# Genealogy Research in South Carolina

Following exploration of the coast in 1521 by Francisco de Gordillo, the Spanish tried but were unable to establish a colony near present-day Georgetown in 1526 and the French also failed to colonize Parris Island near Fort Royal in 1562. The English settled Albemarle Point on the Ashley River in 1670, but poor conditions drove the settlers to the site of Charles Town (now Charleston). South Carolina was named to honor King Charles I.

England attracted settlers by renting land for a half-penny per acre.

About 80 percent of the settlers of colonial South Carolina were English. Many of them came by way of Barbados and other colonies rather than directly from England.

Settlers from Barbados imported slave labor as was done in the plantation system of the West Indies.

Eliza Lucas Pinckney introduced production of indigo in 1742. Rice and indigo were shipped to England.

African American slaves were a majority of the population from early colonial times until 1930.

A group of Dutch settlers from New York came to South Carolina in 1671.

Another smaller group of French origin, mostly descendants of Huguenots, came to the area in 1680.

More numerous were the Scottish dissenters, who came beginning in 1682.

In 1691, the Proprietors appointed a governor for all of Carolina and a deputy governor for its northern half, and this arrangement provided better administration.

In 1712 the province officially split into North and South Carolina.

After South Carolina became an official British Colony in 1729, the English encouraged settlement by offering free rent to families who planted 50 acres of land.

Indian wars drove most Native Americans from the area; but a few Catawba Indians still live in York County today.

During the Revolutionary War, farmers from Scotland, Germany and Wales poured into the Piedmont and upcountry regions and started small farms.

After the Revolutionary War, England stopped buying indigo from South Carolina; then cotton, tobacco and soybeans became the predominant crops grown for export.

The colony was admitted to the Union on May 23, 1788 and became the 8th state.

In 1804, a general invitation was sent to merchants to set up business in Charleston.

South Carolinians believed strongly in state's rights. In 1860 the state was the first to withdraw from the Union. The attack on Fort Sumter in the Charleston harbor launched the Civil War.

Devastation of plantations during the Civil War and emancipation of slaves changed the economic structure of the state after the war.

## Vital Records in Colonial South Carolina

During the colonial years, churches kept birth, marriage and death records. Some have survived.

In 1706, the established church, the Church of England (also called the Protestant Episcopal Church), was ordered to record births, marriages and burials of all citizens, whether or not they were members of the church.

Surviving records of 7 Protestant Episcopal parishes were printed in issues of the *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine.*

Groups of Quakers, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Huguenots and Baptists also settled in South Carolina in the late 1600's and in the 1700's. Some of them kept records of members

- The website of the University of South Carolina Libraries provides finding aids for repositories of colonial South Carolina church records.
- The *FamilySearch Catalog* lists books and microfilms of colonial era South Carolina church records, including Protestant Episcopal, Quaker, Presbyterian and more. Some can be read on the website.

- Some indexes and images of South Carolina vital records on *Ancestry.com,* on *FamilySearch.org,* and on *FindMyPast.com* include records from colonial years.

## South Carolina Birth Records

**Online Indexes, digitized microfilms and books**

- *FamilySearch.org* - databases of church and civil birth records - catalog lists of books and microfilms, some have been digitized and can be read on the website
- *Ancestry.com* - databases of church and civil birth records

## Birth Records

**Charleston** was an independent city. She kept civil birth records from **1877 - 1901.**

**In 1915**, **the state began recording births.**
**Order a copy of a birth certificate from 1915 to the present** from the **Vital Records section of the County Health Department** where the marriage occurred or from the **South Carolina Department of Health**.

## South Carolina Marriage Records

**Indexes:**

- View the index of South Carolina Department of Archives and History church microfilms at http://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/guide/PrivateRecords/privguide.htm.
- *Ancestry.com* and *FamilySearch.org* have indexed or transcribed records of some South Carolina marriages between 1641 and 1965.
- The South Carolina Historical Society has books and papers listing early church marriages. Some books can be read online. Search their catalog: http://schistory.org/research-our-collections/searching-the-catalog/

**South Carolina Civil Marriage Records**
**Independent City Marriage Records**

- The city of **Charleston** kept some civil marriage records from **1877 – 1887**.
- The city of **Georgetown** issued some civil marriage records from **1884 – 1889**.

**County Marriage Records Prior to 1911**
A few counties began recording marriages before 1911.
**Obtain a copy of a pre-1911 civil marriage record** from the **South Carolina Department of Archives and History**. SCDAH has records of pre-1911 marriages recorded in the cities of Charleston and Georgetown and in 11 counties before 1911.

**Civil Marriage Records 1911 to the Present**

- Beginning July 1, 1911, a new law required county Probate Judge's Offices to issue marriage licenses.
- In 1950, the law required county officials to send copies of marriage records to the state.

**Order copies of county marriage records from 1911 to the present** from th**e Probate Judge's Office** of the county in which the marriage occurred.
**Order copies of marriage records dated 1950 to the present** from the **Vital Records Office** of the **South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control**. Ordering information is given at http://www.scdhec.gov/administration/vr/marriage.htm.

## South Carolina Death Records

**Indexes:**

- South Carolina Dept of Archives and History (SCDAH) - microfilms church and cemetery records -
- *Ancestry.com*
- *FamilySearch.org*
- *South Carolina Department of Health* - Index of deaths from 1915 – 1962 - http://www.scdhec.gov/administration/vr/vrdi.htm

**Deaths Prior to 1915**

In this time period, some churches kept funeral/burial records.
Charleston and Georgetown kept some civil death records before 1915.

**Death Records 1915 to the Present**

Beginning in 1915, South Carolina law required counties to issue death certificates.
**Obtain a copy of a death certificate from 1915 – 2004** from the **Vital Records Section of the County Health Department** where the death occurred or from th**e South Carolina State Department of Health.**

## South Carolina Districts or Counties

**Colonial Era**

Until the 1760s the predominant court was in Charleston. **Court records were kept in Parishes and Townships.** NOTE: Early counties were just descriptions of locations. They were not agencies that created or kept records.

**Colonial Parishes**

All Saints · Christ Church · Prince Frederick · Prince George · Prince William · St. Andrew's · St. Bartholomew's · St. David's · St. George Dorchester · St. Helena's · St. James Goose Creek · St. James Santee · St. John's Berkeley · St. John's Colleton · St. Luke's · St. Mark's · St. Matthew's · St. Michael's · St. Paul's · St. Peter's · St. Philip's · St. Stephen's · St. Thomas and St. Denis

**Colonial Townships**

Amelia · Congaree · Edisto · Fredericksburg · Hillsborough · Kingston · Kings Town · Londonborough · New Windsor · Orangeburgh · Purrysburg · Queensborough · Saxe-Gotha · The Welsh Tract · Williamsburg

**1769**

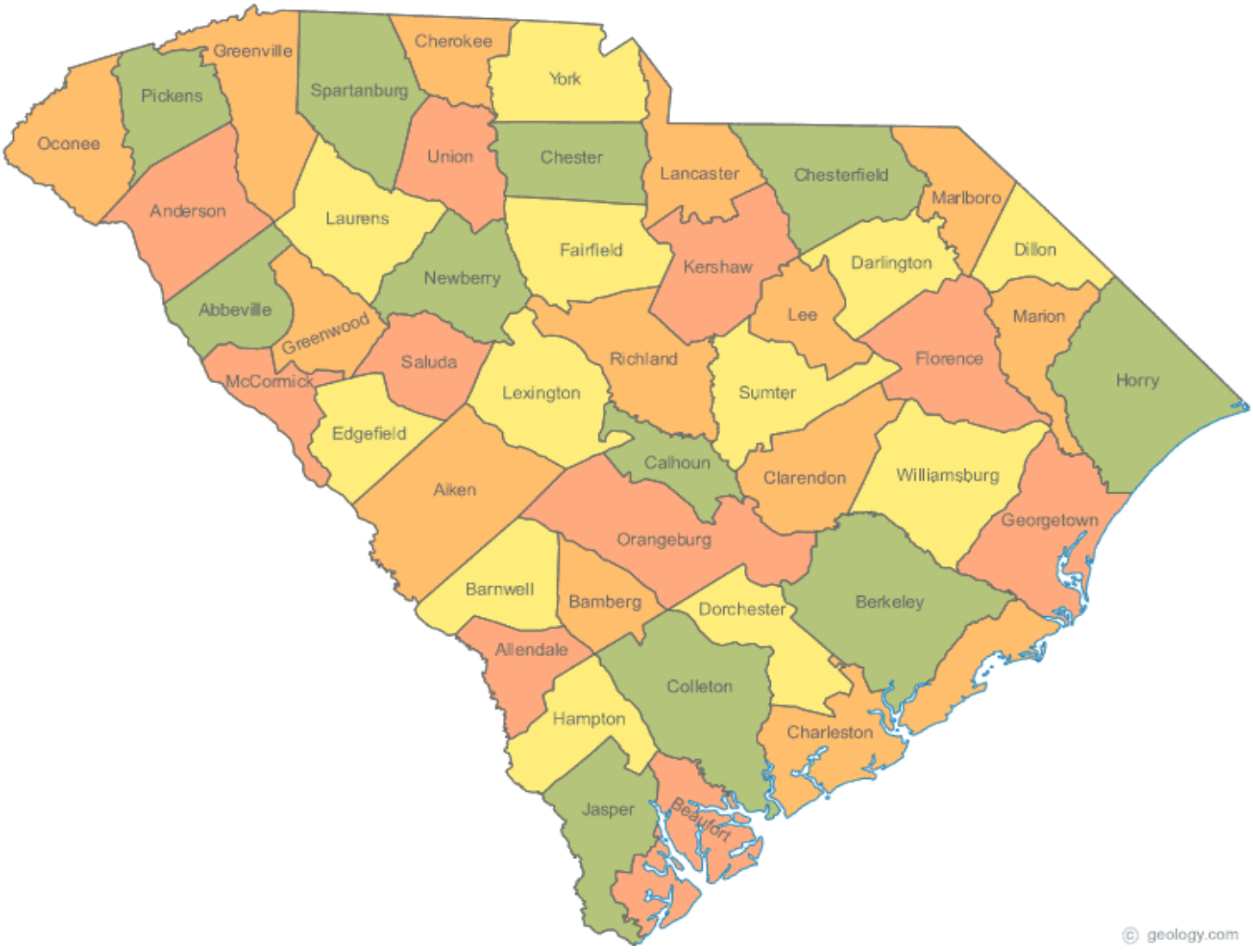
Seven **circuit court districts** were established. All counties were abolished. **Records were kept in Parishes and in District Seats**.
**1785.** The seven overarching districts were sub-divided into three to six counties each.
**From 1785 to 1868, records were kept in Districts and/or Counties.**
**1791.** The 14 provisional counties within Charleston, Beaufort, and Orangeburg districts and several others were dissolved for failure to thrive. Two new districts containing six counties were reorganized from parts of previous districts and counties in the far north.
**Overarching Districts:** Beaufort District · Camden District · Charleston District · Cheraw District · Georgetown District · Ninety-Six District · Orangeburgh District · Pendleton District · Pinckney District · Washington District
**1800.**
All overarching districts and three counties were abolished. Seven new counties were created and added to the other remaining counties.
However, all South Carolina counties were still called districts until 1868!
**1868**
Any remaining so-called districts were officially changed to counties.

**South Carolina Migration Routes**
Savannah River · Augusta & Cherokee Trail · Augusta-Savannah Trail · Augusta-St. Augustine Trail · Camden-Charleston Path · Catawba & Northern Trail · Catawba Trail · Charleston-Ft. Charlotte Trail · Charleston-Savannah Trail · Cisca & St. Augustine Trail (or Nickajack Trail) · Coosa-Tugaloo Indian Warpath · Fall Line Road (or Southern Road) · Fort Charlotte & Cherokee Old Path · Fort Moore-Charleston Trail · Great Valley Road · King's Highway · Lower Cherokee Traders' Path · Lower Creek Trading Path · Middle Creek Trading Path · Occaneechi Path · Old Cherokee Path · Old South Carolina State Road · Savannah-Jacksonville Trail · Secondary Coast Road · Tugaloo-Apalachee Bay Trail · Unicoi Trail · Upper Road ·

**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

**South Carolina Ports:** Beaufort · Charleston · Georgetown

**Current South Carolina Counties**



## South Carolina Land Records

Between 1670 and 1719, English Lord's Proprietors issued and recorded land grants.
After 1719, each province's secretary recorded land grants and a public register kept track of deeds.
After 1785, counties recorded deeds.
State land grants 1784 – 1882 and land plats 1731 – 1861 are on microfilm at the State Archives and at the Family History library in Salt Lake City.
Records of people who lived near the border may be in records of North or South Carolina.

## South Carolina Genealogical/Historical Repositories

Charleston County Public Library
Charleston Library Society
Dallas Public Central Library
Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina Archives
Piedmont Historical Society
South Carolina Department of Archives and History
South Carolina Historical Society
South Carolina Genealogical Society
South Caroliniana Library
South Carolina State Library
University Libraries, University of South Carolina

## South Carolina Genealogy Websites

**NOTE:** Check online for the *GenWeb* or *Genealogy Trails* of any county in which your ancestor lived.

**Online County Histories** - http://www.learnwebskills.com/family/countyhistories1.htm#il
**Richland County Library** - obituary index, local history digital collection, Columbia city directories, ledger of SC Confederate servicemen, index of South Carolina State Hospital Cemetery burials, links to books about local history - http://www.richlandlibrary.com/research-it/genealogy
**South Carolina Department of Archives & History** - military records, wills, state land grants, criminal court records, records of Confederate veterans, some church records - https://scdah.sc.gov/research-and-genealogy/online-research
**South Carolina Department of Health** - index of deaths from 1915 – 1967 - https://scdhec.gov/vital-records/death-indexes-genealogy/vital-records-death-indexes-1915-1967
**South Carolina Digital Library** – family histories, yearbooks, oral histories, map, photos – http://scmemory.org/
**South Carolina Genealogy and Family History** – links to genealogy archives, organizations, cemeteries and websites, search by county - https://www.sciway.net/hist/genealogy/
**South Carolina Pioneers $** – Bible records, births and deaths, military records, early settlers, wills, family histories - http://www.southcarolinapioneers.net/
**South Caroliniana Library** - digitized family papers and Bibles, city directories, church records, historical newspapers - https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/university_libraries/browse/south_caroliniana/index.php?
**York County Library Databases** – databases of photographs, newspaper articles, family histories, church and local histories - http://www.ychistory.org/index.php?utm_source=twgnewsletter&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_campaign=twg679

## South Carolina 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 - http://afrigeneas.com/
**Digital Library on American Slavery** – search database of slave petitions, runaway slave advertisements, bills of sale, transatlantic slave trade database; original focus on records in North Carolina but the information now includes people in all 15 slave states and Washington D.C. - http://library.uncg.edu/slavery/
**Free African Americans in the Southeast -** Free people of color in the colonies of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland, and Delaware – a few families in Illinois, Tennessee and Indiana - http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/
**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/
**Low Country Africana** - SC slaveholders, 1868 voter records, records of African Americans in the rice-growing areas of SC, GA, and northeastern FL, etc. - https://www.lowcountryafricana.com/
**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 - https://www.slavevoyages.org/

## South Carolina Cemeteries

**South Carolina Cemeteries –** addresses of cemeteries, links to websites, some of which list burials - http://www.daddezio.com/cemetery/junction/CJ-SC-001.html

## South Carolina 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/

## South Carolina Native American Research

**First People** - Links to State Recognized Tribes, sorted by state - http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Links/state-recognized-tribes-in-usa-by-state.html
**Native American Tribes of South Carolina** - http://www.native-languages.org/scarolina.htm

Information on these pages is compiled from:

- *FamilySearch.org*
- Family Tree Magazine
- *Genealogy Gems from the Allen County Public Library; Dick Eastman Genealogy Newsletter*