Mississippi Genealogy Research

Early History

The Yazoo, Natchez, Biloxi, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Houma, Ofo, Quapaw, and Tunica tribes were indigenous inhabitants of the area when European colonists arrived. The Chickasaw and the Choctaw were closely related. They both spoke the Muskogean language and were later considered part of the "Five Civilized Tribes." The Natchez lived in the southwest region of Mississippi. They were mostly fisherman and farmers.

European colonists began settling the area in 1699 when the French established Fort Maurepas on Biloxi Bay, Mississippi. After the French and Indian War (Seven Years' War), the French surrendered the Mississippi area to Britain in 1763. Twenty years later, Britain ceded the Gulf Coast area to Spain and the rest of the region was claimed by Georgia.

European colonists imported African slaves as laborers. Under French and Spanish rule, a class of free people of color developed. These were mostly multiracial descendants of European men and enslaved women, and their children. Often the European men would help their multiracial children get educated or have apprenticeships for trades. Sometimes the colonists gave property to their multiracial children; sometimes they freed the enslaved mothers and their children. Some free people of color became artisans or educated merchants and property owners. The largest community of free multiracial citizens was in New Orleans.

In 1789, the Georgia legislature authorized the sale of Yazoo Indian lands. Hundreds of white settlers moved from the southern Atlantic Coast states to the Mississippi area between 1789 and 1794.

The U. S. Congress organized the Mississippi Territory 7 April 1798.

Georgia abandoned claims to the northern portion of the Mississippi Territory in 1802.

The U.S. government acquired the Gulf Coast portion from Spain during the War of 1812.

In 1817, the U.S. Government organized the eastern part of the Mississippi Territory as the Territory of Alabama.

On December 10, 1817, Mississippi became the 20th state in the Union with David Holmes elected the first governor.

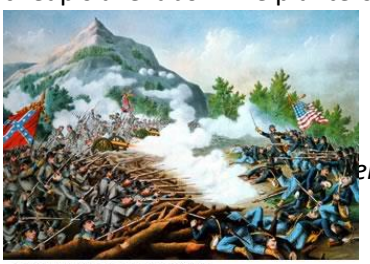
Plantations were developed primarily along the rivers, where waterfront gave them access to the major transportation routes. This is also where early towns developed, linked by the steamboats that carried commercial products and crops to markets. The backcountry remained a largely undeveloped frontier.

Between 1805 and 1832, the Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes ceded millions of acres of their lands to the U. S. Federal Government. Members of the Choctaw tribe were removed to land in what is now the state of Oklahoma*. However, there are still a few thousand Choctaws living in east central Mississippi.*

The lands obtained from the Native Americans were settled mostly by European citizens from other Southern states. Many were slaveholders who brought slaves with them or purchased them through the internal slave market, especially in New Orleans.

Nearly one million slaves were sold and sent to the Deep South, including Mississippi, by planters in Virginia and Maryland when poor farming methods caused lowered production of tobacco. The sale of their unneeded slaves to other areas broke up many slave families. The landowners of the Deep South imposed their harsher slave laws and restricted the rights of free blacks.

During the 1850s, Mississippi cotton plantation owners—especially those of the Delta and Black Belt regions—became wealthy due to the high fertility of the soil, the high price of cotton on the international market, and cheap slave labor. The planters' dependence on slaves for labor and the severe wealth imbalances among whites played strong roles both in state politics and in planters' support for secession. Mississippi seceded from the Union in 1861. More than 80,000 Mississippians fought in the Civil War; their casualties were extremely heavy. During the war,



Battle of Kennesaw Mountain

Union and Confederate forces struggled over dominance on the Mississippi River, critical to supply routes and commerce.
After the Civil War, reconstruction forced new laws in Mississippi which gave more equality in land ownership, voting rights, etc., to former slaves and to poor white people. These groups began farming the unoccupied land in the Mississippi Delta. In time, there were more small farmers than large plantation owners.
In 1870, Mississippi was readmitted to the Union.
After about 20 years, wealthy white politicians in Mississippi enacted "Jim Crow" laws to regain white control of land ownership, politics, laws, and voting rights. These restrictions and the low prices for cotton caused millions of blacks and poor whites to migrate to northern U. S. cities in the 1900's.

Genealogical Records of Colonial Mississippians

Records kept by the French, English, and Spanish colonial governments include censuses, birth and burial registers, and land grants.
Many of these records were transcribed and published by Dunbar Rowland in "Mississippi Provincial Archives". These manuscript volumes include records from the French Dominion (1612 – 1663), the English Dominion (1763 – 1783), and the Spanish Dominion (1757 – 1820).
Find and read various volumes free online on *Google Books, Internet Archive* and *FamilySearch Books*.
These books are also available at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History – www.mdah.ms.gov

Mississippi State Birth and Death Records

Birth and Death Records before 1912

A few counties kept intermittent birth and death records as early as 1879. Obtain copies of these records from the **County Departments of Health.**
Copies of early birth and death records for Harrison, Hinds, and Pike counties are also available from the **Mississippi State Department of Health.**

Births and Deaths 1912 to the Present

Mississippi state law began requiring all births and deaths to be recorded in 1912. By 1921, most were being recorded.
Obtain a copy from the **Mississippi State Department of Health**.

Mississippi State Marriage Records

Indexes of Marriage Records

View an index of some Mississippi marriages for the years 1800 – 1911 on *FamilySearch.org*
View an index of some Mississippi marriages for the years 1776 – 1935 on *Ancestry.com*
The Mississippi Department of Archives and History has an index of pre-1926 Mississippi marriages. View the index at the William F. Winter Archives & History Building, 200 North Street, Jackson, MS 39201.
The Mississippi State Board of Health has an index to marriages (male names only) from 1926 to the present.

Marriages before 1926

Some counties began keeping marriage records as early as 1800. About ½ of the marriages recorded before 1850 have survived.
Obtain a marriage record from the earliest years to the present from **County Circuit Court offices.**

Marriages 1926 to the Present

State registration of marriages began in 1926.
Obtain a marriage record from 1 January 1926 to 31 July 1938 and from 1 January 1942 to the present from the **State Board of Health.**
Marriage Records for the 1938 to 1942 interim period are available from the **County Circuit Court office** in each county.

Other Records that may give information about Births, Marriages and Deaths
Church records - Newspaper articles/obituaries - Censuses - Military Records - Funeral Home/Cemetery records
Wills/Probate records - Family/Plantation records: may mention births or deaths of slaves and family members
Notes: County records of African Americans were often kept in separate "colored" record books.

Churches in Mississippi

Before 1900 the largest religious groups in Mississippi were the Baptist and the Methodist Episcopal (now United Methodist) churches.

Repositories of church records:
Mississippi Baptist Historical Collection - Clinton, MS
The Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives - Nashville, TN
J.B. Cain Archives of Mississippi Methodism - Millsaps-Wilson Library, Millsaps College
Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church - Madison, NJ
Roman Catholic Diocese of Biloxi - Biloxi, MS
Roman Catholic Diocese of Jackson - Jackson, MS

Helpful Books about Churches:
The Ministerial Directory of the Baptist Churches in the United States of America; published in Oxford, Ohio: Ministerial Directory Co., 1899. Includes biographies of early ministers
Methodism in the Mississippi Conference Jackson, Miss.; by Lindsey, J. Allen
Published by Hawkins Foundation, Mississippi Conference Historical Society, 1964

Mississippi Archives and Libraries

Natchez Trace Small Manuscrip Collections - settlers in southern part of Mississippi - personal and business papers of planters, land speculators, merchants, lawyers, politicians, educators, doctors, the clergy, bankers, soldiers, homemakers, and builders - detailed information on the slave population and riverboat traffic (located in Briscoe Center for American History at University of Texas at Austin)
Mississippi Department of Archives and History – MDAH - Jackson, MS
National Archives, Southeast Region (Atlanta) -
Mississippi Genealogical Society - Jackson, MS
Evans Memorial Library – Aberdeen, MS
Mississippi State University-Mitchel Memorial Special Collections-Genealogical Library
University of Southern Mississippi, McCain Library and Archives – Hattiesburg, MS

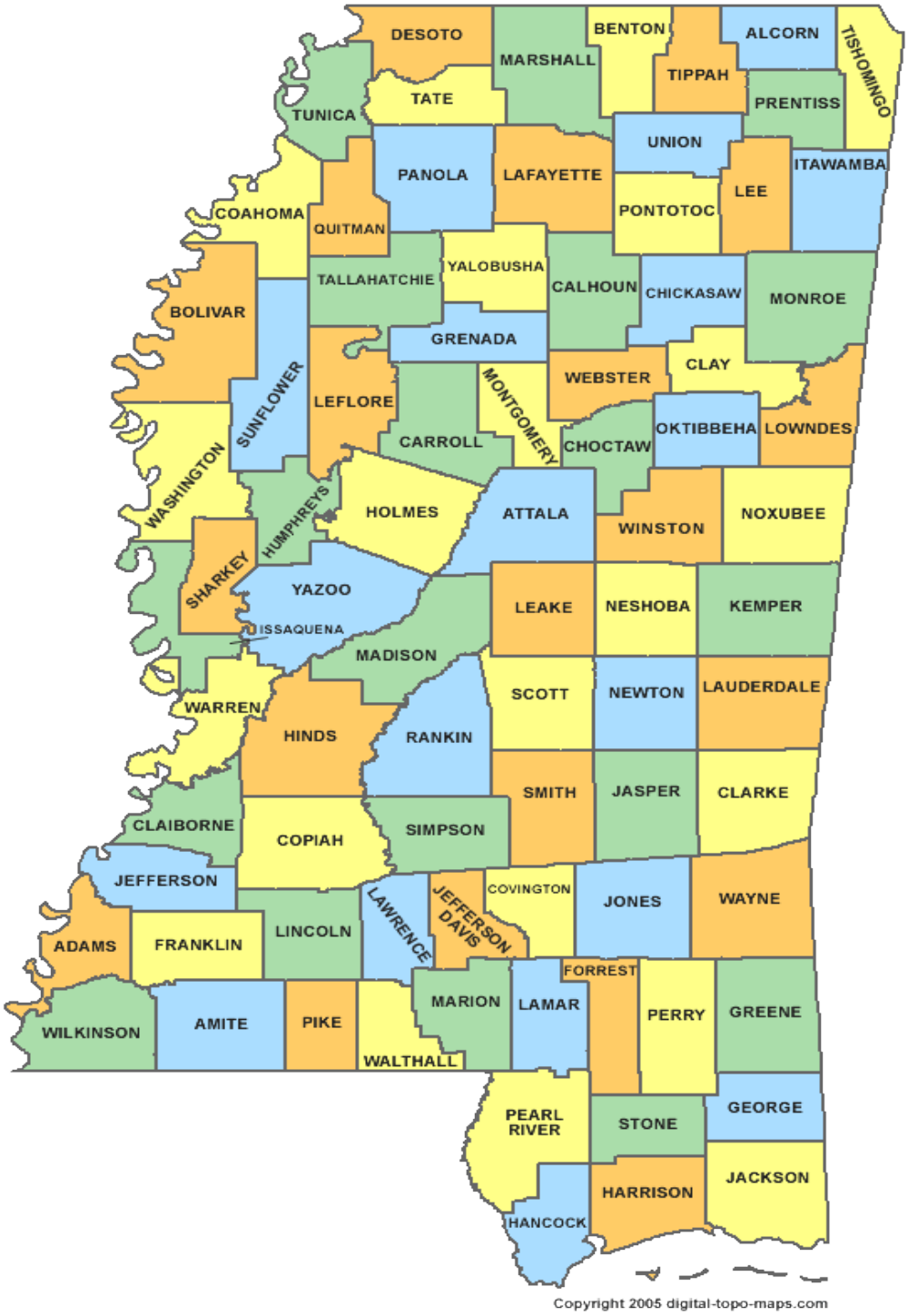
The Atlas of Historical County Boundaries – Interactive maps and text covering the historical boundaries, names, organization, and attachments of every county, extinct county and unsuccessful county proposal from the creation of the first county through December 31, 2000. - http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/index.html

Finding aids o Mississippi county records is *Survey of Records in Mississippi Court Houses* published in Jackson, Mississippi by the Mississippi Genealogical Society in 1957.

Migration Routes

Mississippi River · Yazoo River · Alabama, Choctaw and Natchez Trail · Choctaw-Bay St. Louis Trail · Federal Horse Path · Gaine's Trace · Jackson's Military Road · Lake Ponchartrain Trail · Lower Creek Trading Path · Memphis, Pontotoc and Mobile Trail · Mobile and Natchez Trail · Natchez-Lower Creeks Trail · Natchez-New Orleans Trail · Natchez Trace · Chickasaw Trail · Tombigbee and Arkansas River Trail · West Tennessee Chickasaw Trail · Illinois Central Railroad

Mississippi Counties



Mississippi Territory Land Records

When Mississippi became a U.S. territory, disputes arose over settlers' land grants from France, Britain, and Spain. The American State Papers recorded the court cases resolving these disputes.
Search the American State Papers for your ancestors on the American Memory website:
https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsp.html

Find an index of the Papers in the book "Grassroots of America: Index to American State Papers, Land Grants and Claims, 1789-1837".
The Family History Library in Salt Lake City, UT, has microfilms of Mississippi Territorial Land and Court Records.

Mississippi State Land Records

After Mississippi became a state, some settlers purchased Federally owned land. Search the Bureau of Land Management website database of land patents purchases: https://glorecords.blm.gov/default.aspx .

The county Chancery Court Offices recorded land transactions between private individuals.These offices also recorded probate records, which sometimes named slaves as part of a deceased person's property.
The Mississippi Department of Archives and History has microfilmed most original chancery court records.
Contact a specific county Chancery Court office or view their website for information about obtaining copies of historical property records.

Mississippi Genealogy Websites

NOTE: Look for the *GenWeb* or *Genealogy Trails* of any county in which your ancestors lived.

Brookhaven, MS Genealogy Resources – two databases of information from obituaries printed in local newspapers - oral histories - http://www.llf.lib.ms.us/genealogyarchives
Finding Aids for Mississippi County Records - https://raogk.org/counties/mississippi/#sthash.3AuwdXBj.dpuf
History and Facts of Mississippi Counties – includes links to genealogical records - http://www.genealogyinc.com/mississippi/ms-counties/
Maps of Mississippi - http://www.mapofus.org/mississippi/
Mississippi Department of Archives and History – **Digital Archives** include Confederate Pension applications, tax rolls, photos, educable childrens' records, and Freedman's Bureau Labor Contracts - https://da.mdah.ms.gov/
Mississippi Digital Library – family histories, scrapbooks, letters, photos, oral histories - from libraries, colleges and historical/genealogical societies - https://msdiglib.org/

Mississippi African American Research

Access Genealogy – links by state to websites of African American genealogy, cemeteries, and censuses
AfricaMap – track the slave trade with historical overlays and geographical data - http://worldmap.harvard.edu/africamap/
AfriGeneas – slave records, death and marriage records, censuses, surnames – chat or send messages to other researchers
African-Native American Genealogy - http://www.african-nativeamerican.com/
Digital Library on American Slavery – search database of slave petitions, runaway slave advertisements, bills of sale, transatlantic slave trade database; this compilation of various online collections started with a focus on records in North Carolina but the information includes people in all 15 slave states and Washington D.C.; more records are currently being digitized - http://library.uncg.edu/slavery/
International African American Museum - African American funeral programs, obituaries, marriage records, photos, historical documents and family histories – military records of the U.S. Colored Troops are currently being digitized - https://cfh.iaamuseum.org/records/
Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery - search thousands of "Information Wanted" advertisements taken out by former slaves in all states searching for family members lost by sale, flight, or enlistment – the collection currently includes newspapers from 1853 to 1911 - http://www.informationwanted.org/
MDAH Freedmen's Bureau Archives – search the index by name of person, planter, plantation, or county - http://opac2.mdah.state.ms.us/queries/sfreedman.php?referer=http://zed.mdah.state.ms.us
Slave Confederate Payrolls - digitized payrolls list names of slaves of 10 southern states who worked for the Confederate Army and whose pay went to their masters - https://catalog.archives.gov/search?q=719477

Slave Voyages - the *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* documents vessels along the Atlantic slave routes from 1514 to 1866; *Intra-American Slave Trade Database* documents vessels traveling between the Atlantic and Pacific ports ranging from the United States to Brazil; the *African Names Database* gives names, ages, possible origins of slaves liberated from captured slave ships between 1808 and 1862

Mississippi Cemetery Research

African American Cemeteries Online - burial transcriptions some cemeteries in some states –
Note: This website is older and has some bad links, but it may be the only online source of some burials
Mississippi GenWeb Tombstone Project – lists of burials at many cemeteries
Tennessee Valley Authority Cemeteries – index of over 30,000 graves originally in TN, AL, MS, KY, GA, NC, and VA that were flooded or relocated when the dams were built - https://www.tva.com/environment/environmental-stewardship/land-management/cultural-resource-management/relocated-cemeteries

Mississippi Military Research

Grand Army of the Republic Records Project – developing database - histories of posts, reports of officers and members if available, search by state - http://suvcw.org/garrecords/
Index of Mississippi Soldiers in Civil War – lists of soldiers from various sources - http://usgwarchives.net/ms/civilwar.htm
Index of Mississippi Soldiers in the Spanish American War - http://usgwarchives.net/ms/spanamroster.htm
Mississippi Department of Archives and History – digital archives – confederate pension applications, WW1 service cards and indexes - http://www.mdah.ms.gov/new/
Mississippi Korean War Casualty List - http://files.usgwarchives.net/ms/military/korea/mskorea.txt
Mississippi Korean War POW/MIA Database - http://files.usgwarchives.net/ms/historical/msmiapow.txt

Mississippi Native American Research

Native American Tribes of Mississippi - http://www.native-languages.org/mississippi.htm

Mississippi Newspaper Research

Brookhaven, MS Newspaper Obituaries – two databases of information from obituaries printed in local newspapers - http://www.llf.lib.ms.us/genealogyarchives
Mississippi Online Historical Newspapers

Information on these pages is compiled from information in:

- *FamilySearch.org* Wiki
- Family Tree Magazine
- *The Weekly Genealogist, NEHGS; Eastman Online Genealogy Newsletter*
- Genealogy Gems from the Allen County Public Library