

Tracing Pasts: South Carolina project great for volunteers

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Tracing PASTS Volunteers can always find worthy projects

Contributing Writer

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<http://www.newsherald.com/search/?q=Kleback&fistype=site&x=0&y=0>

We genealogists are great volunteers. We learn early that shared information is key to our success.

If it weren't for the thousands of genealogists who have collected cemetery data, indexed censuses, photographed homesteads and transcribed original documents, we would not have the rich collections of information we use every day. I have volunteered on many projects since the 1980s and always am looking for new opportunities. Just this week in Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter, I learned about an exciting project in South Carolina.

According to an announcement by the South Carolina Department of Archives and History and Lowcountry Africana, there are plans: "to digitize and publish freely online more than 25,000 historic documents of interest to researchers of African American genealogy and history." Colonial and Charleston, S.C., estate inventories from 1732 to 1867 will be digitized and indexed, including names of more than 30,000 slaves.

More than 14,000 South Carolina bills of sale, most of them bills of sale for slaves, also will be digitized for online viewing.

These records will be useful to genealogists of all races with ties to South Carolina in this time period and will be of particular interest to those researching African American ancestry. The indexes and digital images will be available on both Lowcountry Africana (www.lowcountryafricana.com) and within the On-line Records Index for the South Carolina Department of Archives and History (www.archivesindex.sc.gov). Use of the items will be free.

According to the announcement, volunteers are needed to help with the project. There is a Web site in beta testing at www.afriquest.com where volunteers can sign up now. Afriquest is a volunteer project of the Africana Studies Department at the University of South Florida. I've written about them before; they've done some excellent work. Information on the USF program is at www.africanaheritage.com

The Afriquest site is designed to be a new collection point for documentation on African Americans and their history. Anyone can upload and share pictures and information here. Since many records and images are still privately held, having a place to share these is terrific. Afriquest's motto is "Changing the World One Record at a Time." That's a great slogan for any genealogist.

Family researchers owe great thanks to the volunteers before them who have saved and shared vital documents. We can pass their kindness forward by participating in projects like Afriquest.