

1850 Slave Schedule

Schedule 2.—Slave Inhabitants in _____ in the County of _____ State of _____, enumerated by me, on the _____ day of _____, 1850 _____ Ass't Marshal.

	NAMES OF SLAVE OWNERS.	Number of Slaves.	DESCRIPTION.			Fugitives from the State.	Number manumitted.	Deaf & dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic.	
			Age.	Sex.	Color.				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1									1 1
2									2 2
3									3 3
4									4 4
5									5 5
6									6 6
7									7 7
8									8 8
9									9 9
10									10 10

African Americans in the Federal Censuses

African Americans were enumerated in the census as all other U.S. residents from 1870 (the first census year following the Civil War and emancipation) onward. Prior to 1870, however, the situation was far different. Although free African Americans were enumerated by name in 1850 and 1860, slaves were consigned to special, far less informative, schedules in which they were listed anonymously under the names of their owners. The only personal information provided was usually that of age, gender, and racial identity (either black or mulatto). As in the free schedules, there was a column in which certain physical or mental infirmities could be noted. In some instances, the census takers noted an occupation, usually carpenter or blacksmith, in this column. Slaves aged 100 years or more were given special treatment; their names were noted, and sometimes a short biographical sketch was included. In at least one instance, that of 1860 Hampshire County, Virginia, the names of all slaves were included on the schedules, but this happy exception may be the only instance when the instructions were not followed.

Sometimes the listings for large slaveholdings appear to take the form of family groupings, but in most cases slaves are listed from eldest to youngest with no apparent effort to portray family structure. In any event, the slave schedules themselves almost never provide conclusive evidence for the presence of a specific slave in the household or plantation of a particular slaveowner. At best, a census slave schedule can provide supporting evidence for a hypothesis derived from other sources.¹ Prior to 1850 there were no special slave schedules for the manuscript census, as slave data was recorded as part of the general population schedules. In these, only the heads of household were enumerated by name.

In the absence of any contradictory information, it might be assumed that a family of freed people enumerated in the 1870 census was living not far from its last owner, whose surname they also bore. There would, of course, be reasons to dispute both assumptions. (Knowledge of the Civil War history of a locality could come into play here; for example, such relative stability would not have existed in a Georgia county that was in the path of Sherman's march to the sea.) Even so, this assumption represents one of the more obvious exploratory lines of research, especially in the absence of any other options. The

first step in testing the hypothesis would be to search for slaveowners of the same surname in the 1860 slave schedules of the county in which the African American family resided in 1870.

Starting in 1850, another supplemental schedule, the mortality schedule, listed all deaths within a year before the regular census enumeration.² The deaths of blacks and mulattoes, both free and slave, are recorded in them, even though their names have not been included in many of the indexes to these schedules.³ The deaths of slaves were generally enumerated in four fashions: unnamed (as in the slave schedules), but perhaps with the owner identified; by first name only; by first name and surname; and by first name with the owner noted.

Notes

1. The use of the slave schedules as supporting documentation is amply demonstrated in David H. Streets, *Slave Genealogy: A Research Guide with Case Studies* (Bowie, MD: Heritage, 1986), although, not surprisingly, their use is confined to small slaveholdings.
2. See Loretto Dennis Szucs, "Research in Census Records" in *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*, Rev. ed. (Salt Lake City, UT: Ancestry, 1997).
3. A notable exception is found in Jonnie B. Arnold, *Index to 1860 Mortality Schedule of South Carolina* (Greenville, SC: the author, 1982). On the other hand, many of the indexes appearing on the National Archives microfilm publications of these schedules, as well as those published by Accelerated Indexing, should be treated with caution.

Editor's Note: This article was excerpted from *Finding Your African American Ancestors*, by David Thackery. Other sources covered in the book include: probate records; deeds and other local records; plantation records; other records of slave births and deaths; runaway slaves; The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands; The Freedman's Savings and Trust; and military records. Also included are case studies, a selection of slave narratives from a variety of states, bibliographic information, and an extensive listing of additional resources for African American research.