slave owners, which DNA analysis helped confirm. Through his research, he also discovered ancestors who were free people of color long before the Civil War. Andre has been a genealogist for fifteen years. Andre is a director at large for the National Genealogical Society and chair of its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committee. He is also a charter member of the Society of the First African Families in English America. He holds an MBA from Harvard Business School and a BA from Morehouse College. He blogs on Race, Culture, History, and Genealogy at www.medium.com under the name Andre Kearns.