

Educator Resource

Civil War to Civil Rights: Families

History Overview

Dates & Eras Pre-War, Civil War, Post War, Reconstruction

Themes African Americans, Families, Emancipation, Segregation, Reconstruction, Civil War to Civil Rights

Grades 5–7
6–9

Standards VS.1, VS.8 a, VS. 8 b, USI.1, USII.1

Strong family relationships helped African Americans survive enslavement. Even in the harshest of circumstances, enslaved people got married, had children, loved and were loved. But family life was often not stable. Slaveholders broke up families by selling a husband but not a wife, a child but not a mother. While enslaved, many men and women built strong relationships and considered themselves married. However, their union was never legally recognized. After emancipation, African Americans sought to make freedom meaningful by building or rebuilding their families. In this context, African Americans had the freedom to determine what their own family would look like and the freedom to live with their families without the daily fear that it might be broken up.

After Emancipation, couples could be legally recognized as man and wife and live with their children as a family. The institution of marriage was essential in American life at the time and engaging in the institution further legitimized freed men and women as citizens with rights.

After the Civil War, families strove to expand communities built during slavery. Now in control of their own lives and labor, freedpeople wanted to negotiate the conditions of their work.

Following larger ideals that prevailed across America, many families tried to keep women out of the fields, preferring women and children to work inside the home. This allowed the family to enter a new area of economic activity as the nuclear family could be nurtured and developed.

As slavery ended, many freed people went out in search of lost family members. They sent letters and travel great distances retracing the steps of their relatives in order to find them. Many families posted advertisements in newspapers requesting and providing information about a particular individual from whom they had been separated during the Civil War. These methods proved successful for some, but for many the searches ended with questions unanswered.

A note on language: In some of the provided sources, students might come across words that are offensive to many people today. It's important to acknowledge the words (since the students will notice) with a reminder that language evolves over time--the term "African American" was not in common usage 150 years ago. These words can be used to hurt people today, so we remind students to leave them in the historical source.



Resources

[Fannie Berry Slides \(PDF\)](#)

[Appomattox County Census
Infographic](#)

[Newspaper Clip 1](#)

[Newspaper Clip 2](#)

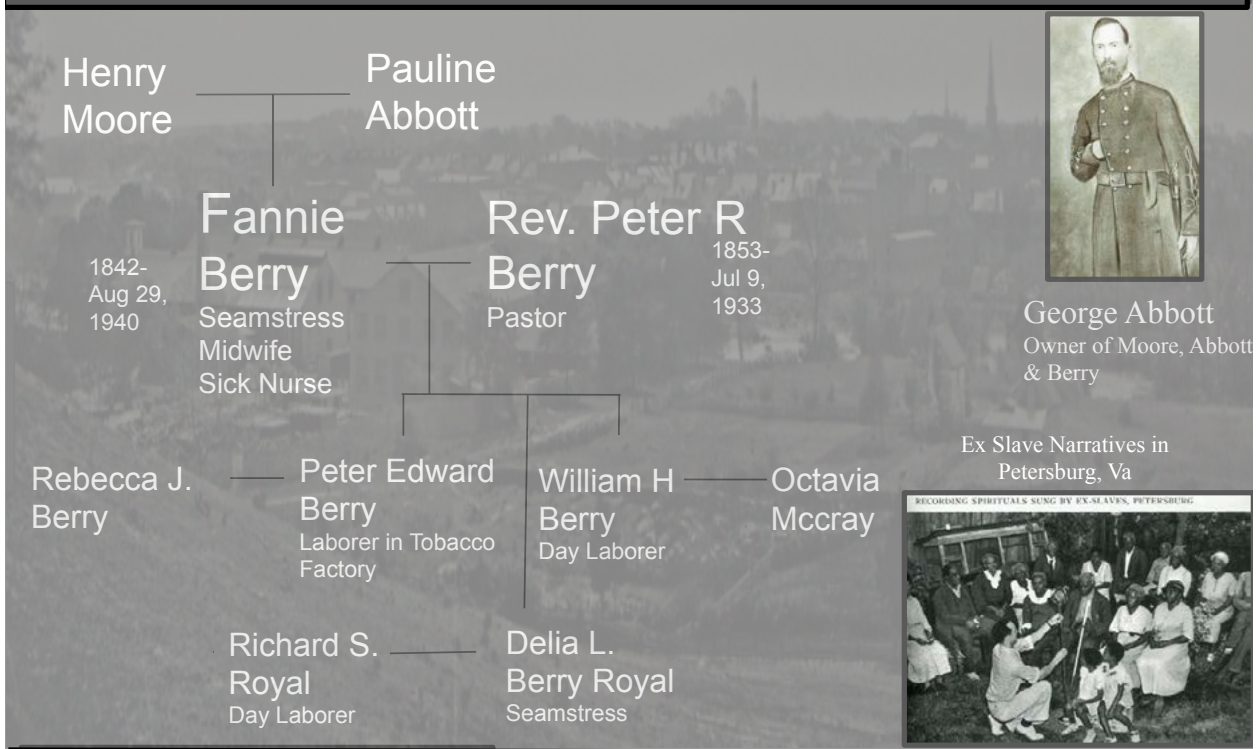
Suggested Questions

1. Explore the Fannie Berry slides. Discuss the opportunities Fannie Berry and her family had in Petersburg after Emancipation.
2. Examine the Appomattox County census infographic. What was the average number of slaves per household in 1860? How do you think the average in Appomattox compares to the rest of Virginia? The rest of the slaveholding South? What do you think it would be like to grow up in a household where people were enslaved?
3. Describe the newspaper clips. What are these clips? Why are they published in the newspaper? What do you think life was like for families who could be broken up in this way?

Suggested Activities

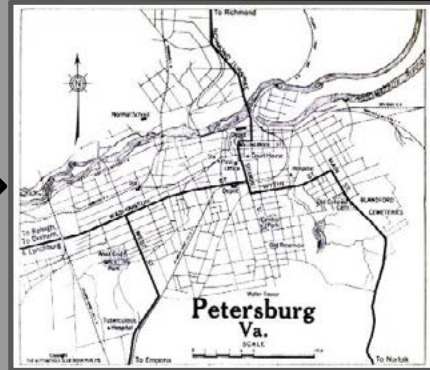
1. Have the students write a reflection paragraph about the newspaper clippings. What did they learn from reading the clips? What can the clips tell us about communication at the time? What do these newspaper clippings tell us about the values and priorities of former slaves and why?
2. Using the photograph, have the students work with a partner and write a paragraph describing the African American family. What are the expressions on their faces? What is the background of the picture like?

The Life of Fannie Berry



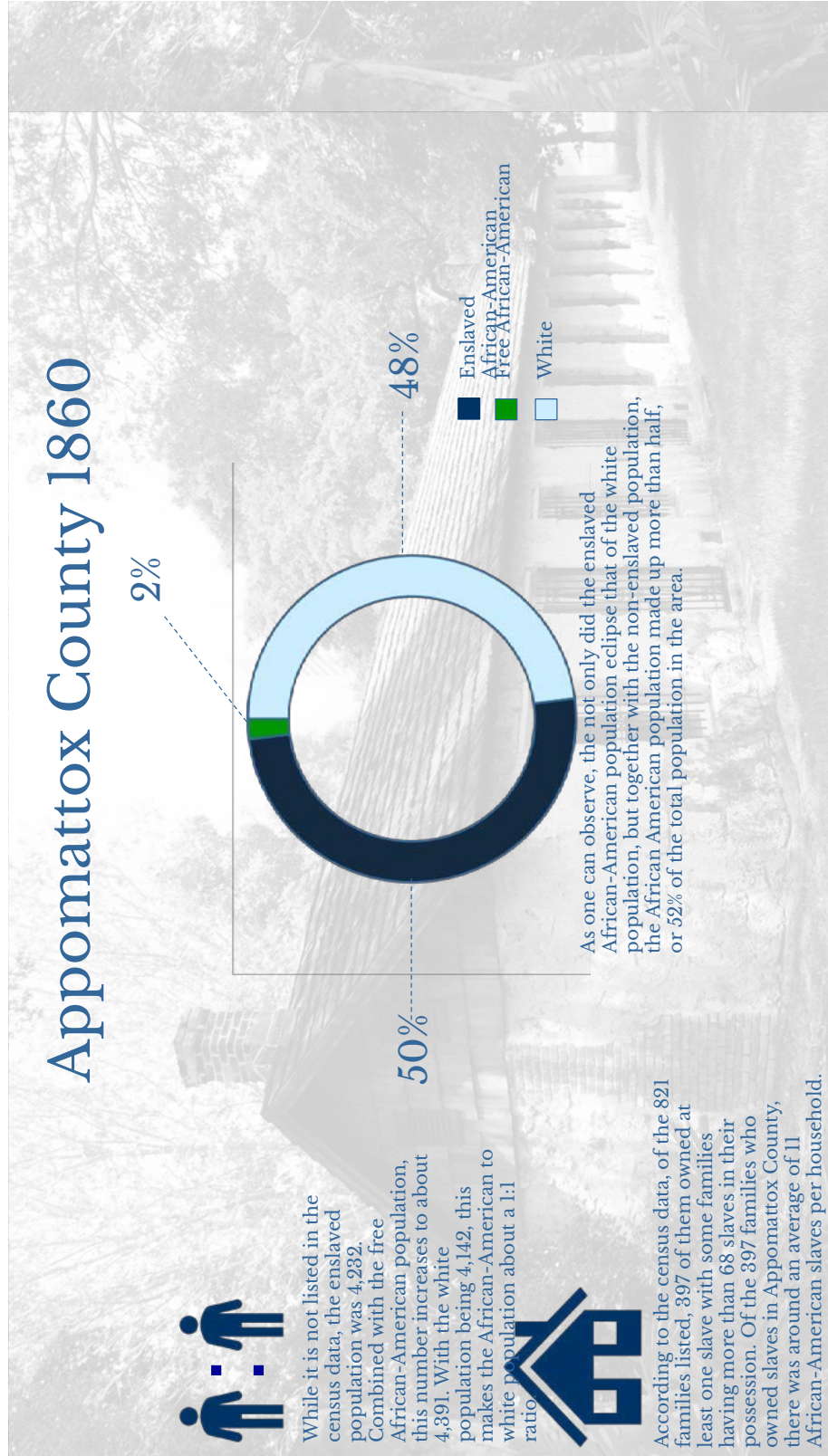
Appomattox County; 1865

At 23 Fannie moves
1865



Petersburg, Virginia; 1919

After the close of the Civil War Berry, along with other Appomattox Area African Americans, fled the rural countryside to more populated and urban areas. Once in Petersburg, Berry married her husband, Reverend Peter R. Berry in 1870. The Berrys' were able to accumulate wealth and become homeowners within the town of Petersburg. According to the 1900 census, Fannie and her husband were homeowners. By 1920, they accumulated enough wealth to pay off their home. They had three children, all of whom were able to read and write although Fannie herself could not.

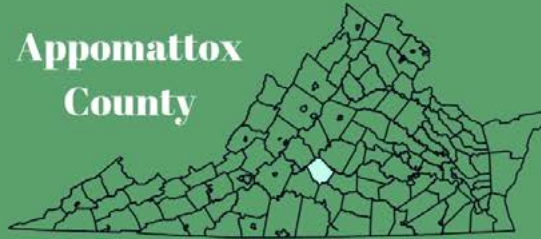




Matthew Mullin

African-American Home Ownership in

Appomattox County



5%
of homes in Appomattox
County were owned by
African Americans in
1870

14%
of homes in Appomattox
County were owned by
African Americans in
1930



Home Ownership By Race





Newspaper Clip 1

INFORMATION WANTED OF JEMMY CALLOWAY, (colored) who left the farm of Mr. John T. Davis, in Appomattox county, Va., after the fall of Richmond. When last heard from he was in Harrisonburg, Pa., boarding with a Mrs. E. Roberts. Any information concerning him will be thankfully received by his father, James Calloway, at Alexandria, Va.
au 29—3t

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Newspaper Clip 2

MR. EDITOR—I wish to inquire for my people. They lived, in the time of the war, in Appomattox county, Va., and the old man was Thomas Mosbey that they belonged to. My father's name was Edmond Jane, he is dead. My mother's name is Jennie Mosbey. I had four brothers, the oldest was James Mosbey, Dave Mosbey, Reader Mosbey, Ben Mosbey, and two sisters of us, Charity and Nancy Mosbey, but now I am Nancy Williams. My young Mistress name is Marsham Elliott, and I got a letter from her in 1880. Please address me at Red Land, Pontotoc county, Miss.

J. B. WILLIAMS.

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