

The Homestead Act of 1862 FOLLOWING THE WITNESSES

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Introduction

This case study will trace the lives of four individuals that served as witnesses and also acquired land under the Homestead Act of 1862 in Livingston Parish, Louisiana.

This initial case study began by tracing my maternal great great-grandfather Peter Clark from slavery to land ownership. However, after reviewing his homestead land entry papers, I was surprised to find that some of his witnesses were also African American homesteaders. I found this racial information—which is not listed on land entry applications—by reviewing data from US Census records. The racial connection caused me to broaden my search to include information on the lives of the witnesses.

Hence, a careful study took place to examine how the lives of those African American witnesses/homesteaders interconnected by reviewing their land entry papers. In addition to the land entry applications, this presentation is also augmented with information from other supporting documents.

Why follow the witnesses?

- Opportunity to reconstruct the community
- Provide insight into how your ancestor interacted with others
- Identify direct and collateral descendants
- Expand your genealogy beyond your direct line
- Prove or disprove a theory

Case Study Questions

- Who Are the Homesteaders?
- What did they do?
- How did they know each other?
- When did they apply and acquire land?
- Who did they use as witnesses?

- Were they witnesses for each other?
- What barriers did they experience in acquiring the land?
- How long did it take them to obtain the Homestead patent?

The Research Journey

- Document oral family history
- Examine names in the family bible
- Review US Census Records - 1870, 1880, 1900

- Agriculture Census – 1880
- Review Freedmen Bureau Labor Contract - 1868
- Review Freedman’s Bank and Trust Record - 1872
- Obtain St. Helena Parish Marriage Records – 1872, 1874, 1881
 1. Hunting For Bears, comp. *Louisiana, Marriages, 1718-1925* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2004.
- Obtain Death certificate- 1909
 1. *Orleans Death Indices 1908-1917*; Volume: 146; Page: 874

- Homestead Land entry papers (Charles Baptiste, Alfred Robinson, Peter Clark, Robert Benefield)

- Civil War Invalid Pension Record – Marshall Douglass

- Create a timeline for each witness

Selected Resources:

Websites:

- National Park Service- U.S. Department of the Interior Homestead National Monument of America <http://www.nps.gov/home/historyculture/index.htm>
- Bureau of Land Management – General Land Office Records <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/>
- Louisiana State Land Office <http://www.slodms.doa.la.gov/HistoricalDocument>
- Ancestry.com – <http://www.ancestry.com>

- National Park Service – Soldiers and Sailors Database
<https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-soldiers.htm>
- The Story of a Louisiana Homesteader – Bernice Alexander Bennett -
<http://www.searchingfamilyhistory.com/louisiana-homesteader.html>

Books:

- Blassingame, John W., Black New Orleans- 1860-1880, The University of Chicago Press, 1973.
- Hair, William Ivy, Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest – Louisiana Politics 1877-1900; Louisiana State University Free Press, Baton Rouge, 1969.
- Hawkins, Kenneth, Research in the Land Entry files of the General Land Office- Record Group 49- Reference Information Paper 114-National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC- Revised 2009
- Poret, Ory G., History of Land Titles in the State of Louisiana: State of Louisiana- Division of Administration – State Land Office- 1972, Baton Rouge, and LA.
- Vincent, Charles, editor, The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History- Volume XI- THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN LOUISIANA- Part B: From the Civil War to Jim Crow - Center for Louisiana Studies- University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2000
- History of Livingston Parish, Louisiana, 1986 / compiled and edited by History Book Committee Edward Livingston Historical Association. Dallas, Tex.: Curtis Media Corp., c1986.
- Records of the Field Offices for the State of Louisiana, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1863-1872 – Record Group 105- National Archives and Records Administration- Washington, DC.

Articles:

_____ USDA- Black Farmers in America, 1865-2000
The Pursuit of Independent Farming and the Role of Cooperatives- RBS Research Report 194

_____ Oubre, Claude F., “Forty Acres and a Mule”: Louisiana and the Southern Homestead Act; Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana of the Louisiana Historical Association, Vol. 17. No. 2 (Spring, 1976), pp. 143-157.

Notes: