

Finding Milly: Tracing Enslaved Ancestors Using Experimental Search

Presented by Andre Kearns at RootsTech 2024

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“Andre, how did you find that [will record] so fast? You are good on FamilySearch. Did you sleep last night?” -- Patti, a DNA cousin and research collaborator

Abstract:

Researching hard-to-find ancestors in old wills and deeds records can be daunting. Learn how AI-powered Experimental Search by FamilySearch revolutionizes the process, making research easier, faster, and more confident. Join me as I share firsthand experiences and insights into unraveling the life of my enslaved ancestor, Milly, demonstrating the power of innovative search techniques in genealogy.

I. Introduction

- a. Introduction to the Speaker
- b. Background in genealogy
- c. Experience in researching enslaved ancestry
- d. Affiliation with the National Genealogical Society
- e. Sharing an anecdote about discovering a will record using Experimental Search
- f. Importance of Experimental Search in genealogical research

II. Strategies for Tracing Enslaved Ancestors

- a. Start with a specific research question
- b. Research records that document enslaved people
- c. Build a tree for your family's enslavers
- d. Connect the dots to uncover your enslaved ancestors

III. Record Types for Researching Enslaved Ancestors

- a. Overview of family, federal, and state/county records
- b. Examples of each record type and their significance in genealogical research

IV. Estate Records and Their Importance to enslaved ancestry research

- a. Overview of estate records on FamilySearch
- b. Explanation of wills, probates, and deeds
- c. Challenges in navigating and researching estate records manually

V. Introduction to United States Wills and Deeds Experimental Search by FamilySearch

- a. Description of Experimental Search as an AI-powered tool
- b. Benefits of Experimental Search in estate records research
- c. Note on the potential limitations of AI-generated transcriptions

VI. VI. Case Study: Uncovering the Life of Milly

- a. Building the family tree back to Milly through ancestral records
- b. Oral family history and contextual information
- c. Search strategies and filtering results using Experimental Search
- d. Tracing Milly's enslavement through historical documents and records

VII. VII. Enduring Slavery and Post-Emancipation Life

- a. Historical context of slavery in North Carolina
- b. Challenges faced by enslaved individuals and families
- c. Transition to post-emancipation life and challenges thereafter

VIII. VIII. Takeaways and Conclusion

- a. Emphasizing the importance of researching enslaved ancestors
- b. Encouraging the application of strategic research approaches
- c. Highlighting the role of Experimental Search in uncovering family history
- d. Encouragement to share ancestral stories and heritage

IX. IX. Q&A Session

- a. Open floor for questions and discussion

About the Presenter

Andre Kearns is a genealogist, writer, and public speaker with a passion for uncovering ancestral histories, especially within African American families. His research has traced his own family's roots back to 1619 and the first Africans to arrive in colonial Virginia. Despite the immense challenges of tracing family histories for marginalized groups, Kearns leverages a blend of oral family history, traditional research, and DNA analysis to discover previously unknown stories of both enslaved ancestors as well as free people of color, and share them forward.

Kearns speaks and writes extensively on race, culture, and genealogy to highlight the importance of diverse and inclusive histories. He serves on the board of the National Genealogical Society where he chairs the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee. He holds a BA in Business Administration from Morehouse College and an MBA from Harvard Business School.

Kearns is on a mission to empower others with knowledge of their own complex ancestries. He blogs about his research and insights at www.medium.com under the name Andre Kearns. With his unique personal history and professional expertise, he is a leading voice advocating for more truth and reconciliation in America's understanding of its complete history.