

NEH Application Cover Sheet

Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants

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Field of Expertise: Anthropology

INSTITUTION

Sweet Briar College
 Sweet Briar, VA UNITED STATES

APPLICATION INFORMATION

Title: *African-American Families Database: Community Formation in Albemarle County, Virginia, 1850-1880*

Grant Period: From 4/2010 to 3/2011

Field of Project: History - American

Description of Project: The African-American Families Database project involves a unique partnership between local historians, anthropologists, database designers, and community residents to develop an on-line database for connecting African-American families to their antebellum roots and tracing patterns of community formation in the post-bellum period. Working with historians and researchers we will develop a research methodology for entering information from standard archival records ??? such as wills, census tallies, personal property taxes, and birth, marriage, and death certificates. Once entered into Excel spreadsheets we will export the data to a relational database, such as MySQL, and develop algorithms for searching for individual people. In this pilot study, we will

BUDGET

Outright Request	\$24,963.00	Cost Sharing	\$6,242.00
Matching Request	\$0.00	Total Budget	\$31,205.00
Total NEH	\$24,963.00		

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List of participants

Cannon, Alice, Central Virginia History Researchers (CVHR) member (artist)

Cooper, Jean, CVHR member (Grants Officer, University of Virginia Library)

Ferster, Bill, database consultant (Sciences, Humanities and Arts Network of Technological Initiatives (SHANTI) University of Virginia)

Murphy, Shelley, CVHR member (African American genealogist)

Parrish, Shirley, CVHR member (African American genealogist)

Pugh, Eric, database consultant (Open Source Connections)

Rainville, Lynn, Project Director (Sweet Briar College)

Sadler, Bess, database consultant (Scholars Lab, University of Virginia)

Schwartz, Baron, database consultant (Percona)

Shulman, Gayle, CVHR member (African American historian)

St. Rose, Edwina, CVHR member (African American genealogist)

Stanton, Lucia, Central Virginia History Researchers Director (Thomas Jefferson Foundation / Monticello)

Thompson, Steve, CVHR member (Rivanna Archaeological Services)

Towler, Sam, CVHR member (legal assistant, Michie Hamlett Lowry Rasmussen & Tweel)

Vernon, Robert, CVHR member (GIS specialist, National Ground Intelligence Center)

Abstract

The *African-American Families Database* project involves a unique partnership between local historians, anthropologists, database designers, and community residents to develop an on-line database for connecting African-American families to their antebellum roots and tracing patterns of community formation in the post-bellum period. Working with historians and researchers we will develop a research methodology for entering information from standard archival records — such as wills, census tallies, personal property taxes, and birth, marriage, and death certificates. Once entered into Excel spreadsheets we will export the data to a relational database, such as MySQL, and develop algorithms for searching for individual people. In this pilot study, we will test the associations between generations of families by tracking the 19th-century descendants of several dozen enslaved individuals listed on two antebellum "slave lists."

Level 1: Digital Humanities Start-Up Proposal — *African-American Families Database: Community Formation in Albemarle County, Virginia, 1850-1880*

This project has two goals. One is to provide a searchable database that allows historians and researchers to track the formation and growth of African-American families and communities in the antebellum and immediate post-Civil War period. Secondly, the database can help African Americans find their enslaved ancestors. These goals are important for a number of reasons. First, the surnames of enslaved individuals are often unknown, mainly because their owners did not record or were ignorant of them. This makes it very difficult for African-American families to trace their ancestry into the antebellum period. Second, our lack of individualized data for enslaved individuals hinders our ability to write compelling stories and historic accounts of the communities they were a part of. Many of the standard works on American slavery rely on gross tallies of "males and females" listed only by age and sex in the US Slave Census. The detailed studies that have been made of specific enslaved communities (e.g., Walsh 2001, Ely 2004, and Chambers 2005, on African Americans in Virginia¹) were painstakingly researched by individual historians. Now that the groundwork has been laid by several decades' worth of plantation studies, it would be valuable to be able to discuss regional trends and compare and contrast the experiences of enslaved individuals on different plantations. When multiple archival records are made available about an individual's residence, marriage, property acquisition, church membership, and commercial transactions, new connections and interpretations can be made about black communities in the south. For example, the extent of enslaved family fragmentation during the pre-war years as well as settlement patterns after the War are strikingly illuminated. Using the heuristic wisdom of local researchers (see below) we will create a methodology that can be used to disambiguate people from complicated historic records. A qualitative approach will be used to develop a work flow to capture the steps taken by these researchers to trace black families and from this logic create on-line templates so other counties can enter in their archival data. The resulting dataset would enable historians to discuss regional trends. Our pilot database would provide information for thousands of individuals from diverse records and help link the generations of African-American families between 1850 and 1880 in one Virginia County. We have reserved the url www.centralvirginiahistory.org for our initial data compilation.

This project will be directed by Dr. Lynn Rainville, an anthropologist and historian at Sweet Briar College. The majority of the archival research will be conducted by a group of local historians, the "Central Virginia History Researchers" (CVHR), who have been meeting once a month at Monticello for five years. The leader of this group is Lucia Stanton, the Shannon Senior Historian at the Thomas Jefferson Foundation (Monticello). The core CVHR group includes two dozen individuals with diverse skills and decades of experience researching Virginian county history. They will be our archival experts, suggesting, locating, and transcribing records for the backbone of the database. Several members of the group have already been successful at tracing African-American families from antebellum plantations to their 20th century descendants. In the proposed project we hope to streamline this research process as much as possible and provide guidelines for researchers in any community tracing slave families.

Grant sponsored Activities: We will link archival data (the composition of households as recorded in census records, vital records, and property tax valuations) with geo-spatial data (the

¹ Chambers, D. B. *Murder at Montpelier: Igbo Africans in Virginia*. Jackson: U. Press of Mississippi (2005); Ely, M. P. *Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom from the 1790s Through the Civil War*. NY: Knopf (2004); Walsh, L. *From Calabar to Carter's Grove: The History of a Virginia Slave Community*. C-ville: U. of Virginia Press (2001).

location of households, the nature of the surrounding topography, and the distribution of businesses, schools, cemeteries, and churches). The result will be a searchable database that traces generations of families within Albemarle County, Virginia in two locations: the neighborhoods of Hydraulic Mills and an Earlsyville's plantation. We are limiting this initial test case to the descendants of slaves from two plantations in order to refine our data entry and search queries before proceeding with data from tens of thousands of individuals. We estimate that this test case will include information on about 400 people from five generations of black families.

Methodology: The archival materials discussed above will be standardized into spreadsheets with one to two dozen variables for each of the six spreadsheets (**App. 2**). For example, the personal property tax list includes fields for the location of the home and any taxable personal property. This record will be linked via the individual's name to the US Census which will reveal the members in their household. These records will be compiled into an open source package such as MySQL that can be installed by historical societies. We are working with database consultants from the University of Virginia, Monticello, and private industry to compile these records. The second methodological approach will be to locate this household in space using Google Maps (on-line) and Google Earth (via a downloadable application). A review of current geo-spatial methodologies reveals a diverse approach to displaying geographic data. In our discussions we have reviewed six options: 1 - Google Maps API (uses IE Google Maps with KML overlay); 2 - Google Earth (with KML and super overlays); 3 - ArcGIS Explorer (AGX 900 - ESRI's free Google Earth look-alike with API functionality); 4 - Open Source MapServer (free, but requires host server and PostGIS database); 5 - ESRI ArcGIS Server (expensive and thus restrictive for disseminating the templates); and, 6 - VisualEyes (vizeyes.org, developed by one of our consultants, Bill Ferster, that enables users to construct new views of historic data).

We plan to display our data at the first three levels immediately and use server hits and customer feedback to determine which option is favored. We will also need to design Boolean queries, i.e., select African American landowners AND farms BETWEEN 50 and 100 acres, so that they are accessible to a wide audience. This kind of query is presently impossible in Google Earth; it may be possible in AGX; it is supported with ArcGIS and VisualEyes.

Environmental scan: The best known on-line databases that approach the complexity of this project are **ancestry.com** and related genealogical programs such as **Afrigeneas**. They differ in three important ways from our project: (1) they are not free and/or not designed to be shared or modified by researchers or historical societies; (2) they are designed around individual family trees where every individual has a kinship connection to another, rather than including social and economic transactions with neighbors; and, (3) they are geared towards traditional kinship trees where surnames guide the search. This search engine is not suitable for the large number of African Americans who descended from the four million enslaved individuals in the slave and border states on the eve of emancipation. Only the surnames of a small percentage of enslaved families were recorded. A second well-known model for this project is the **Valley of the Shadow** by Professor Edward L. Ayers and his University of Virginia colleagues. Unlike Ayers' model, the template for our project's database and search queries will be designed to allow other counties to use it for their own data. A third effort, similar in its goal to disseminate information, is George Mason University's **Omeka** exhibit design program. However, Omeka focuses on the front-end or visualization of data, while this project is geared towards designing a better container for storing raw data and improving the retrieval results for historians and family researchers. The three main technologies used in this grant are not new: Google Earth, Google Maps, and MySQL. The innovation comes in the algorithms designed for locating the descendants of enslaved individuals and in the layering of multiple types of historic, spatial data.

History & Duration: This project is an outgrowth of the PI's NEH Collaborative Research Grant (RZ-50420-05) which created an on-line African-American Cemetery database (www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/cem). Baron Schwartz, the MySQL consultant on the project, created a searchable list of 6,000 gravestones for Albemarle County. The PI's interest in digital local history vaults dates back to 2001; urls for these projects can be found in her biography and she has been working with the CVHR group since it was founded in 2004. If the initial research methodology is successful we will apply for a Level II ODH NEH grant and consider other historical funding sources to enhance the number of archival sources that we add to the databank.

2010 Work plans: Over the course of 12 months we will investigate tools to retrieve archival and spatial data. We have already begun our first task: to enter in archival data (**App. 1 & 2**). If awarded the grant we will meet with the database consultants in April to explain the qualitative and quantitative nature of our *archival* data and the types of queries that we would like to be able to perform. A challenge will be to tie unique individuals to places (such as owned property) and lifetime events (such as births or marriages). In June we will convert our six Excel spreadsheets to database tables and begin to experiment with queries and refining our categories. In August we will process our *spatial* data, historic United States Geodesic Survey maps, property deeds and tax maps, and several post-bellum maps of Albemarle County that list communities, estates, and landowners (**App. 3**). Our consultants will help us decide how to display this data and integrate it with the archival information. In the third stage, we will run two test cases on the newly created databases: searching for descendants of individuals found in two slave lists, from the Hydraulic neighborhood and Bleak House plantation. Depending on the success of these searches we will refine our database design in January 2011 and post the experimental search engine on-line in February, in time for Black History month. We will write up our results in March 2011.

Evaluation: To test the pilot database we have selected two plantations – Hydraulic and Bleak House - to see if we can trace the families of the enslaved individuals into the postbellum period. Once we have our open source package on-line we will work with two local groups to test the search engine: the Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society and the African American Genealogy Group. Several members of CVHR serve in these groups and will act as liaisons to introduce our pilot database.

Staff members: Dr. Rainville will supervise the project, coordinate the consultant sessions, and be responsible for designing a website to host the *Families Database* and posting files and images. The collection of archival data will be supervised by Ms. Stanton and undertaken by the CVHR members, who have decades of experience in researching local records (Sam Towler, Gayle Shulman, Alice Cannon, Jean Cooper), designing GIS databases (Robert Vernon, Steve Thompson), and in researching their own family histories (Shirley Parrish, Shelley Murphy, Edwina St. Rose). Several members have demonstrated how to break through the records barrier between the worlds of slavery and freedom after the War. They have traced descendants of slaves from a number of Albemarle County plantations and created complex family trees. The technological consultants (Bill Ferster, Baron Schwartz, Bess Sadler, and Eric Pugh) have diverse backgrounds in visualization, GIS, and database design.

Final product: We will produce a website, to be hosted by Sweet Briar College, that showcases the first set of six types of archival documents and a step-by-step guide on how to use those records in any community to search for one's enslaved ancestors (or research slave communities). Accompanying this will be a white paper that outlines our successes and failures in designing the search engine and in standardizing archival data (e.g., inconsistent spellings and matching individuals to historic records).

Appendix 1: Six Types of Archival Sources for the Pilot Database

Personal Property Tax Lists (PPTL).

The Central Virginia History Researchers (CVHR) have already entered in data for 1867, 1868, and 1869 into Excel spreadsheets for Fredericksville Parish (where the two sample plantations lie). These years are the most critical because they provide the locations of all African-American men aged 21 and over, and also of female heads of households. Additional years will be transcribed by Sweet Briar students.

Birth records.

See Appendix 2 for a sample of these entries.

CVHR has entered in data for 1857 to 1866 into Excel spreadsheets (again, for Fredericksville Parish where the plantations are located). This list provides the names of enslaved mothers, children born, and mothers' owners, as well as dates of birth. Note that 1865 and 1866 provide something unique: locations for African-American women.

Death records.

There are several on-line sources for this information (1) Library of Virginia Death Records 1863-1896, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/opac/dripabout.htm> (2) The J.F. Bell Funeral Home site which compiles information for 10,000 African Americans who died in Albemarle County from death records. The site was developed by the PI, Lynn Rainville: <http://douglass.vcdh.virginia.edu/jfbell/index.shtml>. (3) Dr. Rainville also developed a database for African-American cemeteries. It contains information on 6,000 people buried in Albemarle County: www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/cem.

Marriage records from licenses.

Members of the group have entered in data from 1865 to 1876 and are moving forward in time (to reach 1890, the end date of this pilot study). Students will assist.

Will Books (containing materials that relate to African Americans, free or enslaved).

CVHR members have finished entering in data for the years 1852-1855. Next they will digitize the years 1855 to 1873 from the will books.

Censuses of 1870 and 1880.

These are currently available online. In Albemarle County there were 15,000 African Americans in 1870 and 13,500 in 1880.

Next set of records to transcribe: As time permits CVHR will:

(a) Transcribe local Church records (Baptist, Episcopal, and Methodist). The years 1850-1865 have already been completed.

(b) Transcribe land tax records from 1867 to 1890. Students will assist.

Appendix 2: Sample Spreadsheet Categories in the Slave Birth Records

Albemarle County, Virginia

Bureau of Vital Statistics, Slave Births, 1858-1861

BVSbirthsNorth18581861.xls													
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	ID	Record	Page	Parish	First Name	Last Name	Sex	Status	Birth Ye	Birth Place	Mother's	Owner's First	Owner's Last
2	1	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	James		M	slave	1859	Milton (near)	Conorilla	George F.	Stachlin
3	2	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	Anthony		M	slave	1859	Mount Eagle	Paulina	Robert	Gentry
4	3	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	Caroline		F	slave	1859	Buck Island	Betsy	Sarah Nancy	Hughes
5	4	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	Rosetta		F	slave	1859	Carter's Bridge (r	Betsy	George W.	Starke
6	5	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	Georgeanna		F	slave	1859	Carter's Bridge (r	Sarah	George W.	Starke
7	6	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	Emily		F	slave	1859	Carter's Bridge (r	Eliza	W. C.	Timberlake
8	7	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	Puss		F	slave	1859	Carter's Bridge (r	Lucinda	W. C.	Timberlake
9	8	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	Lianna		F	slave	1859	Belle Aire	Lucy Ann	Walker	Timberlake
10	9	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	Mary		F	slave	1859	Scottsville	Milly	George S.	Martin
11	#	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	George		M	slave	1859	Scottsville (near)	Frances	Shadrach	Lively
12	#	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	James		M	slave	1859	Green Mountain	Georgeann	Anna M.	Moon
13	#	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	Cordelia		F	slave	1859	Green Mountain	Mary	Anna M.	Moon
14	#	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	Willie		F	slave	1859	Green Mountain	China	Anna M.	Moon
15	#	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	Lewis		M	slave	1859	Green Mountain	Sarah	Anna M.	Moon
16	#	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	Walker		F	slave	1859	Scottsville (near)	Susan	Robert	Tompkins
17	#	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	Albert		M	slave	1859	Charlottesville	Amanda	Jesse W.	Jones
18	#	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	James		M	slave	1859	Carter's Bridge (r	Mary	William K.	Moss
19	#	BVS 1859	97	St. Anne's	O		M	slave	1859	Scottsville (near)	Ann	Mahala	Dawson
20	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Peter		M	slave	1859	Charlottesville (n	Ellen	Reuben	Maury
21	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Major		M	slave	1859	Charlottesville (n	Evaline	Reuben	Maury
22	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	O		F	slave	1859	Charlottesville (n	Kitty	Reuben	Maury
23	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Mitchell		M	slave	1859	Charlottesville (n	Adaline	Monroe	Kelly
24	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Kitty		F	slave	1859	Charlottesville (n	Lydia	Monroe	Kelly
25	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Isabella		F	slave	1859	Charlottesville (n	Mary	John O.	Pendleton
26	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Tom		M	slave	1859	Charlottesville (n	Maria	John O.	Pendleton
27	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Mary		F	slave	1859	Charlottesville (n	Martha	John O.	Pendleton
28	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Lucy		F	slave	1859	Carter's Bridge (r	Anna	John O.	Harris
29	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Coleman		M	slave	1859	Carter's Bridge (r	Betsy	John O.	Harris
30	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Isaac		F	slave	1859	Carter's Bridge	Sally	George	Rives
31	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	James	Williams	M	slave	1859	Carter's Bridge	Mary	George	Rives
32	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Albert		M	slave	1859	Carter's Bridge	Mourning	Jonathan	Leathers
33	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Gabriella		F	slave	1859	Batesville	Elvira	John	Burch
34	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Shadrach		M	slave	1859	Scottsville (near)	Sophia	George W.	Coleman
35	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Frank		M	slave	1859	Scottsville (near)	Jane	George W.	Coleman
36	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Beverly		M	slave	1859	Scottsville (near)	Mary Jan	George W.	Coleman
37	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Martha		F	slave	1859	Brownsville (near	Harriet	Burlington	Fretwell
38	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Evalina		F	slave	1859	Garland's Store (r	Mary	Sarah	Hamner
39	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Jenny		F	slave	1859	University	Mary	Robert P.	Prentis
40	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	George		M	slave	1859	North Garden	Maria	John B.	Townley
41	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	O		M	slave	1859	Buck Island	Milly	William B.	Snead
42	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Isaac		M	slave	1859	Laurel Spring	Adeline	James G.	White
43	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	O		M	slave	1859	University (near)	Martha	Michael	Johnson
44	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Anna		F	slave	1859	Scottsville (near)	Julia	James W.	Mason
45	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Cornelia		F	slave	1859	Scottsville (near)	Judy	James W.	Mason
46	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Willie		M	slave	1859	Scottsville (near)	Mary	James W.	Mason
47	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Mima		F	slave	1859	Scottsville (near)	Letty	James W.	Mason
48	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	William		M	slave	1859	Charlottesville (n	Ann	John A.	Wilson
49	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	O		F	slave	1859	Wingfield's Preci	Esther	Sarah M.	Garland
50	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Anderson		M	slave	1859	Wingfield's Preci	Nancy	Matthew	Eubank
51	#	BVS 1859	98	St. Anne's	Charles		M	slave	1859	Wingfield's Preci	Maria	Henry	Hamner

This data was entered into the spreadsheet by members of the Central Virginia History Researchers group. By correlating the name of the enslaved woman, her child's birth date and gender, and the name of the slave owner we can begin to locate antebellum African-American families in space and time. When combined with our other archival and spatial records we can map these families across the generations.

Appendix 3: Historic Maps of Albemarle County, Virginia

As discussed in the narrative, we will cross reference our archival records with geo-spatial data recovered from several sources.

1864 military map (J. F. Gilmer collection, Library of Congress)

g3883a cw0520a80 <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3883a.cw0520a80>

This map lists place names and names of plantation owners.

This map has been geo-registered by Steve Thompson (a CVHR member) in Excel format and .kmz format (for display in Google Earth).

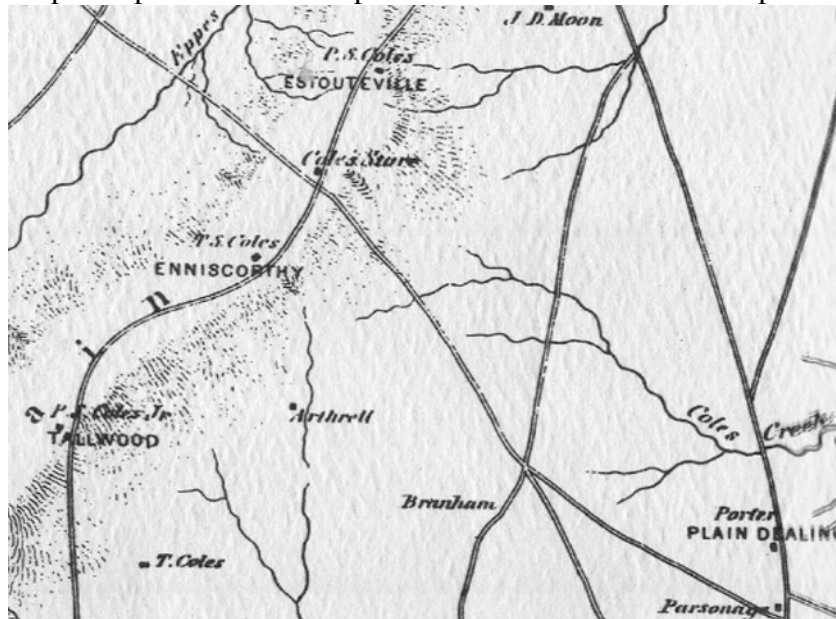
1867 Hotchkiss map (Library of Congress)

g3883a cwh00275 <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3883a.cwh00275>

This map lists place names. Bob Vernon (a CVHR member) is working on layering this map on top of a modern google map to aid us in locating historic plantations.

1875 Green Peyton map (the local historical society has a copy we can digitize)

This map lists place names and plantation owner names. A sample is below.



For example, the Estouteville Plantation (at the top) was owned by P.S. Coles. CVHR research revealed that 99 enslaved individuals lived here. This spatial data would enable us to connect families owned by the same family, T.S. Coles, at the nearby Enniscorthy Plantation where 78 African Americans lived in bondage.

There are two other sources that post-date our pilot study but are still useful:

1. 1907 Massie map (the local historical society has a digital copy). It lists home owners.
2. 1938-1942 aerial tax maps which list African American landowners on verso.