

ASSEMBLING INDIRECT EVIDENCE TO LOCATE THE FAMILY & SLAVEOWNER OF FREEDMAN ARTHUR BRAUD

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Jari C. Honora, CG® ❀ www.jhonora.com

Research on formerly enslaved people is difficult by its very nature because enslaved people were classed as property prior to the Civil War and faced the challenges of marginalization in the segregated society that developed after the War. More often than not, they were the “property” described in the content of antebellum records rather than one of the transacting “parties” to those records. Thus, while millions of pages of information exist which document American slavery, the names of the enslaved people themselves have generally eluded coverage by most transcribers and indexers. Even in censuses, one of the principal sources in genealogy, enslaved people were enumerated with tick marks – denoting age, gender, and color – with no names.

Crucial to uncovering information on enslaved people prior to emancipation is studying their lives as free people for clues as to who their former owners might have been and who their families were. As with any family, answers to questions regarding identity and relationships, including ownership during slavery, are often uncovered as the result of piecing together indirect evidence and application of the FAN principle.

Indirect Evidence
“Indirect evidence is a set of two or more information items that suggest an answer to a research question only when they are combined.”
Source: Thomas W. Jones, <i>Mastering Genealogical Proof</i> (Arlington, Virginia: National Genealogical Society, 2013), 83.

FAN Principle
“To prove identity, origin, and parentage, study individuals in the context of their FAN Club: Family, Associates, and Neighbors. All relevant evidence will rarely be found by searching just the records created by that one person.”
Source: Elizabeth Shown Mills, <i>QuickSheet: The Historical Biographer's Guide to Cluster Research (The FAN Principle)</i> (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2012).

THE RESEARCH QUESTION IN THE CASE STUDY:

Who were the parent(s) and last enslaver of freedman Arthur Braud of Assumption Parish, Louisiana?

RESEARCH CHALLENGES IN THIS CASE STUDY:

- Lack of private family papers/published histories
- No relevant oral history
- No state or local censuses
- No vital records [mandated statewide in 1918]
- Potential surname changes

<i>Genealogy Standards to keep in mind:</i>
Standard 10. Effective Research Question
Standard 17. Extent
Standard 16. Flexibility
Standard 40. Evidence Mining
Source: Board for Certification of Genealogists, <i>Genealogy Standards</i> , 2nd ed. rev. (Nashville, Tennessee: Ancestry.com, 2021)

KEY SOURCES CONSULTED IN THIS CASE STUDY:

- **1850-1910 Federal Census Population Schedules**, databases with images, *Ancestry.com*.
- **Sacramental records** (from the antebellum and postbellum periods), Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge Archives Department (<https://diobr.org/archives>). [The Archives Department of the Diocese of Baton Rouge began publishing abstracts of the sacramental records of the diocese in 1978. Twenty-three volumes, spanning the years 1707 to 1900, were published. The limitation of these publications is that the sacramental records were indexed by surname. Entries for individuals without surnames, in most cases slaves and free persons of color, were not included in these volumes and thus were never published. In 2007, the Archives Department began publishing the sacramental records for individuals without surnames with a volume covering Pointe Coupée civil parish. This continued in 2010 with a volume for East and West Baton Rouge civil parishes. Volumes covering more civil parishes are forthcoming. For this case study, there were no published abstracts available. The original sacramental registers were consulted in the Diocesan Archives.]
- **Civil War Pension Files**, Record Group 15: Department of Veterans Affairs. National Archives, Washington, D. C.
- **Conveyance Records**, Clerks of Court for Ascension Parish, Louisiana & Assumption Parish, Louisiana, browsable images, *FamilySearch.org*.
- **Statewide Death Certificates**, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

FOR FURTHER READING:

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- Peters, Nancy A. “Hiram Cochran, Freedman of Abbeville County, South Carolina.” *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 106 (September 2018):165-80.
- Smith, Franklin Carter and Emily Anne Croom. *A Genealogist’s Guide to Discovering Your African-American Ancestors*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2008.