

Few areas of American genealogy research pose as much of a challenge as the search for African American families. The vast majority of African Americans are descendants of the 500,000 black Africans brought to North America to serve as slaves in the 18th and 19th centuries. Since slaves were chattel property with no legal rights, they were prohibited from reading, writing, attending school, legally marrying, owning property, voting, and participating in many other activities that would generate records that documented their existence. Citizenship was granted to all former slaves in 1868 under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Typically, documents of genealogical importance do not begin to appear until after this date.

As with the physical exhibit, this web version of *Let the Records Show: Discovering the Valley's Black Community in Slavery and Freedom* attempts to shed light on some of the experiences of Shari Williams, her ancestors, and her quest to understand their lives from slavery to freedom. Shari's story is told through the prism of several types of documentary evidence.

#### **Milestones in Shari William's ancestry:**

**Circa 1830** Steve Pace, Shari Williams' great, great grandfather is born into slavery in Georgia.

**Circa 1850** Steve Pace is brought to Macon County, Alabama.

**1853** Steve Pace and Sallie Thomas engage in marriage.

**1860** Malissa Pace, great grandmother of Shari Williams, is born in Macon County, Alabama. In 1883, she would marry John H. Hubbard.

**1915** The "Steven Pace Lands" were sold in 10 parcels to Pace family members to ensure the property stayed within the Pace family. The deeds listed Steve and Sallie Pace's children and their spouses.

**1956** Shari Williams is born in Akron, Ohio.

## Beginnings

Just as with any genealogy research project, you begin with yourself and trace your ancestry backwards. Write down everything you know about yourself and your family members. Information that mentions a name, place and/or a date is of primary importance. Sources of information typically found within the family home includes photographs, postcards, letters, diaries, school yearbooks, family papers, military records, scrapbooks, and family bibles. Use oral history to supplement and support the written evidence. Pay special attention to any family, ethnic or naming traditions which have been handed down from generation to generation.

Shari's journey to uncover her African American heritage began to unfold March 18, 1991, in Birmingham, Alabama when Lorenzo Pace learned of the Lock.



*My uncle Julius, who is eighty-one years young and continuing, began talking about his and my father's life growing up in the South during the 1920s. Uncle Julius suddenly turned to my mother and said, "Mary, did Eddie (my father) keep in the house a brown bag that I had given him thirty years ago?" My mother went into the bedroom and began looking through my father's belongings. She came out with a paper bag and asked my uncle if this was the one he was talking about. Uncle Julius said, "Yes," and pulled an old lock out of the bag. He went on to say that "it originally belonged to Steve Pace-who was your great-great-grandfather. This is the original lock that shackled him during slavery. We have had this lock in our family for over one hundred years. Now I am*

*passing this lock over to you, Lorenzo, and you must pass it on to your children so that it will never be forgotten from where we all came. It's not much to leave, but it is something I hold dearly."*

#### Let the Records Show: Federal Census

Census records provide the building blocks of your research, allowing you to both confirm information, and to learn more details about your ancestors. The Census represents one of the few document sources that contains recorded information about nearly every living person in a given place at a given time. The first Federal Population Census was taken in 1790, and has been taken every ten years since. However, data from recent censuses are not available after 1930 because of a 72-year privacy restriction on access to the Census. The 1940 census will be available in 2012. Researchers should begin with the 1930 Census and work backwards to locate earlier generations. (Note: Most of the 1890 Census was destroyed in a Department of Commerce fire.) Prior to 1870, slaves were enumerated by slave owner, age and sex, but not by name.

Using censuses from 1880-1930, Shari was able to confirm family relationships; notably the Hubbard & Pace family connection, and Creek Stand, Alabama as the ancestral home. Examining the census records provided Shari with detailed information such as dates of births, places of births, marital statuses, dates of marriages, names and number of children, and property ownership. These clues not only confirmed and established family relationship but they also were clues to locate other records sources.







*their first and last names. But the 1870 census did not yield the treasure I hoped for when I began the search for information about my great-great grandfather Steve Pace. Steve and his family are not found in the 1870 census in Macon County, Alabama w, nor in any of the surrounding counties...Fortunately the Pace Family's residence in the area is documented in the 1866 Alabama State census and on the 1867 Voter Registration List for Macon County, Alabama. The Pace family further documented in the U.S. Federal census in 1880 - 1930, and in deeds and tax records ranging from 1866 until 1910. The records indicate that the Pace family ancestral home was in the unincorporated community of Creek Stand, Alabama."*

## Collecting evidence on the Ancestral Home

The ancestral home is the location where your ancestors lived for a period of time. In this phase, you are collecting information on the local area in an attempt to identify settlement patterns, additional family connections and institutions of importance in the life of your ancestor. Local area records typically include deeds, wills, census, marriage records, death records, school records, tax records, church membership lists, voter records, newspapers, and cemetery lists. The most common jurisdiction recording these documents is at the county level.

Shari's research in Macon County revealed several surprises. As early as 1877, Shari's great, great grandparents Steve and Sallie Pace were among a very small number of African Americans landowners in Macon County. The Pace family would come to own over 480 acres in Macon County. Landownership represented a form of economic power and stability which Pace family used to uplift the African American community in Creek Stand. The Pace family was instrumental in establishing a school and the Creek Stand Church through the deeding of their property.

Steve Pace's purchase of 80 acres Sec 17 T15 R26E - 1877  
Macon County Deed Record B V - Page 151

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William Pace, State of Alabama, Macon County  
Macon County, Office of Probate Judge  
I do hereby certify that the within conveyance  
of Stephen Pace was filed in this office for record  
on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of March 1877 at 12 O'clock 4M.  
I, Probate Judge of Macon County  
State of Alabama, know all men by their presents that  
Macon County, J. William Pace of the aforesaid  
State and County, forward in consideration of two hundred  
and twenty dollars to one in hand paid by Stephen Pace  
two receipts of which is hereby acknowledged before me  
by Stephen Pace, as having in full and delivery to the  
said Stephen Pace the following described land by the  
Deed of the 21<sup>st</sup> of September 17 Township 15 of Range 26, Con-  
taining eighty and three acres to have and to hold for his  
use, use and benefit forever in full and delivery of said  
land to him in and against myself, my heirs  
and assigns, and all other persons whatsoever. Witness my  
hand and Seal this 15<sup>th</sup> day of June 1877.  
J. W. Wilson } Probate Judge  
George A. Dent }  
State of Alabama, } John Pridgen a Notary Public in and for  
Macon County, } do hereby certify that J. W. Wilson a Notary Public  
in and for the aforesaid County of Macon to me appeared be-  
fore me this day and being sworn stated that he and Geo-  
rge A. Dent his wife, the grantors in the conveyance aforesaid  
represented the same in his presents, and in the presence of the

1877 Purchase of 80 Acres



Creek Stand AME Zion Church



Creek Stand School circa 1907

THE STATE OF ALABAMA, Macon COUNTY.

Know All Men By These Presents, that Albert Pace & his wife Sallie Pace

Trustees of Creek Stand School, do hereby acknowledge, in presence of Walter Anderson & Anderson Anderson the receipt of the sum of Twenty Dollars (\$20.00) to be used by

them as a fund for the purchase of land in the NE corner of the NE 1/4 of the NE 1/4 of the Section 15 Township 15 Range 24. I have, and to have the said land for school purposes only, by the said Trustees and when other Trustees are elected they are to abide by the deed.

Witness my hand and being in the County of Macon and State of Alabama this 17 day of August 1917.

Albert Pace and Sallie Pace (Trustees)

Albert Pace (S) Sallie Pace (S)

Deed for Creek Stand School Land

## Identify last slave owner

Do not assume that your African American ancestors were slaves. At least one out of every ten African Americans were free in 1861. If you aren't sure whether your ancestors were enslaved prior to the Civil War, then you may want to start with the U.S. Free Population Schedules of the 1860 census. For those whose African American ancestors were slaves, the next step is to identify the slave owner. Some slaves took the name of their former owners when they were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation, but many did not. You will have to really dig in the records to find and prove the name of the slave owner for your ancestors before you can go any further with your research. Sources for this information include county histories, wills, the records of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Bureau, the Freedman's Bureau, slave narratives, the Southern Claims Commission, military records including the records of the U.S. Colored Troops.

Shari's research into the identity of Steve Pace's slave owner has proven how difficult African American genealogy can be. No direct evidence has been uncovered to prove who held Steve Pace as property. However, there are clues that indicate Stephen Pace, originally of South Carolina, to be the last slave owner. Comparing information from the 1850 and 1860 slave schedules and estate records with information that Shari uncovered about the life of Steve Pace, it is a plausible assertion that the ownership connection is true. Again without the proverbial smoking gun all assertions are unfounded. Nevertheless, the reward of the search has been a history lesson about the conditions, laws, customs, and practices that governed slavery and enslaved Africans.

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SCHEDULE 2.—Slave Inhabitants in Eastern Division in the County of Pratt State of Oklahoma, enumerated by me, on the day of June 1860. Geo. H. ...

NAME OF SLAVE OWNER	SEX				AGE	COLOR	REMARKS	STATUS OF SLAVE PROPERTY				TOTAL	REMARKS	
	M	F	B	C				W	U	S	D			
<u>John ...</u>	1	2	1	1										
<u>James ...</u>	1	1	1	1										
<u>Alpha ...</u>	1	1	1	1										
<u>W. ...</u>	1	1	1	1										
<u>D. ...</u>	1	1	1	1										

No. of ... No. of ... No. of ... No. of ... No. of ...

1860 slave census