

Southwest Louisiana Records

Research Guide

Genealogical Records, 1719–1880

6,176 Hall ↔ Hebert links · 21,987 Hebert ↔ 1880 Census links

Garland R. Joseph

garland.joseph@gmail.com

Research Guide

Southwest Louisiana Records — Genealogical Research (1719–1880)

This guide explains how to use Southwest Louisiana Records to search the archives, follow cross-archive links, and trace family lines across the 1865 divide. Whether you are new to genealogical research or an experienced researcher, the platform is designed to surface documentary evidence and let you evaluate it for yourself.

1. [Quick Start](#)
2. [Understanding the Archives](#)
3. [How to Search](#)
4. [Cross-Archive Links](#)
5. [Research Workflow](#)
6. [Tips & Limitations](#)

1. Quick Start

If you are looking for a family name and want results quickly, go to Search and type a surname into the **Hebert Archive** search box. The Hebert Archive covers 1720–1865 and contains the most records by volume — it is the best starting point for most Louisiana families.

Type a surname in the search box. Partial names work — searching *FONTEN* will return FONTENOT, FONTENEAU, and similar variants. French and English spelling variants are matched automatically.

- 2 **Browse the results.** Each card shows the person's name, record type (baptism, marriage, burial), year, and source citation. Click a card to expand the full record text.

Follow cross-archive links if they appear on a record card. A link to the Hall Archive means a notarial act may reference the same person. A link to the 1880 Census means a probable match was found in the federal census.

- 4 **Switch archives** using the tabs at the top of the Search page to search the Hall Archive or 1880 Census directly.

New to genealogy? Start with what you know — a grandparent's name, a parish, a rough decade. The platform is most useful when you have at least a surname and a rough time period to anchor the search.

2. Understanding the Archives

The platform combines three archives created independently, for different purposes, by different institutions. Understanding what each archive contains — and what it does not — is essential to interpreting the results.

Hall Archive — 1719 to 1820

Compiled by Dr. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall from Louisiana notarial records, this archive documents enslaved and freed individuals through legal instruments: bills of sale, manumissions, estate inventories, and freedom papers. It covers the French and Spanish colonial period through the early American period.

What you will find: Names (often first name only for enslaved individuals), approximate ages, origins (African nation or Louisiana-born), physical descriptions, skills or occupations, and the names of enslavers or witnesses.

Important limitation: Enslaved individuals are frequently recorded by first name only, or with a single name. Surnames, where they appear, are often those of the enslaver rather than a chosen family name.

Hebert Archive — 1720 to 1865

Transcribed by Father Donald Hebert from Catholic parish registers across Southwest Louisiana, this archive records sacramental events: baptisms, marriages, burials, and successions. It covers Acadian, Creole, free Black, and enslaved populations who were baptized or married in the Catholic Church.

What you will find: Full names (surname and given name), record type, year, parents' names for baptisms, witnesses for marriages, parish of origin, and ethnicity classification where recorded.

Important limitation: Coverage is uneven across parishes and decades. Many records from 1800–1830 were damaged or lost. Records for enslaved individuals are often recorded by first name only before the 1840s.

1880 US Census — Louisiana

The complete 1880 federal census enumeration for Louisiana, covering all 935,068 residents. This is the first federal census taken after Reconstruction and captures the first generation of formerly enslaved families living under their chosen surnames.

What you will find: Full name, age, calculated birth year, race (White / Black / Mulatto), sex, relationship to head of household, occupation, birthplace, and parents' birthplaces. Records are grouped by household.

Important limitation: Ages were self-reported or estimated by census enumerators and are frequently off by 2–5 years. Name spellings reflect the enumerator's phonetic transcription, not the family's own spelling.

3. How to Search

Hebert Archive search

The Hebert search matches against surname and full text. Searching by surname is recommended for most cases — type the surname in the left search box. The full-text box searches within record content and is useful when you know a parent's name, a witness's name, or a specific place name that might appear in the record.

Name matching is accent-normalized and phonetic — *THIBODAUX*, *THIBODEAUX*, and *TIBODO* will all surface related records. French–English equivalents are matched automatically: searching *JEAN* will also surface records with *JOHN*, *JUAN*, and *JAN*.

Hall Archive search

Hall Archive search works the same way — surname or full text. Because many Hall records contain only a given name for enslaved individuals, full-text search is often more productive than surname search. Try searching a slaveholder's surname to find all enslaved individuals documented in their estate or transactions.

1880 Census search

The Census tab offers two views: **Individual Records** and **Household View**. Household View groups records by household ID and is useful for identifying family units and relationships.

Use the filters to narrow by parish, race, sex, or relationship to head of household. The surname search uses a prefix match — searching *BROUS* will return BROUSSARD, BROUSSAR, and similar. Sort by age or birth year to find individuals in a specific generation.

Search tip: If a common name returns too many results, use the parish filter to narrow to a specific area. Most Louisiana families were geographically concentrated — narrowing to one or two parishes usually isolates the right branch.

4. Cross-Archive Links

Cross-archive links are the platform's most powerful feature. They appear as labeled sections on individual record cards and connect probable matches between archives. There are two active link types:

HALL ↔ HEBERT

6,176 confirmed links connect Hall notarial records to Hebert sacramental records. A person documented in a bill of sale or manumission in the Hall Archive may also appear in a baptism or marriage in the Hebert Archive. These links are the strongest on the platform because both archives cover overlapping time periods and populations.

HEBERT ↔ 1880 CENSUS

21,987 links connect Hebert sacramental records to 1880 Census individuals. These links cross the 1865 barrier — connecting a pre-emancipation baptism or marriage record to a post-Reconstruction census household. This is the platform's core research contribution for Black and Creole family history.

Understanding confidence scores

Every cross-archive link carries a confidence score between 65% and 99%. The score reflects the strength of the match across name similarity, year proximity, and parish geography. Scores are grouped into two tiers:

Strong — 90% and above	High confidence. Name, year, and geography all align closely. Treat as a strong lead requiring primary source confirmation, not as verified fact.
Possible — 65% to 89%	Moderate confidence. Name and at least one other signal match. Worth investigating, but should not be accepted without corroborating evidence. Common surnames at this tier have a higher false-positive rate.

Important: All cross-archive links are algorithmic matches — they are probable connections, not verified genealogical facts. Always confirm against the original source documents before including a link in your family record. Confidence scores help you prioritize; they do not replace primary source research.

5. Research Workflow

The following workflow illustrates how to use all three archives together to build a family case across the 1865 divide. This approach is recommended for researchers trying to connect pre-emancipation records to post-Reconstruction households.

Start with the 1880 Census. If you know a family name and a rough location in 1880, search the Census tab first. The 1880 Census is the most complete and legible starting point for post-emancipation Black and Creole families. Find the household, note the ages and birthplaces of all members, and look for Hebert Archive cross-links on individual records.

- Follow Hebert cross-links.** If a census record shows a Hebert Archive link, click it. The linked Hebert record may be a baptism (giving birth year, parents, and godparents), a marriage (giving spouse and witnesses), or a burial. Each opens new lines of evidence: parents' names extend the family line backward; godparents and witnesses often indicate close community relationships.

Search the Hebert Archive directly for parents and siblings identified in step 2. A baptism record often names the parents — search each parent's surname to find their own sacramental records and build the family tree backward.

- Follow Hall Archive cross-links** on any Hebert records that surface them. A Hebert record with a Hall link may connect a free Black or Creole individual to notarial documentation — manumission papers, property transactions, or estate inventories that confirm identity and establish legal status before emancipation.

Search the Hall Archive directly by the slaveholder or estate name for enslaved ancestors who may not appear under their own surname. Full-text search for a plantation name or a slaveholder's surname often surfaces individuals who are otherwise undocumented by name.

- Search the Freedman's Bureau** using the green *Search Freedman's Bureau* button on any Hebert record, Census card, or person profile page. Bureau records (1865–1872) document the same families during the exact years between the Hebert Archive's end and the 1880 Census — labor contracts, ration rolls, and marriage registers that are otherwise absent from the platform's core archives.

Researcher tip: When a census individual has no Hebert cross-link, try searching the Hebert Archive directly by surname and narrowing to the same parish. The linking algorithm requires a minimum confidence threshold — some valid matches may fall just below it and can be identified through direct search.

6. Freedman's Bureau Records

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (commonly called the Freedman's Bureau) operated from 1865 to 1872, documenting formerly enslaved people and free Black families during the first years of Reconstruction. Its

records fill the critical 15-year gap between the Hebert Archive's 1865 cutoff and the 1880 Census.

Freedman's Bureau — 1865 to 1872

What you'll find: Labor contracts between freedpeople and former enslavers, ration and issue rolls, marriage registers (many couples formalizing unions that had no legal standing under slavery), apprenticeship indentures, hospital and medical records, and complaint registers. Louisiana records are concentrated in two microfilm publications: **M1905** (Records of the Assistant Commissioner for Louisiana) and **M1483** (Records of Subordinate Field Offices, covering individual parishes).

How to access it: Every Hebert record card, 1880 Census card, and person profile page on this platform includes a green *Search Freedman's Bureau* button. Clicking it opens a pre-filled search on FamilySearch -- indexed by volunteers from the original microfilm -- in a new browser tab, with the person's name already entered.

What to expect at FamilySearch

FamilySearch hosts the most comprehensively indexed version of the Bureau records, with individual names transcribed from thousands of documents. Search results show record type, approximate date, and a link to the original image. You may be prompted to create a free FamilySearch account to view full-size images -- account creation is free and does not require a subscription.

Bureau coverage varies by parish and record type. St. Landry, St. Martin, and Lafayette parishes are well-documented. Results are not guaranteed for every individual -- many Bureau records were damaged or destroyed during and after Reconstruction, and not all surviving records have been fully indexed.

Research strategy: Bureau marriage registers are especially valuable. Couples who married formally through the Bureau often provided information about previous relationships, children, and places of origin that appear nowhere else in the documentary record. If you find a family in the 1880 Census, always check the Bureau marriage registers for the same surname and parish.

7. Tips & Limitations

Name variation

Louisiana genealogical records span French, Spanish, and English administrative periods, producing enormous spelling variation. The same family may appear as THIBODAU in a French church record, TIBODO in a Spanish-era notarial act, and THIBODEAUX in the 1880 census. The platform's phonetic matching handles most of these variants automatically, but when searches return no results, try alternate spellings or shorten the surname to a distinctive prefix.

Year approximations

Birth years in the 1880 Census are derived from stated ages, which are frequently off by 2 to 5 years. Cross-archive links account for this uncertainty -- a link between a baptism record from 1843 and a census individual with a calculated birth year of 1847 is still algorithmically plausible. When evaluating a link, prioritize name and parish alignment over exact year agreement.

Common surnames

Surnames like RICHARD, LANDRY, BROUSSARD, HEBERT, and TRAHAN are extremely common in Southwest Louisiana. Cross-archive links for these surnames carry a higher false-positive rate than links for rarer names. Apply extra scrutiny -- look for alignment in given name, approximate birth year, and parish before accepting a common-surname link as a probable match.

Coverage gaps

Not all Louisiana parishes are equally represented in the archives. The Hebert Archive is strongest for the Attakapas-Opelousas corridor (St. Martin, St. Landry, Lafayette, Iberia). Coverage thins for North Louisiana and the Florida Parishes. If searches for a known family return no results, the records for that parish may not be included in the current dataset.

This platform is a research tool, not a definitive record

Southwest Louisiana Records surfaces evidence and probable connections. Every link, match, and suggestion should be verified against original source documents -- church registers, notarial records, census microfilm, or other primary sources. The platform helps you find where to look; the verification is yours to do.

swla-records.garlandjoseph.org