

Nevis: pre-Emancipation genealogical research

A guide with resources

How to research your slave-holding or
enslaved ancestors

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Introduction

Historians have estimated that various European nations have enslaved 12.5 million African men, women and children. Shipped to the Caribbean and the Americas, most of the 10.7 million captives who survived the Atlantic crossing were forced to work on the plantations.

Britain withdrew from the Transatlantic Slave Trade in 1807. Slavery itself continued in British colonies until August 1834. Under the terms of the Slavery Abolition Act 1833 enslaved people had to undergo an unpaid four-year apprenticeship period while their 'masters' and 'mistresses' claimed their share of the British government's £20 million compensation fund. Complete Emancipation in most British possessions came in August 1838.

In North America slavery persisted until 1865. By then literacy was spreading among enslaved people, resulting in a great number of slave narratives.¹ By comparison, in the British Caribbean enslaved people generally left few written records. This means that their lives have to be explored almost entirely from official records.

I have worked with these records for over twenty-five years. My study of the 'Mountravers Plantation Population, 1734-1834'² is based on a collection of plantation documents, the Pinney Papers, which are held in the University of Bristol Library's Special Collections (BULSC). The managers' and overseers' biographies were, in the first instance, drawn from details found in the Pinney Papers and supplemented with information from standard genealogical sources. For the enslaved people I started with a succession of slave inventories found in the records through which I tracked the men, women and children from one inventory to another. I was then able to add information from the plantation account books and letter books, as well as other documents: parish registers and records of sales and manumissions (the granting of freedom from slavery). The Pinneys sold Mountravers in 1808 and those people who had survived until 1817 under the new owners, the Huggins family, I could then follow through the official Slave Registers, the so-called 'Triennial Returns'. For Nevis these were first compiled in 1817.

I am currently researching the free black and coloured³ slaveholders of Nevis in the nineteenth century, a project which grew out of my study of the Mountravers plantation population.

The search for your forebear

Before you begin, a word of caution: tracing your ancestor back to the pre-Emancipation period can feel like a needle-in-a-haystack job. To find a person who was born before 1838 you will need

- a lot of time
- a lot of patience
- a lot of luck
- good note-taking skills
- a healthy dose of scepticism: is this true? how can I prove it is true?

In addition, you will need the ability to deal with uncertainty because you may well be able to narrow down the options to a few individuals without being able to identify the one person who was your forebear. It is also possible that, despite your very best efforts, you may not be able to trace your ancestor back to the pre-Emancipation period at all.

¹ See 'North American Slave Narratives' <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/>

² <https://seis.bristol.ac.uk/~emceee/mountraversplantationcommunity.html>

³ The term 'coloured' is here used in the historic sense.

In the first instance, the only way to go is backwards. Hopefully you will have worked your way back through the documents to a forebear who had a first name and a family name and who was buried sometime in the 1800s. As late as the 1870s some formerly enslaved people in Nevis were still buried with a single first name only. It will be easier to find your ancestor if that person had an unusual name, such as Martha, Gustina, Myrtle, Alfonso, etc.

Free or enslaved?

If you have an ancestor who lived in Nevis during the pre-Emancipation period this person was either white, free black or 'coloured', or enslaved. If free, he or she was either free-born to a free mother, or slave-born but later manumitted (freed) by a master or mistress (enslaver).

Enslaved people were treated as property and could be bought, sold, mortgaged, gifted to others, or left in wills. A master or mistress could free them as a reward for faithful service, or on payment of an agreed sum of money.

Some freed people, as well as free-born descendants of formerly enslaved people, became slaveholders themselves. Unless you know for certain that your ancestor was enslaved, you will need to check the records to see whether your ancestor may have been a slaveholder. If that was the case, then the person was free and is more likely to appear in the historic records - perhaps as someone who bought or rented land, had a trade, or held an official position. Therefore a good way to start your searches would be to find out whether your ancestor was a free person. Once you've established whether this was the case or not, you could then shift the focus of your enquiries.

Slave Compensation payments

A very quick search will tell you whether your ancestor received a share of the British government's £20 million compensation fund.

When slavery was abolished on 1 August 1834 in most British colonies, slaveholders wishing to claim compensation had to submit written claims. An array of documents associated with the administrative compensation machinery can be found in The National Archives at Kew (UKNA): original claims and certificates, counterclaims and adjudications in contested cases, certificates for compensation, etc (Ref T 71). Additional information may be found, for instance, in Colonial Correspondence (CO) and payments records (NDO 49).⁴


Members of the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery based at University College London have trawled through the compensation records and produced an excellent database:


<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>

❖ Try a simple search on the Centre's home page before you go to *Advanced Search*.

⁴ For a good overview of slavery-related records in the UKNA, see Guy Grannum's *Tracing Your West Indian Ancestors*, the Public Record Office Readers' Guide No 11, (PRO Publications, 1995).

Centre for the Study of the
Legacies of British Slavery





HOME
SEARCH THE DATABASE
LEGACIES
ESTATES
INVENTORIES
MAPS
CENTRE
CONTACT

The Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery has been established at UCL with the generous support of the [Hutchins Center at Harvard](#). The Centre builds on two earlier projects based at UCL tracing the impact of slave-ownership on the formation of modern Britain: the [ESRC-funded Legacies of British Slave-ownership project \(2009-2012\)](#) and the [ESRC](#)

Search the Database

Individuals
Advanced Search

The Centre's Search Guidance Notes are very helpful and worth perusing before you go any further:
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/project/search-notes>
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/project/estates-search-notes>

Advanced Search

[Search guidance notes](#) | [Browse & search the legacy strands](#) | [Browse & search Estate information](#)

SEARCH OPTIONS ↑

Individual's Details

Clicking on one of the red labels below will take you to the [guidance notes on searching](#).

Surname	First Name(s)	Sex	Individual Type	Notes Search
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text" value="All"/>	<input type="text" value="All"/>	<input type="text"/>
F or M will also find all F? or M?				
Education	Occupation	Religion	Absentee/Resident?	
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text" value="Please choose a value"/>	or <input type="checkbox"/> Select all Absentees
Sources	Birth/Death		Wealth at Death	
<input type="text"/>	Birth <input type="text"/>	Death <input type="text"/>	Between £ <input type="text"/> and £ <input type="text"/>	
DD/MM/YYYY or YYYY				

Address Details

Quick Address Search	Street	District	Town/City	County	Region	Country
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Claim Details

Claim Number	Colony	Parish (only applies to Jamaica)	Collected By
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text" value="All Colonies"/>	<input type="text" value="All Parishes"/>	<input type="text"/>
Claimant Category	Amount of compensation		Number of enslaved
<input type="text" value="Please choose a value"/>	Between £ <input type="text"/> and £ <input type="text"/>		Between <input type="text"/> and <input type="text"/>
or <input type="checkbox"/> Select all Categories			

[Search guidance notes](#) | [Browse & search the legacy strands](#) | [Browse & search Estate information](#)

Search options for the database compiled by the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery, UCL

Unfortunately the biographies of those who received slave compensation, or were associated with particular claims, are not yet complete. So far most of the biographies that have been completed for Nevis are of the white planters and merchants. As well as information about individuals, you can also find information about some of the estates.

Searching the UCL database is a quick and easy way to take the first step towards establishing whether your ancestor was a slaveholder or not. However, since not all slaveholders received compensation you'll need to do further checks.

Slaveholder without compensation? Try the Slave Registers 1817-1834

Another relatively quick way of establishing whether your ancestor was a slaveholder is to use the Search facility for *Enslaver* (previously called *Slave Owners*) in Ancestry.co.uk, or to search the indexes in the online Ancestry Slave Registers.

Enslaver First & Middle Name(s)

Enslaver Surname

Search box for *Enslavers* from Ancestry.co.uk

The Ancestry search can lead to incomplete results. Depending on the name you are looking for, a 'manual' search of the indexes may be more accurate because you can spot variations in the name and the spelling.

You will find, for instance, that the transcriptions in the Ancestry database do not list joint slaveholders on the results page. For example, if you were looking for Rebecca Alvarez and you entered her name in the search box, she would not come up as a slaveholder (enslaver). Only Elizabeth Alvarez and Felix Alvarez would be listed.⁵ But if you then went into Elizabeth Alvarez's register you would see that she *and* Rebecca completed a register jointly. Had you perused the index to the 1817 volume you would have found an entry for 'Alvarez Elizabeth & Rebecca'. The transcriptions on the results page also do not include extensions such as 'senior' and 'junior', or 'dec'd' (deceased).

See below for information about searching the Ancestry database and about accessing the indexes.

When doing a 'manual' search, you will need to look at each index since some slaveholders are known to have only ever completed a register for one of the years (e.g. 1822, 1825, etc). There is no index for the 1828 volume.

Once you have established that your ancestor was a slaveholder, you can track their slaveholdings through each of the registers. This may provide useful information about the number and the sort of people they had in their possession. Of course this exercise will only give you a snapshot during the period 1817 to 1834; your forebear may well have 'owned' people before 1817. You may find evidence of their slaveholding in the Common Deed Records Books (see below).

❖ [You may find taking screen shots helpful in keeping track of the information.](#)

⁵ UPDATE: Since the search page on the Ancestry website has been changed to include another search option and since the 'slave owner' has been changed to 'enslaver', the results have become less accurate.

Free but not a slaveholder? Try the Parish Registers

Another way of establishing whether your ancestor was a free person is to consult the Parish Registers for baptisms and marriages. Some of the Nevis baptismal records are online but as they are not searchable you will have to go through the pages 'manually'. For those that are not online you may have to visit the relevant church, or the Archive of the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society (NHCS) in Charlestown (see Appendix).

The majority of free people lived in Charlestown. Many attended St Paul's Anglican Church and the Methodist Chapel. In the case of baptisms usually – but not always – the person performing the ceremony would have noted whether the mother or the parents were free. The mother's status was important because mothers (whether free or enslaved) passed on their status to their new-born children – regardless of whether a child's father was free or enslaved. Children aged six years or under on 1 August 1834 were automatically free under the terms of the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act.

- ❖ If more than one person was baptised on a particular day, it may be worth noting the names of the other people. Later in your research you may find evidence that they were related to one another.

Some of the free people's surnames in the St Thomas Lowland Baptismal Register were those associated with plantations in that parish (Parris, Clifton, Colquhoun) but there were also other assorted surnames: Rooks, Moore, Archbald, etc.

While in the case of free people clergymen tended to enter the word 'free' in the column *Quality, Trade or Profession*, in the case of white people they noted the person's trade or profession. In a few instances this was also the case with well-established free mixed-heritage people, such as, for instance, the merchant Garret Herbert Lans and his wife Mary. When their son George Thomas was baptised in 1832 the father was said to have been a merchant. However, eight years earlier, when their daughter Georgiana was baptised, the parents had been identified as 'coloured persons' without mentioning the father's occupation.⁶ Sometimes the style of entries changed when another clergyman took office but in this case it is apparent that Mr Lans and his wife had become absorbed into the property-owning class. It may be no coincidence that in 1825 Garret (sic) H Lans and family registered their first enslaved people.

Enslaved people in the Parish Registers

Baptising enslaved people only became common in the 1820s after pressure from British abolitionists. Estate owners in some other islands had their people baptised *en masse* but in Nevis this was generally not the case – except for Ward's Trust Estate and Taylor's Estate. Apparently, owners tended to let individuals decide.

Before delving into the Slave Registers it may be useful to consult the baptismal records. Of course it is possible that the person you are looking for was never baptised but you might be lucky and find an entry that would confirm that that person was, indeed, enslaved. At the same time you would find their owner, or the estate on which they lived, because the clergyman would usually have noted this in the parish register. Having an owner's (or a plantation's) name would make consulting the Ancestry Slave Registers so much easier. Bear in mind, though, that if the baptism took place in, say,

⁶ NHCS, St Paul's Baptisms, 1824-1835 No 573 and No 68

1830, the baptised person's owner could have changed since 1817. In this case you'll need to work backwards through the Slave Registers.

Some plantation's names changed over time. For instance, Bayley's Estate mentioned in the St Thomas Lowland Baptismal Register probably was Alexander Baillie's land that became Spring Hill. Owners also changed; Parris's – called Black Rock during James Parris's ownership – was in the 1820s acquired by Peter Thomas Huggins and named 'Parris's alias Black Rock'.

- ❖ Although this is not a contemporary map of Nevis, you may find the 1871 map by John Alexander Burke Iles helpful in locating the historic plantations. You can find the map online.

Nevis, like Barbados but unlike some other West Indian colonies, did not require candidates for baptism to have surnames⁷ but people increasingly acquired surnames. Conventions varied and were inconsistent; sometimes Revd Lyons simply added the estate owner's name (Taylor or Lawrence, for instance) to the baptised person's first name; the next incumbent, Revd Duke, added the name of the estate (Jesup), or of the estate's owner (Ede) - again sometimes but not always.

Although there were no ecclesiastical restrictions on enslaved people getting married, the authorities in Nevis did not allow marriages between two enslaved individuals until after 1818,⁸ and the prospective bride and groom had to obtain their slaveholder's consent. This was noted in a section of the pre-printed parish registers and provides good evidence as to the couple's identity and that of their 'master' or 'mistress'.

No register has been found of early marriages which were conducted in the Methodist Chapel. In any case, they were deemed to have been invalid until the Nevis Legislature passed an Act in 1842 which set Methodist marriages on an equal footing with those undertaken in the Church of England. Apparently between 1828 and 1842 some people who had married in the Methodist Chapel got married for a second time in an Anglican church - sometimes to different people.⁹

With the church playing a greater role in enslaved people's lives from around the 1820s, burials in church cemeteries became more frequent but it appears that plantation or yard burials continued for some time. These would not have been recorded in the parish registers.

See the Appendix for information about locating the various Nevis Parish Registers.

Free and enslaved people in the Nevis Court House records

A vault in the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court Registry situated in the Nevis Court House in Charlestown holds voluminous historic records which are of great importance not just to historians but to anyone researching their family history. The fragile and decaying historic volumes were rescued for future generations under a scheme organised by the British Library Endangered Archives Programme and financed by the charity Arcadia. The documents have been digitised in Nevis and, although no longer accessible in the Court House, are now freely available online:

<https://eap.bl.uk/collection/EAP794-1>

⁷ Jerome S Handler and JoAnn Jacoby, 'Slave Names and Naming in Barbados, 1650-1830', *William and Mary Quarterly* Vol 53, Issue 4 (October 1996) p720

⁸ Christine Eickelmann, *The Mountravers Plantation Community, 1734-1834* Part 2 Chapter 7 p798

⁹ Karen Fog Olwig, *Global Culture, Island Identity - Continuing Change in the Afro-Caribbean Community of Nevis* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993) p82

Move down the screen to *View archives from this collection* and choose the series you want to access.

Some volumes are incomplete because their state of disintegration was such that they could not be digitised. Those listed below cover the pre-Emancipation period but there other, later series concerning the records of the Supreme Court (1874-1962), as well as Ships Bonds (1847-1867); Provost Marshal's Sales (1847-1935); Plans and Maps (1888-1974); Land Title Registers (1887-1922), and Miscellaneous documents (1840-1940).¹⁰



The following are relevant to anyone researching the pre-Emancipation period.

Common Deed Record Books (Common Records)

48 Common Deed Record Books from 1707 to 1922 have been digitised. These contain

- sales, leases and mortgages of land, together with descriptions and boundaries and, in some cases, inventories
- sales, leases and mortgages of estates with their enslaved people, often with lists of names
- indentures (contracts) recording the sale or mortgages of individuals or groups of enslaved people
- manumissions (freeing) of enslaved people
- deeds of gift recording the free transfer of enslaved people
- assignments of compensation money
- deeds of conveyance concerning plots of land bought by free people
- deeds and sometimes also plans which record the formation of independent post-Emancipation villages. In the case of Cotton Ground, and possibly others, the records show a plan of the village and named lot owners in its early stage of development.

Generally the volumes of the Common Records have indexes.

Most transactions were carried out by men although a surprising number of women - unmarried 'spinsters' or widows - conducted their own business. Men were sometimes identified by their trade, or as a 'gent' or 'Esq'. By the early nineteenth century there were no fixed criteria as to who qualified for this title and it may have been sufficient to acquire a certain amount of land and with it the right to vote to become an Esquire. Historically, however, it was generally reserved for the

¹⁰ Plans and Maps are useful for estate plans, and Land Title Registers record much but not all land ownership from the 1880s.

gentry or holders of higher public office – such as members of the Nevis Council, the upper chamber of the local Legislature. To access selected Nevis Council Minutes online, go to <https://beinecke.hamilton.edu/nevis>

When conducting business, many of the well-established free black and ‘coloured’ people were not consistently identified as such (eg Amelia Brodbelt, Hester Smith). This makes it difficult to know exactly whether a person was a free black, a mixed-heritage, or a white person – particularly since the same first names often appeared in white planter and in free families, such as the Powells, the Herberts and the Hanleys.

Some people were freed with their pet names (Sally, Peggy, Nancy), others with the formal Sarah, Margaret or Ann, etc. Occasionally a person was freed with a surname or an alias that did not appear in the Slave Register.

The series of Common Records is fairly complete but some volumes – particularly early ones - could not be digitised owing to their state of decay.



Common Deed Record Book 1750-1752, too fragile to open

Wills

All nine volumes of Wills from 1763 to 1880 which still exist have been digitised. The books include

- wills
- grants of probate
- administrations
- appraisements of property and
- inventories of deceased individuals' possessions with valuations.

The wills were written not just by white people but increasingly also by property-owning free people of colour and free blacks.

The will books tend to contain a great deal of information about family relationships - often the only way of getting this information in the absence of family trees. This includes relationships between planters and free and enslaved women (and their children) who were to inherit, or who were to be freed in a will. In some cases the executor or executrix followed up the deceased's wishes by formally freeing the enslaved person and registering the manumission in the Common Records but this was not always the case, nor was it necessary to do so.

Court of King's/Queen's Bench and Common Pleas

The records in this series cover both civil and criminal cases. There are 40 volumes or items covering the period from 1705 to 1873.

The series includes Proceedings, Minute Books, Cause Lists and Entries for Judgement. In civil cases the Minute Books list the plaintiff and the defendant and give some limited details of the cases together with outcomes. The criminal case Minute Books include cases in the years straddling Emancipation. Volumes listing Entries for Judgement in the 1700s are particularly useful since they can sometimes provide plantation names, acreages and lists of enslaved people - information which may not be available elsewhere. The volume for 1831-1834 includes a Court of Criminal Slaves.

Other courts

The Court of General Sessions was concerned with hearing criminal cases. The early records in the one surviving volume (1815-1850) reveal many names of free and enslaved people, members of juries and those men who served as constables.

The Court of Complaints was concerned with the recovery of small debts and intended to process the many claims for relatively small amounts of money that would otherwise have been dealt with in the Court of King's Bench and Common Pleas. The records in the one surviving volume (1830-1846) show the extent to which many people were indebted. As well as listing the names of creditors and debtors an occasional alias is revealed ('Priscilla Scarbrough alias Pinkerton').

Once you have established through the above records whether your forebear was a slaveholder or an enslaved person, your next search will be in the Slave Registers.

Slave Registers 1817 to 1834

Introduction

Following the withdrawal from the Transatlantic Slave Trade in 1807, the trade between the islands continued until it became illegal in 1811. In order to monitor the legally held slaves, the British government required its colonies to establish regular inventories, with slaveholders producing lists of their people every three years. Nevis completed its first register in 1817 but delayed the next until 1822 and then followed with registers for 1825, 1828, 1831 and 1834. Other colonies completed theirs in different years.

Nevis Slave Population, 1817 to 1831

Years	Males	Females	Total	Increase/births			Decrease/deaths			Manumissions
				Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	
1817	4,685	4,917	9,602	---	---	---	---	---	--	---
1822	4,583	4,678	9,261	547	517	1064	685	537	1222	42
1825	4,591	4,695	9,286	349	316	665	358	335	693	38
1828	4,574	4,685	9,259	323	315	638	328	301	629	61
1831	4,526	4,616	9,142	334	309	643	343	336	679	66

Robert Montgomery Martin, *Statistics of the Colonies of the British Empire in the West Indies, South America, North America ... from the official records of the Colonial Office Printed by Wm H Allen & Co, London 1839 p87 Chapter X – Nevis*

Records were kept on site in the colonies, and copies of the local registers were sent to the Office for the Registry of Colonial Slaves in London. After the office was disbanded, some 200,000 pages of names were placed in the UKNA. This still holds the paper volumes for all the years, including the 1834 register for Nevis which is missing from the online registers. It could not be digitised because the ink on most of this book's pages had faded too much.

Having been instructed by the British government to produce a register of all enslaved people, the colonies introduced their own formats. In Nevis each entry is headed by a preamble:

An alphabetical List and Return of all the Negro and other Slaves belonging to or in the lawful possession of [Name of estate and/or slaveholder]. Given in by me this 15th July one thousand and eight hundred and seventeen.

Signature (see later for explanation)

Then follow six columns: *Number - Names - Sex - Country - Colour - Reputed Age*. Other colonies extended the categories and also listed information about occupations (eg St Kitts, Barbados, Dominica), physical characteristics (Trinidad, Grenada), or height (St Lucia, Trinidad).

78 *Nevis*

An alphabetical List and Return of all the Negro and other Slaves now resident on the Estate called Eden and belonging to or in the lawful possession of Anne Hutton Given in by me this sixth day of July one thousand eight hundred and seventeen

Anne Hutton

<i>No</i>	<i>Names</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Colour</i>	<i>Reputed age</i>
1	Abbe	Male	Africa	Black	Forty Years
2	Augustus	do	Nevis	do	Twenty four do
3	Abba	Female	do	do	Sixty do
4	Aun	do	Africa	do	Sixty seven do
5	Anne (Black)	do	Nevis	do	Thirty eight do
6	Anne (White)	do	do	do	Five do
7	Baud	Male	do	do	thirteen do
8	Banks	do	do	do	Eighteen do
9	Bob	do	do	do	One do
10	Barba	Female	do	do	Fifty three do
11	Belf	do	do	do	Sixty five do
12	Betty HARRY	do	do	do	Sixty do
13	Blanch	do	do	do	Twenty five do
14	Barbay	do	do	do	Eleven do
15	Badanda	Male	do	do	Fifty two do
16	Charles	do	do	do	Thirty do
17	Charlton	do	do	do	thirteen do
18	Crawford	do	do	do	thirteen do
19	Cudjoe	do	do	do	Ten do
20	Claxton	do	do	do	Eight do
21	Clarke	do	do	do	Six do
22	Clark	do	do	do	Five do
23	Corke	do	do	do	Three do
24	Olbe	Female	African	do	Sixty two do
25	Cores	do	Nevis	do	Thirty five do
26	Charlotte	do	do	do	Eighteen do

Page 1 of the 1817 register for Eden plantation, image from Ancestry.co.uk

The first registers were intended as a complete inventory of all the island's enslaved people. In Nevis 66 estates and 244 individual owners submitted a total of 310 registers. In the first part of the 1817

volume are the estates listed by parish, starting with St Thomas Lowland and going clockwise round the island. In the second part are the individual owners (from f200). All the volumes - except the 1828 volume - are indexed with the names of individual owners and of the owners of plantations and sometimes also by the names of the plantations.

Subsequent registers for 1822 and so on were intended to update the previous register:

An alphabetical List and Return of all the additions to the original Stock of Slaves belonging to or in the lawful possession of [name of slaveholder] whether by Birth Purchase returns of fugitives or absent Slaves or otherwise since the last Return. Given in by me the twenty first of January one thousand eight hundred and twenty two.

An additional column headed 'by birth purchase or Return and if purchased by whom' gave slaveholders space to complete the required information and list all the individuals born, purchased, gifted or inherited since completing the previous register. Some slaveholders diligently recorded the dates people came into their possession and the dates infants were born.

Similarly, in a section for *Deductions* slaveholders declared any decreases through *Death, Sale, Manumission, Absconding, or otherwise*. Again, some slaveholders carefully recorded the day someone had died, been freed, gifted or sold, while others did not afford their people that dignity.

If since the previous register no additions or deductions had occurred, they submitted a register, stating 'no alteration', or 'nil' but in many cases simply did not inform the authorities until some change had taken place.

152	Piecent	M	M	M	2 years 11 Months	born 22 Feb 1818
153	Lilly	M	M	M	2 years 9 Months	born 5 April 1818
154	Leah	M	M	M		12 Feb 1821
155	Lanmy	M	M	M	3 years	born 22 Dec 1818
156	Tyre	F	M	M	1 year	born 26 Jan 1820
157	Natty	M	M	M		born 13 Oct 1821

b.

An Alphabetical List and Return of all Deductions from the original Stock of Slaves resident on the Estate called Eden formerly belonging to or in the lawful possession of M^r Anne Hutton now of John Huggins Junr whether by Death Sale Manumission Absconding or otherwise since the last Return.

Original or subsequent Return	Name	Dead Manumitted sold or absconded	If sold, to whom	Date of Sale &c
3	Abba	Dead		
4	Anna	D		
16	Lilly	D		
63	John Africa	D		
69	John Day	D		
75	Lilly	M		
80	Lilly	M		
87	Mary Bony	M		
137	Leah	M		
141	Tom Constatler	D		
140	Tom Anstons	D		

Part of the 1822 update for John Huggins's Eden, listing some of the additions and deductions, image from Ancestry.co.uk

While historians can draw valuable demographic information the Slave Registers, such as the rates of births and deaths between 1817 and 1834 and the size of plantations in different islands, they are not always that useful for genealogical research. Not only are the lists often flawed (each of the columns contain omissions and errors), but the task of securely locating a person in the registers can be very difficult indeed – particularly if few personal details are known.

Despite their shortcomings, the island-wide slave registers can be a rich source of information about the enslaved people and the slaveholders, as well as the plantations. Since they submitted their returns parish by parish their registers provide pointers as to where they lived. Often family members registered the people they had in their possession together, and this internal evidence can yield additional information.

The Slave Registers, column by column

This section explains what each column contains and what to look out for.

The preamble

The slaveholder listed in the preamble to an entry was not necessarily the person to whom the enslaved people 'belonged' or by whom they were 'owned'; it could have been someone in whose 'lawful possession' they were. These could be the owner's representative in the island, such as their plantation manager or attorney, or an executor in case of a deceased slaveholder. On marriage, a husband usually came to own his wife's people 'in right of marriage' - except where the marriage contract stipulated that they were to be for the 'sole use and benefit' of the wife only.

Many unmarried women registered their own people and either signed the register or made their mark, but in some instances male relatives or partners submitted the information on their behalf. It is worth noting the names of these men. They can provide pointers, as in the case of Elizabeth Alvarez. Her and Rebecca Alvarez's register was signed by Nicholas K Fyfield. It is very likely that Elizabeth Alvarez was Fyfield's common-law wife and buried as Elizabeth Fyfil (sic).¹¹

In the 1817 Nevis register only four slaveholders were labelled as 'free coloured' but so far many more free coloured or black men and women have been identified as slaveholders who had submitted registers. By the 1820s these free people had merged into the general population and in the official documents did not necessarily require to be marked out as a free black or a person of colour. Given that names recur within generations of planter families and that enslaved people were sometimes called after members of their owners' families, this can make it difficult to establish people's identity with certainty.

All slaveholders in the Nevis registers had first names and surnames.

Names

The enslaved peoples' names listed in the Nevis registers generally tended to be consistent across the different registers, so that a male called Tom would remain Tom while someone called Thomas would in subsequent entries remain Thomas.

¹¹ NHCS Archive, St Paul's Burials, 1825-1837 No 411

Few people were registered with surnames; the majority had single names. Most were pet forms of common names such as Elizabeth (Betsey), Ann/Anne (Nancy), Margaret (Peggy), Mary (Polly), James (Jim or Jemmy), etc.

If a person had a surname, it could be that of their father – white, or black/mixed-heritage. Sometimes a person acquired the surname of their previous owner when they were sold. However, this was not always the case; the surname could be that of a previous-owner-but one (or more), as in the case of Robert Arthurton. In 1825 Margaret Jones registered Robert, a boy aged 8, as purchased from John Peterson. In 1831 she declared she had sold Robert in 1829 to Elizabeth Jones. It did not state that Elizabeth Jones was in Trinidad but an Elizabeth Jones of Port-of-Spain registered in 1831 a Robert Arthurton as imported from Nevis. After checking John Peterson's register, it is apparent that he had bought the child at a Marshal's Sale (auction). Almost certainly Robert's owner before John Peterson had been a member of the Arthurton family. If Robert Arthurton had any offspring, in all likelihood they will have continued using that same surname.

On plantations (rather than among individual slaveholders) one can often find people of the same name with the prefixes 'Little' and 'Great', or 'Young' and 'Old'. While some may have been different generations of the same family, this was not necessarily the case. The different labels may just have been used to identify people with the same first name. Such duplication could come about by purchased people joining an existing slave population but it may also indicate that enslaved people themselves could express a preference and so named their children after kin – regardless of their master's or mistress's need for easy identification.

Some children's names were linked to that of their mothers, and people retained these double names into adulthood: for instance on Mountravers were Madges Juba (aged 37 years) and Nellys Juba (34), on Mount Pleasant Flora's Phillis (40) and on Batchelor's Hall Fanny's Peter (45).

As can be seen from the above and the following examples, the mother-child relationship was not always indicated by an apostrophe: also on Batchelor Hall were the boys Hago Sam and Lorain Tom, and given that at the same plantation were women of child-bearing age called Hago and Loraine one can safely assume that they were the boys' mothers. Sometimes the link cannot be made easily if the mother was no longer alive, or with the same slaveholder. It is also apparent from the case of Lorain Tom that spelling could be inconsistent.

Very occasionally the Nevis registers state that a person was 'commonly called' or 'known by' another name. The 1817 Jamaican registers include many aliases, showing that people would have been known by more than one name. In Nevis, too, many enslaved people would of course have had private and pet names unbeknown to their slaveholders.

Sex

Simply stating whether a person was 'male' or 'female' means that this is the most accurate of the columns.

Rather than use 'male' and 'female', some plantations (eg Saddle Hill, Maynard's New River, Prospect) listed each individual as a boy or a man; a girl or a woman. If on the same plantation a male aged 19 was listed as a boy and a female aged 18 as a woman, it probably is an indication that she had already given birth.

If several individuals of the same gender were listed together, the line below will just say 'do' (ditto, the same). This also applies to the other columns.

Although this column is the most accurate, it is possible that mistakes have crept in during transcribing. For instance, in 1817 Fanny's Peter on George Webbe's Batchelor's Hall was listed as female, in 1822 as 'absconded' but by 1825 Fanny's Peter, now listed as 'male', had 'returned home'.

Colour

Using the language of the times, the historian Barry Higman has established that in 1817 the mixed-heritage population on Nevis made up about a sixth of the Nevis-born enslaved people. However, he did not include those individuals classed as 'red' or 'yellow' because these descriptions were also used for first generation Africans.¹² Other categories in use in Nevis were negro, black, mulatto, sambo, mustee/mestee/mestize, yellow cast, yellowish, of a yellow cast.

'Negro' and 'black' described Africans, or those of full African descent, while the other descriptions were for children of mixed heritage. Different colonies sometimes used different language. In Jamaica, for instance, the child of a mulatto and a white parent (one quarter black by descent) would have been known as a quadroon but quadroons do not appear in the Nevis registers. In Nevis the child of a mulatto parent and a white parent tended to be classed as mestee, or mustee, or mestize; the child of a mulatto and a black parent as sambo. A mulatto was the child of a black and a white parent – in the case of the colonies usually a black woman and a white man.

In Jamaica the children of a mustee and a white parent (mustee finos) were free by law 'and rank as white persons to all intent and purposes'.¹³ In Nevis these children did not acquire automatic freedom by virtue of their parentage.

Some people's colour was incorporated into their name, such as Mulatto Jack, or Mulatto Christian, and it can be safely assumed that their parents were a black woman and a white man.

While it is important to take note of the original colour classification as a pointer towards a person's parentage, it must be remembered that these are not entirely reliable. Variations could result from the slaveholders or their slave informants not knowing the exact kin relationships. Particularly those people who were moved between different owners may have been judged just by the colour of their skin, rather than their actual descent.

Country

In this column the main difference was between people born in the colonies and those born in Africa. By 1817 the majority in Nevis were island-born and either called Native, Creole, or Nevis Creole – as opposed to, for instance, St Kitts Creole.

Given the close links between Nevis and St Kitts it is unsurprising that people had been imported from St Kitts but others came from St Eustatius, St Martin, Antigua, Guadeloupe, Barbados, Dominica and Curacao, as well as America. This shows the wide spread of family and business networks and how Nevis was connected with the wider Caribbean and with North America through trade – including the trade in human beings. It also shows that this geographical label of their birthplace was something that accompanied enslaved people throughout life and gave them an identity.

¹² Barry Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834* (University of the West Indies Press, 1995) p147 and p155

¹³ MG Lewis, *Journal of a Residence Among the Negroes in the West Indies* (London: John Murray, 1845, in edition with Fortunato Prandi, *Memoirs of Father Ripa*, 1844) p55

A few individuals' names confirm their African origins, such as Ebo Tom, Bambra (sic) Jim; Congo Sally, or Sally Minna. However, confusingly Betty Minna on Spring Valley plantation was listed as a Creole.

A very small number of slaveholders in Nevis stated that their people were from Congo, as opposed to just Africa. The 1817 St Kitts register also lists people from Congo and in addition reveals the presence of specific African ethnic groups: Ebo, Mande, Minna, Bambara, etc. One can take this as a good pointer to someone's origin but cannot completely rely on this information. Slave traders and slaving vessels operating along the West African coast tended to pick up a few individuals at one of the stations *en route* so that these people became intermingled with captives from the main people group who were said to have been taken on board, eg Ebo, Mande, etc.¹⁴

Africans themselves may not have been able to articulate to which particular group they belonged,¹⁵ and purchasers may have lacked accurate knowledge of a person's actual birthplace. And, as with other information, errors crept in over time. Using the 1817 register for Mountravers plantation as an example, in the column headed 'country' mistakes were made regarding two African women's origin: one woman's entry was left blank (Hannah), the other was wrongly described as a Creole (Monimia). From the plantation records it is clear that in 1765 Monimia had been bought as a girl, together with two other young African females, when all three were said to have been 'Ebbo'.¹⁶

Reputed age

In Nevis the ages were mostly, as the heading states, 'reputed'.

By the nineteenth century many plantations in Nevis were owned by absentees residing in Britain. Usually their managers and overseers would have recorded all the births and deaths of everyone on the plantation and periodically sent these to the owners to keep them informed of the state of their workforce. It is very unlikely that personal slaveholders living in Nevis would have kept such records; there was no particular need for them to do so. This means that they would have had to estimate the ages of their people when it came to registering them in July 1817. At best, slaveholders (or the enslaved people themselves) may have connected the birth days or birth years with particular events – perhaps the year a hurricane struck, or when the harvest was outstanding, or when the slaveholders' own children were born.

It is probable, therefore, that the older a person was, the less likely their reputed age could have been guessed correctly. If someone's age was recorded in multiple of fives (eg 55, 60, 65 etc) this could well be a sign that their age had been estimated, as was usually the case with those born in Africa.

Some infants' ages were stated exactly (1 year 2 months, 2 years 8 months, etc). In the registers taken after 1817 often the actual birth dates were entered, particularly of children born on plantations.

If a person was sold, their purchaser should have adjusted their age when first registering him or her but often the original 1817 age was just transferred without taking account of the passage of time. You will notice this if you are working forwards in the registers. If, for some reason you are working backwards, then it is always worth trying to find the seller's original register.

¹⁴ See *The Mountravers Plantation Community, 1734-1834* Part 2 Chapter 4 pp433-34

¹⁵ Higman, *Slave Populations* p17 and p21

¹⁶ UoBSC, PP, AB 18: 2 November 1765; AB 15 Gingerland Plantation a/c; also AB 16 Smith & Baillies' a/c

Of all the registers completed in Nevis in 1817, the one for Mountravers plantation stands out. It alone stated the dates of birth of all plantation-born children except for a period when an interim owner did not record those. The final new owner continued the tradition of entering children's birth dates which makes it uniquely possible to identify each plantation-born individual with absolute certainty.

When Mountravers was sold in 1808, fairly accurate ages of the people not born on the plantation were known but in 1817 the new owner made significant mistakes in estimating some of their ages - particularly for women. Two women were said to have been about 33 and 28 years older than they were; in total six women's ages were over-estimated by almost one hundred years. Although enslaved women generally outlived enslaved men, it probably meant that these individuals had endured a particularly hard life and had aged accordingly.

Other information

The Nevis registers occasionally note that someone had 'absconded'. Slaveholders tended to tolerate a certain amount of absenteeism when, for a few days, someone visited friends and relatives on other estates but returned on their own accord, and these short-term absences would not have warranted an entry in the register. If deemed a 'runaway', these people were likely to have been absent for some time already and were not expected to return soon - if ever.

One woman who had absented herself was then registered in another island. Mary Constable, registered in 1817 by Martha Fox as a 28-year-old, was in 1822 recorded as 'absconded' but in the 1825 St Kitts register appeared as a 28-year-old Creole of St Kitts, 'brought from Nevis per Certificate'. All transfers between islands had to be officially recorded.

Although the Nevis registers did not require information about a person's occupation, very occasionally a job may have been mentioned.

Equally, very occasionally family relationships were recorded. Samuel Pemberton and Elizabeth Arthurton's executors, for instance, identified eight children's three mothers. In this the Nevis registers are very different from, say, Jamaican ones with their *Remarks* columns in which generally the mothers of the children were listed. The Tobago lists have a specific column for mothers' names while in the Trinidadian ones families are grouped together but even then, the wider kin relationships with aunts and uncles or grandparents were only very rarely recognised.

The updating registers of Grenada and Tobago list the causes of death; in Nevis this was not the case although at least two people were recorded as having drowned. Occasionally an entry opens up an entirely different story, such as Sterling, a man on Edward Huggins's Eden Estate, who had been hanged 'for the murder of Mr Thomas Hurman 29th August 1829'.

In some instances people were noted as 'sold to be manumitted' in which case you may want to check whether the sale and the manumission were entered in the Common Records. You may find further details about the freed person. However, that not all manumissions were officially recorded - partly due to the administrative cost but also because since about 1814 slaveholders had to satisfy the authorities that the freed person was able to support him or herself. If children or frail adults were unable to earn a living, the slaveholder had to lodge a bond with the Treasury. This legislation

was conceived at a time of food shortages which caused much distress ‘to the poorer classes of the inhabitants’.¹⁷

Entries in the registers reveal whether the slaveholder was at least sufficiently literate to write their own signature but sometimes one can glean other information about them. Usually this involved a change in their circumstance, such as ‘Miss Bethia Brazier deceased December 7th 1826’, or Reverend Leacock marrying Mary Anne Beard.

Missing information, and additional information

Working closely with the Slave Registers it becomes apparent that many slaveholders simply did not follow the rules to the letter. In theory they were supposed to report and have recorded every transaction – every purchase, every sale – as well as every birth and every death.

Some slaveholders submitted incomplete information but even if they did supply all the relevant information at the time, people could get lost in the slave registration process. For instance, in 1817 John Brooks registered five people: Phillis, a 50-year-old African woman, Betsey and her sons George and Thomas, and Joe, a Creole sambo. After confirming in 1822 that he still had five people, Brooks died later that year. No one completed a final register for him but in 1825 two people are known to have acquired two of Brooks’s males: Garrett Herbert Lans bought one of Betsey’s sons, George, ‘from the estate John Brooks dec’d’ while another man registered Joe Barnes, now said to have been a St Kitts Creole and a mulatto. His age should have been adjusted to take account of the intervening eight years but, registered as a 25-year-old in 1817, in 1825 he was listed as aged 30. By stitching together the information from the different Slave Registers additional (and also contradictory) information had emerged. Yet more came to light after consulting the Wills book: apparently Robert Mulhall, probably John Brooks’s friend, paid for the cost of burying Brooks and thereby became his creditor. To recover the money Mulhall applied for the administration of the deceased’s estate which included jewellery items (Brooks was a jeweller) and the value of his enslaved people: Joe Bains (Barnes!) was worth £200 Nevis currency, Betsey £110, George £150 and Phillis £60. Betsey’s younger son Thomas (one and a half years old in 1817) was not listed, and it can be assumed that he, like so many young children, had died.¹⁸ As can be seen from this, it is possible to extract a lot of information from both the Slave Registers and the Court House records.

It was easy for mistakes to creep in when plantations or enslaved people changed hands, and different owners supplied the evidence to the authorities. The next source of errors could have occurred when clerks in the colonies transcribed the information into the volumes to be sent to London. Further mistakes were made when these volumes were transcribed for the online Ancestry edition.

¹⁷ JH Howard, *The Laws of the British Colonies* (London: Joseph Butterworth, 1827) p511 Act No 54 Geo III 24 May 1814

¹⁸ Nevis Book of Wills 1819-1830 ff109-19

Searching the Ancestry Slave Registers database

The basics

After creating a log-in ID you can access these registers free of charge, without having to take out a subscription to Ancestry. <http://www.ancestry.com>

In theory, the Ancestry database is searchable by country, first and middle name, last name, age, gender, and name of 'enslaver' (previously slave owner). In practice, this is hardly ever straightforward. The Ancestry database is quite unwieldy and one cannot always immediately get a result. Often it will take some nifty manoeuvres to find the right records. Frustratingly, I have found one record one day but then was not able to locate it again on another day through the same search facility. One way round this is to get into the register for a particular year (eg 1817) and manually search it page by page.

When you first open the page *Former British Colonial Dependencies, Slave Registers, 1813-1834* and open the *Country* drop-down menu on the right-hand side, you'll get the options for Nevis: *Description 1817, 1822* and underneath *1825, 1828, 1832*. For some reason Ancestry has put together the volumes for the first two registers, and then the following three. Note that the 1831 register is wrongly labelled '1832'.

You can go straight into one of the two volumes in order to do a 'manual' search. However, once you've gone straight into a volume and you then decide to go back and do a name search, the highlighted years under *Description* disappear and you can only get back into a particular Nevis volume if you enter a name in the search box.

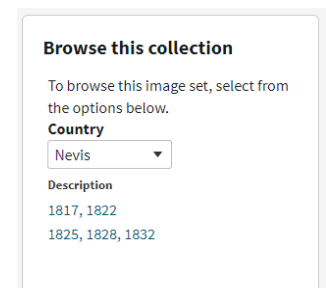
If the name you are searching for results in a lot of references to other colonies, one way to get back into a Nevis volume for a 'manual' search is to use the name that is bound to result in several 'hits'. I tend to use 'Edward Huggins', the notorious Nevis planter who owned several plantations.

- ❖ [Book-marking the Search page will make it easy to get back into the system.](#)

You will see from the image below that in my search for Edward Huggins a man called Edward Rodon Huggins of Jamaica appears before the planter from Nevis, even though I had wanted to search only for Nevis results – one of the frustrating anomalies of dealing with the Ancestry Slave Registers.

So far, I have not been able to make the boxes marked 'Keyword' and 'Nationality' work when searching the Slave Registers for, for instance, plantation managers, or attorneys.

- ❖ [BUT: If you enter 'Nevis' in both the 'Keyword' and the 'Nationality' box, you can usually narrow down the results to those just relating to Nevis.](#)



Former British Colonial Dependencies, Slave Registers, 1813-1834

Search Match all terms exactly

First & Middle Name(s)

Last Name

Year

Location

Birth

Lived In

e.g. London, England

Any Event

e.g. London, England

Keyword

e.g. teacher or "Tower of London"▼

Role

Nationality

Gender

Year

Residence Date

Enslaver First & Middle Name(s)

 Exact

Enslaver Surname

 Exact**Search**

Clear search

Browse this collection

To browse this image set, select from the options below.

Country

Description

Related data collections

[St. Croix, Danish West Indies, Denmark, Slave Plantation and Town Head Tax Lists, 1772-1821](#)

This database contains images of plantation and town head tax lists from the island of St. Croix in the Danish West Indies (today the U.S. Virgin Islands) from 1772-1821. Some of these records have been indexed and are name searchable.

[Danish West Indies, Denmark, Records of Enslaved People, 1672-1917](#)

Think you'll never find your early slave ancestors from St. Thomas or St. Croix? It might be time to think again because the Danes were great record keepers.

[All Census & Electoral Rolls in the Card Catalogue](#)

More help

[How to search Ancestry](#)[Finding records](#)[Search tips](#)[Refining your search to improve results](#)[Handwriting help](#)

All Former British Colonial Dependencies, Slave Registers, 1813-1834 results for Edward Huggins

Search Filters

Broad ▶ Exact

2 more search fields:
[Hide additional fields](#) ▲

Slave Owner First & Middle Name(s):
Edward

Slave Owner Surname: **Huggins**

[Edit Search](#) | [New Search](#) | [Update](#)

▼ All Categories

- ▶ Census & Electoral Rolls ✕
- ▶ 1800s Censuses ✕

Former British Colonial Dependencies, Slave Registers, 1813-1834

This database contains slave registers from former British colonial dependencies, many of them in the Caribbean, for various years in between 1812 and 1834. Information available on these records...

[Learn more about this database...](#)
[Browse Individual Records](#) ▶

Shortcut Keys ▶

Results 1–50 of 52,095

View Record	Name	Birth Date	Residence Date	Residence Place	Owner	View Images
<p>Note: To get better results, add more information such as Birth Info, Death Info or Location—even a guess will help. Edit your search or learn more.</p>						
View Record	Margaret Elliss	abt 1765	1823	St Catherine, Jamaica	Edward Rodon Huggins	
View Record	Margaret Elliss	abt 1765	1823	St John, Jamaica	Edward Rodon Huggins	
View Record	William Edwards	abt 1795	1823	St Catherine, Jamaica	Edward Rodon Huggins	
View Record	Margaret Elliss	abt 1765	1823	St John, Jamaica	Edward Rodon Huggins	
View Record	William Edward	abt 1795	1823	St John, Jamaica	Edward Rodon Huggins	
View Record	William Edward	abt 1795	1823	St John, Jamaica	Edward Rodon Huggins	
View Record	Toney	abt 1819	1822	Nevis	Edward Huggins	
View Record	Hannah		1831	Nevis	Edward Huggins	
View Record	Bessy	abt 1795	1817	Nevis	Edward Huggins	
View Record	Philip	abt 1826	1828	Nevis	Edward Huggins	
View Record	Frankey	abt 1777	1831	Nevis	Edward Huggins	
View Record	Margaret		1831	Nevis	Edward Huggins	
View Record	Laurence	abt 1829	1831	Nevis	Edward Huggins	
View Record	Marie Cil		1828	St Vincent	Edward Huggins	

Images from Ancestry.co.uk

In the image above, if you click on the little square screen on the right-hand side, you'll dive straight into the volume for 1817, or whichever year you choose. *View Record* on the left-hand side gives you an abbreviated transcript – useful for a quick overview.

Once inside a volume, to get to another year you choose the option *ALL* at the top and then click on the other volumes – in this case 1825, 1828 and 1831 (wrongly labelled 1832).

Former British Colonial Dependencies. Slave Registers, 1813-1834

Nevis > ALL > 1817, 1822

Save ▾

The image shows two pages of a slave register from Nevis, dated 1817 and 1822. The left page (frame 116) is headed 'B' and the right page (frame 113) is headed 'C'. Both pages contain handwritten entries for individual slaves, including names, ages, and descriptions. The interface includes a search bar at the top, a 'Save' button, and a navigation toolbar on the right side.

116

113

Nevis > ALL > 1817, 1822

Save ▾

116

An Alphabetical List and Return of all the names of the original stock of Slaves belonging to or in the lawful possession of White Persons resident in the Parish of St. Andrew's in the Island of Nevis on the 1st day of January 1817. Known in by me this 1st day of January 1817. Thomas Smith Esq. Clerk of the Peace.

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Particulars	Particulars
23	Jacob	Male	40	Black	
24	John	Male	40	Black	

113

An Alphabetical List and Return of all the names of the original stock of Slaves belonging to or in the lawful possession of White Persons resident in the Parish of St. Andrew's in the Island of Nevis on the 1st day of January 1822. Known in by me this 1st day of January 1822. Thomas Smith Esq. Clerk of the Peace.

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Particulars	Particulars
11	Stephen	Male	2 years	Black	

200 of 332

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- To move around a volume, you can
 - enter another frame number at the bottom, or
 - click on the image to the left of the frame number to see small images of several frames side by side.
- To turn to the next page use the arrow on the right-hand side.
- To see transcribed text (useful if you cannot decipher something) click on the two heads to the right of the frame number.
- To enlarge the image, use the slider to the right of the reference number.
- To print, download records, etc use the tools option above the slider.
- To get to the indexes for each volume, go to
 - Frame 171 for 1817
 - Frame 320 for 1822
 - Frame 114 for 1825
 - Frame 473 for 1831
 - Volume 1828 has no index; it starts at Frame 132.
- ❖ Spend some time and familiarise yourself with all these functions so that you can confidently navigate your way around the Slave Registers.

The process

In order to have a reasonable chance of finding your ancestor in the Slave Registers, you will need to know how old that person was when he or she died (unless they had a truly unique name). But treat their age at death as something a bit fluid; people's ages were not always accurate and those in multiple of fives were, most likely, estimated. Remember how enslaved people's age did not always change in the registers, reflecting the real passage of time.

A person's surname may be an indication that they worked on a particular estate, or for a particular slaveholder. Before going any further, you may wish to eliminate this possibility by searching for that estate or slaveholder.

However, after Emancipation your ancestor may have chosen a surname entirely unrelated to their last 'master' or 'mistress', or to the last plantation on which he or she had worked. Given all these variations, you may well end up with several people who could have been your ancestor – particularly if they had a common first name.

- ❖ If you are trying to find an enslaved person with a first and a second name, enter both names in the 'First & Middle Names' box. For some odd reason, Ancestry treats enslaved people's surnames as middle names. However, if it turns out that the person you are looking for was a slaveholder ('enslaver'), then you can enter their forename and their surname into the separate boxes.

Before you can trace a woman through the Slave Registers, you will need to have checked the marriage registers first to find out if she was married and her maiden name.

From the Parish Registers you may well have built up a collection of names. More often than not freed people tended to remain in the parish where they had lived and worked – unless they emigrated. Nevis had hardly any spare land on which people could settle, and after Emancipation many left for other colonies. Presumably some also came to live in Nevis so there is a small possibility that your ancestor was enslaved elsewhere and might show in the register of a different colony.

If you cannot find the person you are looking for by entering a first and a second name, you will have to search for him or her by their first name, including pet names (a woman may have been buried as Catherine but during slavery days was known as Kitty or Kitsy). You can end up with a long list of names but as you follow each of them through the registers you may already reduce the number because some people would have died.

Slight changes in spelling can make online searches more difficult: Abel Blyden became Abel Bliden, Anna Bella/Annabella, Statira/Satira, Laurence/Lawrence, etc.

- ❖ Even if you are getting results for a name, try a different way of spelling it to make sure you are not missing anyone: a search for Christianna results in 27 entries; a search for Christiana in 64.

Following people through the registers can also be made more difficult by women owners getting married and their enslaved people (i.e. their property) becoming their husband's.

With each subsequent update new slaveholders emerged: those who had inherited enslaved people or who had bought some in the intervening years. A number of slaveholders died; their executor or executrix may have completed a final register which stated who inherited the enslaved people, or to whom they were sold. Some executors did not complete these final registers which makes it that much more difficult to track people through successive volumes.

When you search the Slave Registers remember that the online volumes for Nevis only cover the years 1817, 1822, 1825, 1828 and 1831 as the final year, 1834, has not been copied. To consult this you will have to travel to the UKNA or employ a researcher to do a search for you. If you do not check the final volume you may miss important information, such as someone having been freed between 1831 and 1834. In addition to the usual methods of manumitting people they could now claim their freedom once they had travelled to England. On Maynard's New River estate, for instance, in 1834 Franklin was among those 'freed by late Act of Parliament he having been in England'.

Also, a person you had identified in the registers as one of your possible ancestors may have died between 1831 and 1834 when a cholera pandemic killed many people in Nevis.

Conclusion

You will have noticed that I have often use modifying words such as 'generally' and 'usually'. I do not want to dispirit you but the reality is that these searches are not as straightforward as one wants them to be. Just when one thinks something is certain, another issue crops up that means one has to question – or should question - one's certainty. When doing this kind of research one has to consider the many exceptions to the rule and be aware of the many errors, or inaccuracies, in the records.

So as to not add to the mistakes, when searching all the different sources it is absolutely vital that you keep a written record of everything you find and where you have found it. Once you've gathered all the information, you can then evaluate what you've found: could this person have been the same as that person? Can you build up a coherent picture from what you have found, or are there too many variables? Why were the names slightly different? Could a woman at her age have had a child? Was this individual free/enslaved/white? What did that mean?

I know from experience that one wants an answer, and one wants something (and sometimes anything!) to be the right answer. It is so easy to ignore facts that don't quite fit the picture one has built up but do try and stand back and ask yourself 'is this really the person I was looking for?'

You may well end up with several individuals who could have been your ancestor, so you will have to weigh up the available evidence. You may decide that, on the balance of probability, this or that person was indeed your forebear but you may also have to accept that you cannot choose between them.

The conclusion may be that there is no conclusion.

If you are unable to trace your family to the days of enslavement, you may take comfort from knowing that your ancestor has probably been listed in one of the registers. His or her name remains safely somewhere in one of those volumes – perhaps to be discovered in future when new documents or new methods of research have become known.

Plantation records

If you have managed to track your ancestor to the Slave Registers, then you can try and search the Common Records and Wills to see whether he or she appears in those. If not, your best chance of finding out more about him or her is in the slaveholders' private papers, or in records about the slaveholder and his or her property. Some families still have these documents in their possession and it will be difficult to track those down but others have deposited them in their local archive, university, library or museum. Among the collections for Nevis are the

- Maynard Papers in Suffolk Archives, Ipswich Branch
- Mills Papers, Letterbooks 1752-1771 in Museum of London Docklands, Sainsbury Centre Archive
- Pinney Papers in the University of Bristol Special Collections
- Stapleton collections: 'Stapleton Cotton MSS' and 'Bangor Bodrhyddan MSS' (both collections are held in the University of Wales at Bangor); 'Aberystwyth Bodrhyddan MSS' (held in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth); 'Ryland Stapleton MSS' (held in the John Ryland Library, University of Manchester) and 'Harvard Stapleton MSS' (held in the Houghton Library at Harvard University).

Further reading

The Bibliography for *The Mountravers Plantation Community, 1734-1834* lists a wide range of material relating to Nevis and to plantation slavery:

<https://seis.bristol.ac.uk/~emceee/mountraversplantationcommunity.html>

In addition, you can find many more sources online, among them

- Vere Langford Oliver's *Caribbeana* Mitchell, Hughes and Clarke, London 1910-1919, available through the Digital Library of the Caribbean
- Barry Higman's *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean: 1807-1834* University of the West Indies Press, 1995, available on google books
- Slave Population - Papers and Returns, present pursuant to Address of The House of Commons, dated 6 June 1825, relating to the Slave Population of Barbados ... Nevis etc Digitised by the University of Minnesota. For Nevis see from p669 onwards.

Nevis Parish Registers and some other sources

You can find a list of all the Nevis baptismal, marriage and burial registers and where to access them in *A survey of the endangered court records of Nevis, West Indies* (EAP093). In addition, apparently the Methodists in Nevis have digitised their historic records. See Appendix 8: 'Anglican and Methodist Parish Records, Nevis – Overview' pp74-81

http://eap.bl.uk/sites/default/files/legacy-eap/downloads/eap093_survey.pdf

The following baptismal registers have been digitised by a team from Hamilton College, together with staff from the NHCS, and are available online free of charge:

- St Paul's Baptismal Records 1824-1835
- St Paul's Baptismal Records 1835-1873
- St Thomas Lowland Baptismal Records 1827-1873
- St James Register of Baptisms 1839-1877

<https://litsdigital.hamilton.edu/collections/nevis-historical-and-conservation-society-manuscripts-and-imprints>

The following are on FindMyPast and include the above registers digitised by Hamilton College, as well as those in *Caribbeana*:

- St Paul's Charlestown 1812-1881
- St Thomas Lowland 1734-1873
- St James Windward 1740-1877
- St George Gingerland 1716-1821
- St John Figtree 1729-1860

You can do a search to see whether a record exists but to view the record you will need to take out a subscription to FindMyPast.

The links to the Bishop's Transcripts in *Caribbeana* are useful if you are looking for eighteenth century Nevis parish registers:

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Saint_Kitts_and_Nevis_Church_Records

The Registrar General's Office in the administrative complex in Main Street, Charlestown holds records of births, deaths and marriages which in some cases go back to the 1860s. These constitute the first formal, post-emancipation, Government record of the island's population and are complementary to the parish records held by individual churches. As far as I know, the records have been digitised: registrargeneralnev@niagov.com

See also https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Saint_Kitts_and_Nevis_Civil_Registration

You may well be familiar with the free service Family Search which occasionally has C18th records but is more useful as a tool for late C19th/early C20th emigration records:

<https://www.familysearch.org/en/>

You can find a useful overview to genealogical sources on the website of the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society <https://www.nevisheritage.org/genealogy-resources>