

Steps to use the new African-American Families Database:
(questions? Comments? Email lynn: lr9t@virginia.edu)

Visit: <http://hero.village.virginia.edu:309>

Create a new account: you just need to enter in an email address & create a password (it does not have to be a complicated one).

Next you will see the available source tables and search fields.

As of Jan 25th the following are available:

- Albemarle Census (1870) – fredericksville parish only
- Albemarle Census (1880) – all
- Personal Property Tax Burnley (1866-69)
- Will Books (1834-1865; vol. 23-27)
- Will Books: Louisa County Burnley Slave Lists
- Church Membership (1851-1880)
- Marriages (1865-1885)

I know there are more spreadsheets that can be uploaded. I'm trying to get as many up as possible but each one takes an inordinate amount of time to standardize for the database (and includes entering fields like date of birth, and gender).

Start Searching

You can search the database like before, clicking which tables you want to search and/or narrowing your search by year/owner/race/gender, etc.

But if you want to use the database to build an hypothesis, then you'll want to use the new features. Think of the hypothesis buttons as "shopping carts" where you place people for further analysis.

Building Hypotheses

Example: you start with an individual listed in a will book and you want to trace her into the postbellum era. Let's use "Mariah" from Bleak House as an example.

Step 1: We've decided to focus on Mariah from the J B Rogers estate so enter in "Mariah" as a first name and click "Will Books" so we can narrow in on that record. Click on "show" next to line for Mariah; information associated with the file will pop up below.

Step 2: You will see "plus" signs next to each category of information. You'll want to experiment with these, but for now, click on "Mariah's" "First Name" plus button and you will see a box that says "Add Factoid." These "factoids" are akin to pieces of data about an individual. The box that pops up will ask you to "select a person" or "add a new one." Since we're just starting, we will add a new one, "Mariah."

Step 3: Each person can be associated with an hypothesis. In this case, we're searching for Mariah in the post-bellum era so I would pick something descriptive, "Mariah-post-bellum." Note, once you start populating your search with factoids and hypothesis, you will be able to add a new fact/hypothesis to an existing category.

Step 4: once you finish creating an hypothesis a black box will pop up titled, in this case, "Mariah-post-bellum." It will automatically display basic data, her age and calculated birth year. But if you click on the magnifying glass it will expand to include the other information from that record. In other words, you're using the hypothesis and facts to collect information about someone.

Step 5: Let's search for Mariah in the 1870 Census. Return to the search fields and click on source #7, using "Mariah" as the first name. You will get 52 results. You can click on the header fields to sort. One next step is to sort the "birth year" field and narrow in on women named Mariah who were born around the time as the "Mariah" on the JBR estate (note: you can also narrow the birth year in the search fields).

Step 6: In the Will Book her birth year is estimated at 1817, so I will narrow in on Mariah's born between 1810 and 1820. I will add each Mariah in that date range as a "factoid" – someone to evaluate as the "Mariah" that we are looking for.

By now you've created a "Mariah" so when the box pops up (from clicking on the show button, then the plus button next to her first name) you will select "Mariah" as the person. Then you can choose which hypothesis to associate her with. I like creating an hypothesis for each source type, so here I would say "Mariah-in-1870-Census." This will be my 'clipboard' for adding facts about "Mariahs" from the 1870 census who I think might be the right one. Remember – the two census tables include black and WHITE people so if you're looking for an African American you can ignore the whites from the census (or pre-sort by selecting the race you want to search for in the original fields). You end up with 4 Mariah's born between 1810 and 1820 (not including 1820). Your hypothesis box should include all 4 for you to review.

One of the helpful tricks to remember is that you can always click on the magnifying glass, pull up the original census record, and then click on "dwelling" number to see everyone in her household. If you do that for the Mariah Jennins record you will see the 7 people in her household, including her husband "Perkins." If I weren't using an example that I already knew, I would be clicking through the households of each of the four possible "Mariahs" and comparing her 1870 household members to the original JBR Slave List (which you can pull up in the database by searching under "owner").

Step 6b: To assess which of the Mariahs is the right one, I would go back to a search for "Rogers" as an owner and then click on one of the individuals, pull up her record, and then click on the plus sign next to the owner's name. Then I created a "JB Rogers Estate" hypothesis so that I can store everyone.

TIP: So far you only have one person in the list, but once you create her hypothesis you will have the option to “add all” so you can add everyone enslaved on the JB Rogers plantation with one click.

Step 7: So far we have only added “first names” to our black box. But you can also add entire dwellings. So if we think that “Mariah Jennins” is the right “Mariah” we can click on the dwelling number and add the members of the household to our hypothesis.

TIP: Experiment with the ability to search in the background, while creating black boxes, and expanding them. In the example below I’m trying to see if any of the individuals in Mariah Jennins’ 1870 household are listed on JB Rogers’ Slave List. Indeed, we can see Bernard in both places, as well as Hannah.

Step 8: I added Mariah’s 1870 household members to my “Mariah-post-bellum” hypothesis because I’m pretty certain it’s the right Mariah (because of the co-occurrence of Bernard and Hannah in her household).

TIP: I am using the “Mariahs-in-1870-Census” as a workbook space to evaluate possible Mariahs. Once I think I’ve narrowed in on the right Mariah I will add that data to my “Mariah-post-bellum” hypothesis which I’m using as my “final conclusions” space.

Step 9: I would move on to evaluate Mariah’s in other sources. Unfortunately, Mariah is a difficult case because she is listed as a “Jennins” in 1870 and an “Ivins,” but in 1880 she is listed, correctly, as an “Evans.” But even then, her birth year is 1825 in the 1880 census, versus 1817 in the original slave list. In her case you might have to find her in 1880 by her husband, Perkins. Once you locate her, add her household to the “Mariah-post-bellum” hypothesis.

TIP: Notice that in the census records you can search neighboring households by clicking on the blue buttons at the top of the page on either side of the household number. If we do that with Perkins Evans we see that his next-door neighbor is Nathaniel Evans.

Step 10: If you click on your “Mariah-post-bellum” hypothesis black box you will see all of the people you have added. In my case, it includes Mariah on the Rogers List, Mariah and her family in the 1870 Census, and Maria and her family in the 1880 Census. Remember: the source tables each have a number associated with them so that you can easily see where your data comes from. Here we have data from source (16) – the slave list; (7) – the 1870 Census; and (6) – the 1880 Census.

Step 11: There are many steps to take at this point. For this example, I narrow in on Maria’s husband because I’m hoping that he paid property tax. He does indeed show up in 1867, 1868, and 1869. I add him to Mariah’s-post-bellum hypothesis. But you

could also create a new person at this point and start collecting information about Perkins.

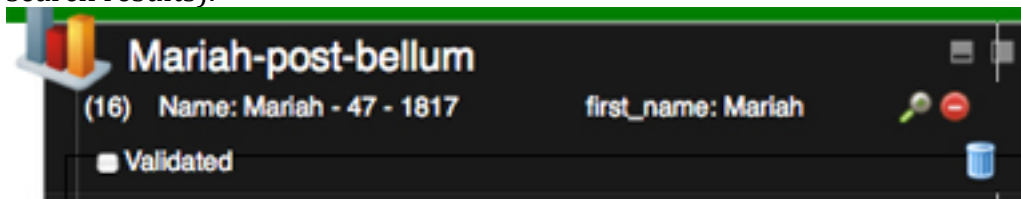
TIP: You can click “find similar sounding names” if you’re having troubles finding someone.

TIP: Remember you can always minimize the size of the black boxes. When minimized they automatically store themselves in the lower left corner. If you hover over them their names will pop up.

TIP: If you click on the printer button it will print out all of your work in the hypothesis.

Controls:

If you click on the two gray boxes within a fact/hypothesis black box the box will disappear down to the bottom of your screen (this gives you more room to see your search results).



The stored hypotheses hide under the blue/red/yellow graph icon. Click on the icon and it will expand.



The hypothesis icons also include a print button and a trash can to delete them.



BROWSER TIP:

I tested the database using an updated version of Firefox. If you have older versions some of the features may not work. For example, you cannot sort the columns.

Final, final TIP:

This is not meant in any way to replace a Genealogy Program. This is not the place to try to create family trees – there are plenty of other programs that do that. This is meant to enable you to create hypotheses about people and their identities.