

Tony Burroughs is an African American research specialist. He shows that when searching the 1870 census, one should look for their ancestor's given name. He tells how to make an effective search.

Finding African Americans



Photo courtesy of the Western History/Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library.

On the 1870 Census

by Tony Burroughs

AFRICAN AMERICAN GENEALOGY HAS A LOT OF TWISTS AND turns, challenges and brick walls. Some of these occur before researchers get to the slavery period. Genealogists with European ancestors entering the United



Photo courtesy of the Western History/Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library.

States prior to 1870 usually have little difficulty when tracing ancestors through the Federal census records to the Civil War and beyond. Of course it will take time, perseverance, and sometimes a little ingenuity.

Those with African ancestry have much more difficulties. Many can only trace their ancestors to the 1880 U.S. Census before getting stumped with the 1870 Census.

Some African American genealogists don't find their ancestors on the 1870 census and try to go from the 1880 Census to the 1860 Census Slave Schedule. This is a difficult leap of twenty years through the most tumultuous period of our nation's history, which can cause all sorts of problems.

Many genealogists are surprised to learn there were over 400,000 African Americans free before the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. About half of these were in the South. Many African American genealogists don't know if the ancestral line they are tracing was slave or free before 1863, but after searching 1870 they immediately start looking for slaves and slave owners, pre-Civil War.

In 1850 and 1860 there were two census population schedules, one for free inhabitants, and another for slave inhabitants. Unfortunately Census Slave Schedules do not list names of slaves. They only list names of slave owners and the number, age, sex and color of slaves. Researchers often search these Slave Schedules for a slave owner with the same last name as their ancestor, assuming this slave owner owned their ancestor. I know, because that's what I did twenty-five years ago and I talk with people all over the country who are still doing the same thing.

When researchers don't find a surname they're looking for, they surmise their ancestors must have moved, and then switch to researching another county. If they

do find a slave owner with the same surname as their ancestor they try to match ages on the slave schedule with those of their ancestors. If the ages don't match they come up with creative reasons why they don't, not even considering those are probably *not* their ancestors.

of African American genealogists who have struggled with, and succeeded in finding their ancestors on the 1870 Census. Each example is slightly different, but there is a common thread among each.

Nettie Nesbary. Nettie Nesbary, an African American genealogist from

The image shows a handwritten 1860 Census Slave Schedule for Halifax County, Virginia. The document is titled "Slave Schedule of Halifax County, Virginia, in the County of Halifax, on the 1st day of August 1860." It contains two columns of data, each with a header "NAMES OF SLAVE OWNERS" and "DISPOSITION". The columns are numbered 1 through 14. The entries include names of slave owners such as "Thomas L. Nesbary" and "William Nesbary", and their corresponding slave schedules with columns for "Number of Slaves", "Age", "Sex", and "Color".

An 1860 Census Slave Schedule from Halifax County Virginia showing names of slave owners and the number, age, sex and color of slaves.

It's difficult enough proving a person with the name of your ancestor *is* your ancestor, and not merely someone with the same name. In most records slaves are not even *associated* with surnames, so it becomes even harder to prove ancestry, relations, and slave owners. Trying to identify ancestors on a list of slaves with only ages and sex, and *without* any names, is an impossible task.

Genealogists need to reexamine the 1870 Census from a different perspective. Perhaps it will shed new light on the family and the possible former slave owner.

Below are several real case studies

Chicago, located her ancestors on the 1880 Census in Hinds County, Mississippi but could not locate them in the 1870 Census. She worked a nine-to-five job and couldn't get to the National Archives regularly to research the census. Like many anxious genealogists, Nettie always rushed to squeeze every minute into researching. Then in 1989 she broke down and purchased a microfilm reader from the American Genealogical Lending Library (AGLL). She was the first genealogist I knew to buy a reader. Now Nettie could search the census at her convenience, take her time, and search more carefully. Soon

afterwards she finally found her ancestors on the 1870 Census.

Nettie found her Thompson ancestors on the 1870 Census, but they were listed with the Hinton surname. She knew it was the same family because the first names and ages of three family members were the same. She said it was not all that surprising to find them listed as Hintons. Nettie was familiar with the Hinton name because she had found some of her ancestors listed on Freedmen's Bureau Labor

1870 Census - Hinds County, Mississippi²

Family 188	Hinton,Sarah	38	F	B
	Hinton,Harry	38	M	B
	Hinton,Lucinda	15	F	B
	Hinton,Susan	11	F	B
	Hinton,Dolly	9	F	B
	Hinton,Ellen	5	F	B

At first I thought Nettie was successful because she took her time. I quickly learned it was much more complex. *I was about to discover a new phenomenon in African American genealogy.* I was beginning to realize Nettie's experience had implications for all African Americans

She never located him in 1860 but saw an Underwood Bristow in Todd County in 1860. Since Underwood was an unusual first name, she wondered if this was the same person as Underwood McCoy, especially since the age he should have been in 1860 was pretty close.

While researching at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City in 1992, Cristal asked me to analyze this Underwood Bristow she found on the census. After studying the family, I realized *the age listings in the household were not in chronological order. However they were in a pattern, which indicated distinct groupings.* I theorized these were probably family groupings, *indicating three distinct families.* However, the census enumerator only recorded the surname of the head of the household. Yes, this was her Underwood McCoy, but his surname was not recorded. The census enumerator appeared to only record the surname of the head of the household in an extended family.



1860 Todd County, Kentucky³, the Bristow family age pattern may indicate distinct families.

1860 Todd County, Kentucky³ [family groups]

Family 1161	Thusey Bristow	60	F	B	1
	James Bristow	40	M	B	2
	Silvy	35	F	B	2
	Louvinnia	20	F	B	2
	Marella	16	F	B	2
	John	25	M	B	1
	J.L.	18	M	M	1
	Harrison	35	M	B	3
	Ben	9	M	B	3
	Carter	6	M	B	3
	Underwood	8	M	B	3

Contracts in Mississippi soon after the Civil War. They were working on the Hinton Plantation. She also noticed white Hintons enumerated above her Thompsons on the same 1880 Census page. Later Nettie also found marriage records of white Thompsons and Hintons intermarrying.

1880 Census - Hinds County, Mississippi¹

Family 405	Thompson,Sarah	50	B	F
	Thompson,Dolly	20	B	F
	Thompson,Ellen	16	B	F
	Thompson,Lizzie	10	B	F
	Thompson,Ida	7	B	F
	Thompson,Henry	4	B	M
	Thompson,Arthur	2	B	M

researching the 1870 census.

Cristal Simmons. Another African American genealogist, Cristal Simmons, traced her ancestors to the 1870s in Kentucky. She discovered they were free before the Civil War and began researching the 1860 Census Schedules of Free Inhabitants.

Cristal was tracking her great-great-grandfather Underwood McCoy, who lived in Todd County, Kentucky. She had traced him in census records from 1910 through 1870.

Morris Burroughs. I'd located my great-grandfather, Morris Burroughs on several records created in Chicago, which indicated he was from Spartanburg, South Carolina. However, I had not located any record with his name on it created in South Carolina. I searched for him on the 1870 Census for Spartanburg County without success. Years later, I thought I might have rushed the first time, so repeated the search, again

without success. That was six hours of negative research.

Several pieces of circumstantial evidence all indicated Morris was born in South Carolina.

- My grandfather, Asa Morris Burroughs, kept a little red book noting the names, birth-dates and ages of his ancestors. It listed his father, Morris Burroughs, being born in Spartanburg, South Carolina in 1864.
- The 1903 Cook County, Illinois death certificate for Morris Burroughs indicated he was born in South Carolina.
- The 1893 birth certificate for Morris' youngest son, Asa, indicated his father Morris was born in South Carolina.
- His eldest son Robert Burroughs' 1943 delayed birth certificate listed father Morris as being born in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

I located Morris on the 1900 Census in Chicago, Illinois, which indicated he was from South Carolina. Also living in the household were two boarders and three lodgers. One of the boarders was Anna Clemons, which provided circumstantial evidence of a possible relative.

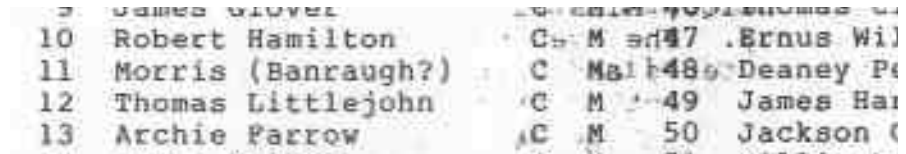
1900 Census - Cook County - Chicago⁴
Family 199

Burroughs, M(orris)	34	B	M	Head
- Mary	30	B	F	Wife
- Robert	10	B	M	Son
- Asa	7	B	M	Son
Williams, M.	48	B	F	Mother-in-law
Clemons, Anna	19	B	F	Boarder
Stevenson, B	12	B	M	Boarder
Thompson, Ellin	NR	B	F	Lodger
Thompson, Walter	23	B	M	Lodger
Thompson, Pearl	21	B	F	Lodger

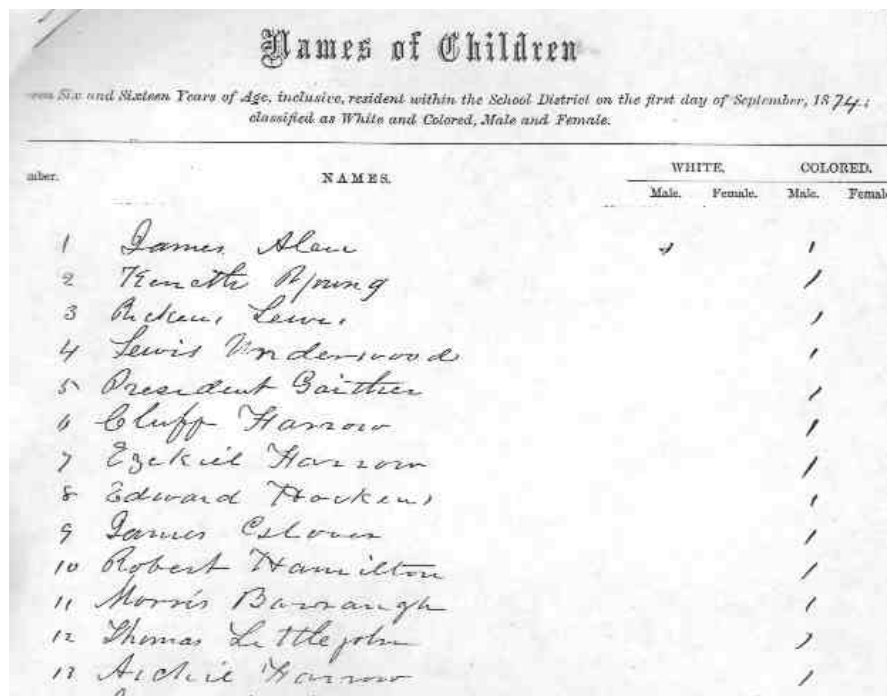
Through genealogical research I located a cousin that was a descendant of a Clemons. I traced the family backward to a 1932

Spartanburg, South Carolina Death Certificate for Charlotte Clemons whose mother was Ellen Burroughs. That death certificate was the second link between the Clemons and the Burroughs family. I theorized

Then I discovered a rare journal, only published for three years, *The Old Spartanburg District Genealogy*. It contained transcripts of original records in Spartanburg County, South Carolina. In it I located



The Old Spartanburg District Genealogy contained transcripts of the original records.



From the Spartanburg Township school record.

Ellen Burroughs was also the mother of Morris Burroughs, and Charlotte Clemons was Morris' sister. I located Ellen Burris and Charlotte Clemons on the 1880 Census.

1880 Census - Spartanburg, SC⁵

Family 195

Burris, Ellen	45	B	F	Head
Clemons, Charlotte	21	B	F	Daughter
Clemons, George	26	B	M	Son-in-law

Morris Burroughs in an 1874 school record. However, the surname was spelled "Banraugh?" The transcriber did the best he could to interpret the handwriting and placed a question mark behind it to indicate he wasn't sure of the correct spelling. I later located the original school record, (above) at the South Carolina Department of Archives &

History and proved it was Burroughs. If I had used only the index to the journal, I never would have found the Burroughs name because it was spelled wrong. This is also a weakness when researching on the Internet and some CD-ROM indexes. If you do not have the exact spelling that is on the record, you'll often miss it because some searches do not allow browsing through an index. Researchers also need to study the original records, in addition to searching indexes and internet databases.

This 1874 school record was the first record I found created in South Carolina with the name Morris Burroughs on it. I figured if Morris was in Spartanburg, South Carolina in 1874, he should be there in 1870, on the census. I thought about experiences of Nettie Nesbary and Crystal Simmons where they found names of ancestors, unlike what they'd expected. I therefore decided to search the 1870 Census a third time, in spite of my previous six hours of negative research. However, this time I'd search differently. Instead of searching for Morris Burroughs, I would search for anyone named Morris. The surname could be different than expected. I also decided not to look at the race column because I had light-skinned ancestors that were sometimes listed as white and sometimes listed as black.

In less than an hour I found him. Morris was listed with Ellen and Charlotte in 1870, but the surname was neither Burroughs nor Clemons—it was Norton. According to other census records, their ages were what they were supposed to be.

1870 Spartanburg, South Carolina⁷

Family 191	Norton, Ellen	33	F	B
	Norton, Charlotte	10	F	B
	Norton, Morris	7	M	B

I do not know why they were listed with the surname Norton. It was never mentioned in any oral history, nor have I found it in any other record. But I am now researching people named Norton. I have yet to locate Morris in 1880.

Janis Forté. I soon realized this phenomenon of different surnames on different census records was not an aberration. African American genealogist Janis Forté traced her paternal grandparents, Walton and Margaret Minor from the 1920 back through 1880 Census in Green County Alabama. She located similar first names in Green County Alabama in 1870 and wondered if it was the same family she found in 1880 but with the Knott surname. After a quick analysis I assured her it was the same family.

1880 Census - Green County, Alabama⁸

Family 57	Minor, W(alton)⁹	40	B	M
	Minor, M(argarret)	40	B	F
	Minor, M(imm)	11	B	M
	Minor, A(ttaway)	10	B	M
	Minor, C(lara)	9	B	F
	Minor, A(dam)	5	B	M
	Minor, F(rancis)	3	B	F

1870 Census - Green County, Alabama⁹

Family 429	Knott, Walton	27	M	B
	Knott, Margaret	23	F	B
	Knott, Otaway	2	M	B
	Knott, Minia	3	M	B

Rose (Vaught) Harris. Rose Vaught Harris traced her great-grandfather, William Vaught, to the 1880 Census in McMinn County, Tennessee. Then she could not locate the family in the 1870 census.

1880 Census - McMinn County, Tennessee¹¹

Family 488	Vaught, Wm	36	B	M
	Vaught, Mattie	22	B	F
	Vaught, George M.	6	B	M
	Vaught, Mary M	5	B	F

While searching in the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Rose located a book of transcribed death records for McMinn County, Tennessee. It

listed William Vaught's death on 21 August 1916. However, the listing also indicated Vaught might have been part Native American Indian. The word "Indian" was in parentheses, with a question mark after it.

Rose then read a Tennessee history that included a section on Riceville, the town in McMinn County where Rose's Vaughts lived. One sentence read, "Bill Vaught a Cherokee Indian, operated a tan yard and son Grand was an artist in making settees, tables, and chairs from Willow bark." Here was confirmation of what Rose had read in the death listing. Rose, having never heard any oral history of Native American Indians in her family tree, began to believe there was, from the evidence she was collecting.

Now knowing the date and place of death, Rose ordered a death certificate for her grandfather, William Vaught. When it arrived from the Tennessee Vital Records Office the box for race said, "part or entirely Indian." The informant on the death certificate was William's son, Garrett Hobart Vaught, Rose's father.

Rose's next step was to try to further substantiate the Indian claim. She applied to the National Archives for a search of Eastern Cherokee Applications.¹² The application was sixteen pages long, containing lots of family information.

William Vaught's application had been rejected by the Court of Claims because his mother was a slave. However, several affidavits contained in the application confirmed William Vaught had Indian ancestry. William Vaught himself stated his father was a full-blooded Indian. Another affidavit was from Daniel Wagner, the slave owner of

one of William's wife's children. Another affidavit was from John B. Vaught, a nephew to another slave owner, Joe Vaught. Both Wagner and Vaught stated William's father was called "Injun Dan."

But the affidavits said Dan's name was Daniel Shoun, not Daniel Vaught. They said his name came from the white Shoun family that had raised him from a child, whereas his children went by the surname of their slave mother, Malvina Vaught.

The affidavits also stated the Shouns and Vaughts lived in Johnson County, Tennessee—new information to Rose. She had only researched McMinn County, Tennessee. So she returned to the 1870 Census, but this time looked in Johnson County, and searched for Shouns, in addition to Vaughts. She easily located Daniel Shoun.

1870 Census - Johnson County, Tennessee¹³

Family 39	Shoun, Daniel	59	M	M
	Shoun, Melvina	40	F	B
	Shoun, Martin	19	M	M
	Shoun, Louisa	14	F	B
	Shoun, Milton	11	M	M
	Shoun, Isaac	9	M	M
	Shoun, David	5	M	M
	Shoun, Gabriel E.	1	F	M

Rose still has not located William Vaught in 1870, who was probably living in his own household. However, she is grateful for finding his father and mother.

Cheryl Gaines. The Henderson County, Kentucky ancestors of genealogist Cheryl Gaines reveal a slightly different story. Cheryl's great-aunt Mary passed down stories of Mr. E. B. Newcomb fathering children of Cheryl's great-great-grandmother, Betsey Horsley. Mr. Newcomb was white and married with three children, in addition

to fathering six children by a Black woman.

When Cheryl located her great-great-grandmother on the 1880 Census, the family was using the Horsley surname. However, when she located them on the 1870 Census, Betsey was still using the Horsley surname, but her children were listed under their father's surname, Newcomb.

1880 Henderson County, Kentucky¹⁴

Dwelling 157	Horsley, Betsey	52	M	F
Family 167	Horsley, Laura	14	B	F
	Horsley, Annie	9	B	F
	Horsley, Mamie	18 ¹⁵	M	F
	Horsley, Jim	21	M	M

1870 Henderson County, Kentucky¹⁶

Family 122	Horsley, Betsy	39	F	M
	Newcomb, Betty	16	F	M
	Newcomb, Sam	14	M	M
	Newcomb, James	12	M	M
	Newcomb, Mary	8	F	M
	Newcomb, Laura	4	F	M
	Newcomb, Alfred	2	M	M

When Cheryl's great-grandmother, Mamie married in 1881, she listed her maiden name as Newcomb, and her father's place of birth as England. There was no blank for father's name on the marriage register.¹⁷ As time passed on, some of Betsy Horsley's children continued to use the Newcomb surname, while others used the Horsley surname.

S. Char McCarbo Bah. S. Char McCarbo Bah located her Jones ancestors on the 1900 and 1880 census in Halifax County, Virginia. Her great-uncle told her they were related to the Woods family, but didn't know how they were related. Char could not locate the Jones ancestors in 1870 and began searching for first names. She located Kate and Solomon, but under the Woods surname. She suspected it was the same family and proved it when she began obtaining death certificates.

1880 Census - Halifax County, VA¹⁸

Family 231	Jones, Solomon	23
	Jones, Milly	20
	Jones, Emma	3
	Jones, James B	1
	Jones, Polly	50
	Jones, Kate	19

1870 Census - Halifax County, VA¹⁹

Family 554	Wood, Scrafford	54
	Wood, Polly	54
	Wood, Simon	26
	Wood, Jane	19
	Wood, James	18
	Wood, Lemma	14
	Wood, Solomon	13
	Wood, Kate	12

Why does this phenomenon exist? I suspect because it was only five years after the end of the Civil War. Most census enumerators probably lived in the community and knew many of the residents. They may have still associated former slaves with their former slave owners. Many of the former slaves probably still resided on the same property as when they were slaves. Once freedom came, former slaves may have used names different from the former owners but the enumerators recorded what they wanted to record, perhaps not even interviewing the former slaves. By 1880 fifteen years had passed since the Civil War and former slaves were less associated with former slave owners. They had established their own identities.

The Nettie Rule. Not all of these examples are the same, but they all have a common thread. The family has one surname on one census record, and a different surname on another census record. I think these experiences will help many other African American genealogists. To assist them, years ago, I quantified a research technique into what I call "The Nettie Rule," named for Nettie Nesbary, the first person I discovered with this phenomenon. It goes like this:

“If you locate your ancestors in 1880 but not in 1870, don’t look for the surname, look for the first name.”

I’ve found this technique also works for some European American families that live in extended households like the Bristow family in 1860 Todd County, Kentucky. Many European surnames became Anglicized, with the given names remaining the same. Obviously these situations are not limited to 1880 and 1870. ■

End Notes

1. 1880 U.S. Census, Hinds County, Mississippi, Population Schedule, Township Seven, Clinton Beat, E.D. 4, page 46, family 405; National Archives Microfilm Publication T9, reel 648.
2. 1870 U.S. Census, Hinds County, Mississippi Population Schedule, Township Seven, Clinton Post Office, page 649, family 188; National Archives Microfilm Publication M593, reel 730.
3. 1860 U.S. Census, (Free Inhabitants of) Todd County, Kentucky Population Schedule, page 836, line 12, family 1161; National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, reel 396.
4. 1900 U.S. Census, Cook County, Illinois Population Schedule, Chicago, E.D. 405, sheet 9B, line 90, family 199; National Archives Microfilm Publication T623, reel 261.
5. 1880 U.S. Census, Spartanburg County, South Carolina Population Schedule, Spartanburg Township, E.D. 136, page 17, line 21, family 195; National Archives Microfilm Publication T9, reel 1240.
6. Clemons is spelled with an “e” instead of an “o” and Burroughs is spelled Burris. Names on early census records were often spelled like they sounded, and often varied from year to year and record to record.
7. 1870 U.S. Census, Spartanburg, South Carolina Population Schedule, Spartanburg Village, page 574B, line 18, family 191; National Archives Microfilm Publication M593, reel 1508.
8. 1880 U.S. Census, Greene County, Alabama Population Schedule, family 57; National Archives Microfilm Publication T9, reel 14.
9. The first names on the original census schedules only listed an initial. Through other research Janis had done she knew the first names, which I enclose in parentheses.
10. 1870 U.S. Census, Greene County, Alabama Population Schedule, family 429; National Archives Microfilm Publication M593, reel 17.
11. 1880 U.S. Census, McMinn County, Tennessee Population Schedule, 10th Civil District, E.D. 67, page 58, line 25, family 488; National Archives Microfilm Publication T9, reel 1268.
12. National Archives Microfilm Publication M1104.
13. 1870 U.S. Census, Johnson County, Tennessee Population Schedule, page 35, line 33, family 39; National Archives Microfilm Publication M593, reel 1540.
14. 1880 U.S. Census, Henderson County, Kentucky Population Schedule, Henderson, E.D. 44, page 17, line 42, family 167; National Archives Microfilm Publication T9, reel 419.
15. It is not known why these children are not in chronological order.
16. 1870 U.S. Census, Henderson County Kentucky Population Schedule, Henderson, page 102, line 1, family 122; National Archives Microfilm Publication M593, reel 469.
17. Marriage record for W. Thos. Gaines and Mamie Newcomb, 12 January 1882, Colored Marriage Book 2, page, 273; County Clerk’s Office, Henderson, Kentucky.
18. 1880 U.S. Census, Halifax County, Virginia Population Schedule, Birch Creek District, page 24, line 43, family 231; National Archives Microfilm Publication T9, reel 1369.
19. 1870 U.S. Census, Halifax County Virginia Population Schedule, Bannister Township, page 81, line 20, family 554; National Archives Microfilm Publication M593, reel 1650.



Tony Burroughs is an internationally known, recognized leader in African American genealogy. Among his many accomplishments, he teaches at Chicago State University (since 1990), was awarded the Distinguished Service Award from the National Genealogical Society, and is the co-author of the African American Genealogical Sourcebook. He is the author of a new book, *Black Roots: A Beginners Guide to Tracing the African American Family Tree*, published by Simon & Schuster, and sure to garner much attention.