

MARCH 2024

10 Million Names Origins



A Message from the President & CEO's Desk



The yearning to know one's ancestors and their influences is innately human. Long before 10 Million Names was conceived, many others had dedicated themselves to this cause. And, since its launch, we have heard from numerous individuals and organizations eager to share their records and research to help us reach our goal to recover the names of the ten million people enslaved in America and to restore those names to their families and to history.

We are grateful for their tireless work, and through 10 Million Names, we strive to uplift their efforts. Some of our central aims are to amplify the voices of those who have been telling their family stories for centuries, connect researchers and partners with those seeking answers to family history questions, and expand access to resources and information about enslaved African Americans and their descendants.

During the planning stages of this project, someone referred to 10 Million Names as a "genealogical moonshot." We rather liked this comparison. Indeed, we choose to do this not because it is easy, nor because it is hard, but because it is right.

I am descended from men and women who were enslaved in this country, and so my children are also descendants of enslaved peoples. Just as my children know of their Mayflower ancestry, their colonial New York Dutch past, and their American Revolution patriots, so too should they know of the Crisp family of Mississippi and the Jones family of Alabama, who were born into bondage. Their descendants served their country as Black soldiers in World War I and the Korean Conflict. They were postal carriers, teachers, nurses, mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters. We are the result of many and varied American stories and American lives.

With a deep appreciation of the past and an abiding commitment to the future, we are proud to embark on this vital undertaking to recover these lost names and stories, restore this lost history to American families, and, most important, to share them with you.

Sincerely,

Ryan J. Woods
President & CEO

Descendants of Enslaved and Enslavers Form New Family Ties

By Joyce Jones

When Egypt Lloyd first learned about a direct link to her formerly enslaved ancestor, Darby Vassall, she experienced a series of emotions that ranged from astonishment to blessed. Her father, Dennis, is Darby's ninth great-grandson. As a Black woman who has spent many years exploring her family's history, Lloyd, 44, assumed there was some connection to slavery, but it wasn't until her family was contacted in 2020 by Harvard undergraduate Carissa Chen, who discovered the Lloyd family's tie to Darby in her research, that she learned of the extent.

Darby Vassall was born in May 1769 on the Cambridge, Massachusetts, property of John Vassall, where Darby's mother, Cuba, was enslaved. Darby's father, Tony, was enslaved by John Vassall's aunt and uncle, Penelope (Royall) and Henry Vassall, who had previously owned Cuba, as well. At the start of the Revolutionary War, John gave Darby, then just 5 or 6 years old, to George Reed, a fellow Christ Church Cambridge parishioner. Darby may have been with Reed during the Battle of Bunker Hill. When Reed died shortly after the battle, the young Darby ultimately found his way back to Cambridge and was reunited with his parents and siblings who were living on property abandoned by the Loyalist John Vassall. Around that time, Darby encountered then-General George Washington. He offered Darby an unpaid job, which he refused. Years later, Darby described the future U.S. president as "no gentleman, to expect a boy to work without wages."

Against the Odds

After the Revolution, Tony petitioned the Massachusetts state legislature for the small home where the family was living and some surrounding property. The legislature denied the request but awarded him an annual pension. He purchased property nearby in Cambridge, where he operated a stable. Darby spent most of his adulthood in Boston, where he worked as a caterer for prominent white families. He also owned property on Beacon Hill and became a leading advocate for Boston's Black community. He was part of a small group of people who first petitioned the state legislature to provide funding for the education of Black children, and he also was an abolition activist.

DARBY VASSALL.

The decease of this well-known and worthy colored citizen occurred in Boston, Oct. 12th, 1861. The day of his burial (16th) completed just 92 years and 6 months since his birth.

Mr. Vassall was born in Old Cambridge, in the celebrated Vassall house, known as Washington's headquarters, (now the residence of Prof. Longfellow.) It was formerly occupied by Col. John Vassall, (a royalist,) when, in 1775, it was confiscated, and subsequently called the Cragie estate.

After his marriage, Mr. Vassall settled in Boston, where he became known to many of the wealthy families, including Peter C. Brooks, James Sullivan, William Stevenson, and others—by whom, to the day of his death, he was universally respected for his general intelligence and excellent character.

He was the oldest member of Brattle Street Church, having received the ministrations of the following stated occupants of that pulpit, viz: Peter Thatcher, J. S. Buckminster, Edward Everett, John G. Palfrey, and Samuel K. Lothrop the present incumbent, whose remarks at the funeral bore deserved tribute to the virtues of the deceased.

He was among those colored citizens of Boston who, in 1796, instituted the "African Society." Its objects were benevolent, and the preamble to its Constitution expressed its loyalty by the following emphatic clause:—"Behaving ourselves, at the same time, as true and faithful citizens of the Commonwealth in which we live, and that we take no one into the Society who shall commit any injustice or outrage against the laws of their country."

In alphabetical arrangement, the name of Darby Vassall stands last on the list of members, and he lived to be the last survivor.

In April, 1843, he was presented with a paper by Miss Catharine Graves Russell, which contained this provision:—

*** "I have promised Darby Vassall that he and his family shall be placed in my grandfather's tomb under the church in Cambridge, built by Henry Vassall, and owned by me, his granddaughter."***

It happened that the centennial anniversary of Christ Church was being commemorated on the very day of the funeral. The tomb had not been opened since the death of Miss Russell, some sixteen years ago; and to those who were not cognizant of the provision for Mr. Vassall's interment therein, the event seemed strange indeed. The idea of this tomb being his last resting-place was often the subject of his meditation, and he was eloquent in grateful expressions towards her whom he had always regarded as a considerate, rare, and valued friend.

That he inherited loyalty will be seen by the following facts, noted by a correspondent of the Boston Transcript:—

"At a gathering of historical writers at Professor Longfellow's, on the 17th of June, 1858, the late Chief Justice Shaw stated an incident with which he was officially conversant, of Anthony, (Mr. Vassall's father,) and Catherine, (his mother,) viz:

"When the commissioners were selling the estate, Tony, who had long lived in an old house on the estate, stepped forth and said:—*He was no tory, but a friend of liberty, and, having lived there all his life, he didn't know any reason why he should be deprived of his dwelling.*"

On petitioning the General Court, a resolve was passed, granting Tony a stipend of twelve pounds annually. About 1810, after his death, Cuba, his wife, went to the State Treasurer to get her stipend, but it was found that the resolve did not include her. Judge Shaw, then a member of the House, presented her petition for its continuance, which found favor, and she had the annual sum through her natural title."

Mr. Vassall was favored with a wonderful memory, and it was deemed a privilege with many persons, from different walks in life, to avail themselves of his conversational reminiscences of Boston and vicinity, in the olden time.

He had an intelligent appreciation of the Anti-Slavery movement, and loved to speak with and of Wm. Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips. Those who attended the first Attucks commemoration in Faneuil Hall, March 5th, 1858, will remember his presence, and the reference made to him by Rev. Theodore Parker.

He was probably the oldest colored man in Massachusetts, and in his death has been severed the last link which associated many of his race with the wealthy and dominant class in Boston, and which (at least in his case) was kept bright by continued sympathy, friendship and recognition of his Christian manhood.

Boston, Oct. 13, 1861.

W. C. N.



Lloyds and Royall—photo credit: Martha Stewart

“He is truly someone to be admired. Who would have thought that someone who came from such a hard beginning could accomplish so much?” marveled Lloyd. “I think about all of the struggles people experience in society today; they can’t achieve even half of the things that he did, and he was a slave!”

Darby died in 1861 at age 92. Decades earlier, Catherine Graves Russell, the granddaughter of Henry Vassall—one of Christ Church’s founders and the former enslaver of Darby’s parents—gave Darby a letter granting him permission to be buried in the Vassall family’s crypt under the church, an invitation that he included in his will.

In the past year, Lloyd and her family have built a relationship with Julia Royall, an eighth-generation collateral descendant of Isaac Royall Jr., whose great wealth was amassed through profits from slavery. Royall, 73, was born and raised in South Carolina and cannot recall a time

when she was not aware of her family’s ties to slavery. She does, however, remember childhood visits with her father during the Christmas holidays to the site of her great-grandfather’s plantation, Palmetto Grove, where they met with African Americans who’d grown up there and still lived nearby.

“I never forgot those visits and will carry them with me always,” Royall said. “So, yes, I’ve always known about my family’s connection with the history. Growing up in the South, your history is always with you.”

This pragmatic approach does not mean that Royall doesn’t acknowledge the horror of her family’s legacy. While living in Cambridge, Royall was co-chair of Christ Church Cambridge’s Antiracism Committee through which she created several programs on slavery, civil rights, and African American history. As co-president of the [Royall House and Slave Quarters](#) in Medford, Massachusetts, once the home

of her slave-owning ancestors, Royall and the late Archie Epps, then Dean of Students at Harvard, presented a colloquium that focused on the Royall House’s history of slavery in the very space where the enslaved had lived.

Welcome to the Family

Last year, Royall and the Lloyd family met for the first time at Harvard University’s Memorial Church. Neither side knew what to expect but hoped that there would be no discomfort or worse—fear, hurt feelings, or bitterness. As she prepared for the meeting in her hotel room, Lloyd wondered, “What will her disposition be like? Will she be warm?” She hoped that Royall would understand that while the Lloyds are not happy that their ancestors suffered the indignities of slavery, the meeting would be the first step in the process of forgiveness.

“All of these things were on my mind and when Julia entered the church, she walked toward us with her arms open. My spirit was just flooded with so much emotion and I instantly gave her a hug,” said Lloyd.

Interestingly, both Lloyd and Royall arrived with letters to read.

“Sitting in a D.C. coffee shop thinking about you and me. What we can say to one another that says now, not history, but yes, history,” began Royall’s. “I feel sorrow and horror for the past, what my family did to yours as participants in an evil system made by us, driven by money, legally and culturally approved, and how that sanctioned system sorted who would benefit and

Descendants of Enslaved and Enslavers Form New Family Ties *(continued)*



those who would not, kept you from access.” It ended with the understanding that while forgiveness might be too much to expect, “I can hold out my hand with faith in what might be.”

Referencing the hymn, “Amazing Grace,” Lloyd, who was accompanied by her father and her children, wrote, “Over 300 years ago, descendants of our families came together during a time when [. . .] the true value and the respect we should have for each other was not understood. As you are aware, Julia, it was a time in history, like many other times in history, when enslavement, cruelty and injustices were inflicted by one group of humans upon another group of humans. To some extent a time gone by. However, then there is this moment in time we stand in, a time of Amazing Grace, how sweet the words, for us to share together. As we move forward on our journey, we look forward to sharing the growth of grace and understanding in our friendship.”

Be the Change

Nearly one year since their first meeting, the two families have formed a loving bond that many might find unimaginable. During an event last fall at the Harvard Club in New York City at which they shared their journey, a white audience member approached Royall and said, “I couldn’t have done what you’re doing.” Lloyd has had conversations with many of her white friends who have echoed that sentiment. “They tell me they’re proud of [me], but they couldn’t do the same because they’re scared. Many are overwhelmed by just the thought of that,” she said.

“This experience has been life-enriching. It can be confusing for some people because it’s not an easy subject, but I pray that together we can help people open their eyes,” Royall added.

After learning about Darby, Lloyd’s father approached her about forming what today is the [Slave Legacy History Coalition](#) to honor their ancestor’s activism and “build a pathway forward for other families who are descendants of slaves and the general public to help connect to the vast repositories of information on slave legacy history in the Boston and Cambridge communities and beyond.”

“I take pride in the fact that I can give that gift to my daughters. We are very proud of what Darby achieved and as his descendants, the least we could do is honor him and continue that mission and to educate ourselves,” Lloyd said. “It’s important to do this work and we need to lead by example.”



2024 American Ancestors Young Family Historians Essay Contest

The 2024 American Ancestors Young Family Historians Essay Contest is open for students enrolled in grades 4–12 in public, private, parochial, and home schools across the nation and US territories. This year’s contest invites students to share a story from their personal family history and to explain how lessons from that story can apply to their life today.

We encourage teachers to use this essay contest as a class project. Our **Family History Curriculum** has everything you need to help students explore their roots, including inquiry-based lessons, teaching strategies, and editable student worksheets.

Submission Deadline: April 1, 2024

Why I Give

By Donata Russell Ross, CEO, Concessions International

photo credit: Concessions International



My father, Herman J. Russell, Sr., became an entrepreneur at the very tender age of eight. His father and hero, Rogers Russell, Sr., had only a fourth-grade education. He led by example by establishing a plastering business before the Great Depression. Despite the financial constraints of raising eight children, my grandparents taught their son the plastering trade and the value of hard work and integrity. These life lessons fueled an entrepreneurial spirit and enabled their son to earn enough money to finance his education at Alabama's Tuskegee Institute, where he earned a degree in building construction.

My father frequently spoke to us about his determination to become a successful entrepreneur and our family business, H.J. Russell & Company, ultimately became an exemplar of African American entrepreneurship. Still, I've always longed to learn more about the generations that came before him and how their determination and zest for success survived the arduous racial and economic challenges they surely faced.

I was excited to learn about and contribute to 10 Million Names because so many African Americans don't know very much about their family histories and the lineages that have helped make us who we are today. And I really believe

that if we could understand more about our history that it also would help create much more interesting connections for future generations.

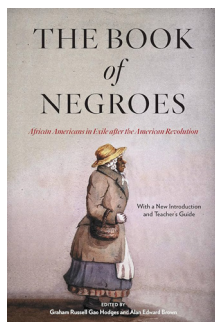
For so many years, we as a people have been brainwashed to believe that there is nothing interesting, regal, or important about our past. The ability to trace our lineage and learn more about the people in our pasts who made us who we are not only motivates but gives us a sense of purpose.

We have been able to learn a little bit more about my mother's family history. Interestingly, my mother's great-grandfather, Shephard Peek, was given land by his enslaver and over time, purchased additional land, eventually owning and operating a cotton gin. We believe this was the first Black-owned cotton gin in Georgia. Also, in the 1860s, he served in Washington, D.C., as a U.S. congressman from Georgia. It's stories like these that indicate how we as a people had a vision about how the world should be and were willing to stand up and fight to represent our interests in a way that so many people could not. It is important for African American families that have experienced success to help change the narrative about who we are and what we represent in our nation's history. If we don't make a commitment to share these stories and get it right, who else will?

To learn more about how you can support 10 Million Names, [click here](https://10millionnames.org).



Database Highlight: Black Loyalist Directory



The Black Loyalist Directory contains valuable information that can aid researchers as they examine the history and lives of a group of Black Loyalists after the Revolutionary War.

This database includes emigration, military, residence, and some vital and residence records from *The Book of Negroes: African Americans in Exile After the American Revolution*, edited by Graham Russell Gao Hodges and Alan Edward Brown. Transcribed information also includes enslavers' first and last names, ship name, and port of destination. The records largely range from May through November of 1783, but also include records of passengers on ships leaving from England to Sierra

Leone in 1788, and a list of formerly enslaved persons residing in London, England, after the Revolution.

The Black Loyalist Directory was transcribed from the list compiled under the orders of Sir Guy Carleton, Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's Armies for North America, in 1783. The original transcript is currently on deposit in the National Archives' Papers of the Continental Congress: Miscellaneous Papers: Papers Relating to Specific States (folios 21, 25, 26, 29, 30, 44, 47 and 52).

This volume contains three books of records from these papers, detailing information regarding Black and multiracial passengers bound from the United States to British-occupied Canada. Many ports in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Quebec are destinations for the mentioned ships.



How to Trace African American Ancestry

Tracing Black family lineages can be especially challenging, for a variety of reasons, including omitted or obscured records and records that were never created before the 1870 census. For many people interested in tracing their roots, the first challenge may simply be a question of where to begin. Whether you are new to tracing family genealogy or need additional support for research already underway, 10 Million Names wants to help! Each issue of Origins will include a family research tip and genealogy advice from our experts to help you get started and keep going.

Please submit your questions to: joyce.jones@nehgs.

Ask a Genealogist

What are the first steps I should take to find my enslaved ancestors?

Talk to all relatives with family history knowledge, especially the older generations. Their knowledge is essential to tracing the history of enslaved individuals. You will want to ask detailed questions that will provide full names (including maiden names), birth dates, death dates, and locations of all family members. Remember to record this information in a way that can be easily accessed and updated as you learn more. You will need to refer to it often as you trace your family through time.



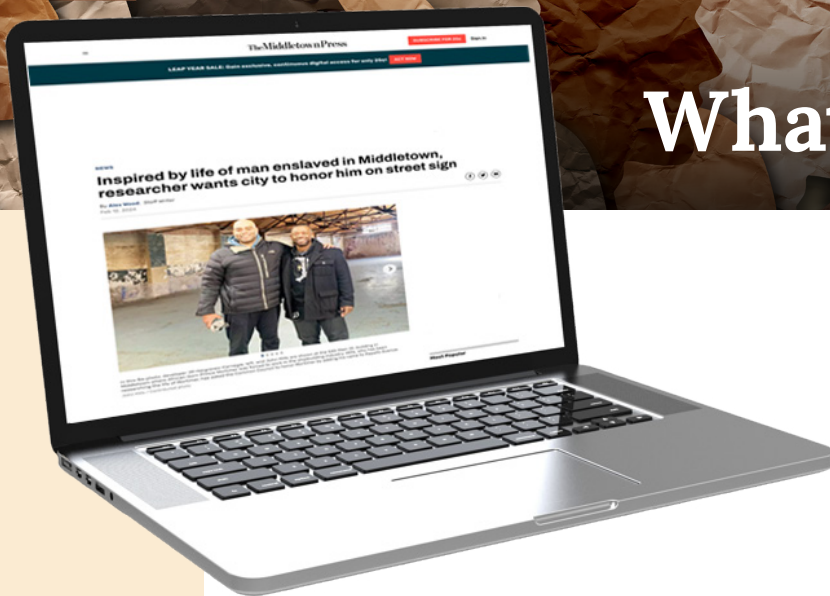
Family Research Tip

What can be learned from birth and death certificates and other documents to begin tracing my family's roots?

Birth and death records offer a variety of clues to help you trace your family history. Some of the information provided includes the names of the parents, the current location of the family, and the event date. Death records can show where the parents were born and where a person might be buried. Later birth and death certificates often show the current address of the birth parents or the deceased individual. This information is vital to locating and following the correct ancestor through time.

Any document that offers information about family connections, locations, dates, and general family history is worth pursuing.

What We're Reading



[How Wall Street Funded Slavery](#)

A Time reporter found that “contrary to popular belief, the wealth of slavery did not disappear after the Civil War, burned in the fires of conflict; it endured, in the form of private and public wealth, in the form of institutional fortunes.”

[Inspired by life of man enslaved in Middletown, researcher wants city to honor him on street sign](#)

“Everybody likes a story of an underdog who overcomes adversity to triumph. The story of Prince Mortimer, who spent most of his life enslaved in Middletown, is not like that. At least, not while he was alive.”

[University of Alabama researchers explore lives of enslaved individuals on campus before Civil War](#)

“A research group from The University of Alabama has published a website about the role of slavery on the campus before the Civil War. The website, ‘The History of Enslaved People at UA,’ is the first time the names of the enslaved men and women who built UA are listed all in one place.”

[In telling the story of Northern slavery, Mass. woman hopes to help others reckon with the impacts](#)

“When it comes to studying Massachusetts history, most of the focus is on the freedom trail and the revolutionary war. But slavery played a pivotal role in building the country and the commonwealth.”

[Descendants of those enslaved by St. Louis University calculated their ancestors' unpaid labor. Here's how](#)

“Descendants of the Black people enslaved by St. Louis University have for the first time calculated how much labor and wealth was stolen from their ancestors, their latest effort in a yearslong push for the university to ‘make good on promises of justice and accountability.’”

[Black students took a field trip to the birthplace of American slavery and walked away feeling empowered](#)

“In 1619, enslaved people were first taken to a site that later became a Union stronghold in Confederate territory. Now an educator uses the destination to teach about freedom.”

[NC State student creates site map of Charlotte's lost slavery history](#)

“A local student built a map of places around Uptown where slaves once worked, lived and worshipped. Alexia Alexander, a veterinary student at N.C. State, created Charlotte's Lost Slavery History Map when she was 18 for her Girl Scouts Gold Award project.”

Become a Collaborator!

10 Million Names is building a robust community of collaborators to help reshape the cultural narrative around Black family history. Together, organizations and individuals are working to amplify the voices of people who have been telling their family stories for centuries; connecting researchers and data partners with people seeking answers about their own family histories; and expanding access to data, resources, and information about enslaved African Americans.

For more information about how to become a 10 Million Names collaborator, please contact Joyce Jones at joyce.jones@nehgs.org.



Origins
by AMERICAN ANCESTORS

Become a 10 Million Names Volunteer and Impact Generations to Come!

The success of 10 Million Names will depend in part on the work of volunteers who generously donate their time and talents in a variety of ways. We are currently seeking volunteers who can contribute to database projects. You will work from handwritten or text documents, extracting information into a spreadsheet, or assist with proofreading the data. Our 10 Million Names team provides training, but volunteers must possess a basic knowledge of Microsoft Excel. This is a great, hands-on way to learn the process of transferring printed material to the Internet. Students are encouraged to inquire about internship opportunities. For more information, please contact 10 Million Names Volunteer Coordinator, Danielle Rose, at 10mn@nehgs.org.

Origins is a quarterly newsletter featuring news about 10 Million Names and our collaborators.

To subscribe, [click here](#).

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