



The Beyond Kin Project™

*A Proposal for Optimizing Research of
Enslaved Populations and Slaveholders
in Genealogical Software*

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The Beyond Kin Project™

A Proposal for Optimizing Research of Enslaved Populations and Slaveholders in Genealogical Software

Problem Statement

Effective genealogical research on America's enslaved people requires access to the documents and life stories of the slaveholders who claimed ownership of them. The slaveholders' stories, meanwhile, are incomplete without the fullest possible accounting of the enslaved persons who were integral to their comfort, wealth, and position in society. While the two groups of people in most cases were not genetically kin, they have relationships "beyond kin." Slavery intertwined their lives and connected their family histories.

Enslaved persons also shared Beyond Kin relationships with the rest of the enslaved population with whom they worked but were not traditionally related. Research work illuminating the life of one enslaved individual has the potential to be useful as well for descendants researching the ten, forty, or two hundred other enslaved persons who shared this one individual's life circumstances. But how do these researchers find each other's work? We need a way to tie all of the often nameless scraps of information about enslaved persons together in coherent context until they can be analyzed and hopefully matched with their descendants' family trees.

Genealogy software ties people who are family, either genetically or legally. It offers no obvious way to connect individuals whose lives were intertwined by circumstances other than family relationships. In many cases, though, the Beyond Kin relationships would be of more help to the researcher than traditional family ties. Documents needed to establish meaningful and useful ancestral records for enslaved persons often remain in the private hands of the slaveholders' descendants. Our software and practices, however, offer nothing that encourages these white descendants to make the documentation of their ancestors' enslaved populations a part of their research work.

As things currently exist, the descendants of the enslaved hit a formidable wall around 1865, many never getting further back. The descendants of slaveholders are building family narratives that are missing the real story. We need each other, and we need a way to work together to break down the walls.

Proposed Solution

We propose that genealogy software developers create a Beyond Kin module, which links together the ancestral records of those who shared a vital bond outside of genetic or legal kinship—a bond that interconnects their stories and makes the research on one useful to the other. This Beyond Kin module could be used to link orphans who grew up together in an institution,

apprentices who lived and studied under a certain master craftsman, men who served in a military unit together, and many other situations. But its greatest use will be in the documentation of enslaved persons, whose descendants face a tremendous challenge in finding them and recreating their stories.

This module would also offer a tool for the descendants of slaveholders who want to acknowledge, document, and better understand their ancestors' lives as beneficiaries of a slave society. In fact, the Beyond Kin Project hopes to recruit the descendants of slaveholders as the front line in this effort, given that they tend to be closer to the needed records and can work on their ancestors' enslaved populations as a whole, while the descendants of the associated enslaved persons can meanwhile work from their own known family members backwards in time to eventually connect to the ancestors documented by the slaveholders' descendants.

How the Beyond Kin Project Began

This idea originated one night as Donna Baker was co-instructing a beginning genealogy class. A descendant of white southerners, Baker knew that the African American students in her class would face a much tougher challenge in tracing their family histories than she did. She had always felt compassion for this predicament, but it had never occurred to her that, in a very real sense, it was a predicament she shared and could do something about.

As her colleague began to teach the section on African American sources—displaying a bill of sale for a woman her own ancestor had purchased—it hit Baker for the first time: she wanted to document the enslaved persons held by her own ancestors. She would be sorting through her family records anyway, every line and every page. It made sense that she should extract all she could find about them. But where should she begin? How could she record her findings? It kept her awake all night, eager to get started.

The next morning, her first call was to friend and colleague Frazine Taylor, who has been researching and teaching African American genealogy for more than 25 years and is highly respected for her skills. Baker, first and foremost, wanted Taylor's blessing. Was she usurping a role that did not belong to her? Second, she needed to tap into her friend's knowledge. Taylor assured her that she had long recognized that African American genealogy required a connection to the white families. She was on board and eagerly began to teach Baker how to do it.

Recalling an ancestor rumored to have been escorted to the Civil War with an enslaved body-guard, Baker decided to turn her attention to that family line, where she knew she would find at least one enslaved person. Taylor sent her to the 1850 slave census where, to her shock, Baker discovered that her ancestor—Jacob Mayberry of Bibb County, Alabama—owned forty-two men, women, and children. They were nameless in this census, but there they were, and the real journey began.

Taylor helped her locate the slave inventory in Mayberry's probate papers and his bequests of enslaved persons in his will, and the forty-two began to have names and valuations. Her family story had, overnight, become a very complex one – an ideal prototype for the Becoming Kin concept that she and Taylor were shaping.

With Taylor's help, within a few months, Baker's research had spread to plantations across four counties, where the various branches of her family lived. Their enslaved personnel were passed from fathers to children, inherited by marriage, bought and sold, being born and dying. In her family's census records, wills, guardianship papers, deeds and other documents, she began to get to know a whole new group of people who had built her family's experience of life. She realized what she now wants others to know: a genealogist cannot know her slaveholding ancestors' stories until she knows the enslaved people who supported and shaped their lives.

Given the very incomplete and often conflicting information available in most sources, along with the absence of surnames, documenting enslaved people proves challenging. Taylor and Baker recognized that the most effective research could be done with software that allows a link between the slaveholding families and their enslaved personnel.

They began by creating a temporary solution using existing technology, as a proof of concept and short-term solution for those eager to get started. They now ask genealogical software and online tree vendors to modify their products to make the documentation of Beyond Kin simpler, more effective, transferrable via GEDCOM, and a standard expectation in genealogical research.

Documenting Beyond Kin with Existing Technology: A Temporary Expedient

A vital element of this project requires a methodology for documenting slaveholder/enslaved connections in online sharable environments. We have developed a short-term method, employing the existing technology of Ancestry.com, syncing to Family Tree Maker—a solution that will likely work on most popular software and online family tree environments, some more easily than others.

Until a better software option appears, we are using placeholder “spouses” to link the families. It allows us to draw a group of people from different families into a group, sharing a story, based on their nonbiological ties. The method includes naming conventions for optimal effectiveness and creates the links in such a way that enslaved persons will not appear to be the stepchildren of their slaveholders.

While imperfect, this workaround is tremendously easier than attempting to study the enslaved populations *outside* of our familiar online tree applications. Until our applications can be modified to handle Beyond Kin links, we can do the most good by sharing this common method.

We describe the temporary method in more detail in “Appendix A: The Beyond Kin Workaround,” and are now using the method successfully on a prototype slaveholding family—headed by Baker's 3rd-great-grandfather Jacob Newell Mayberry of Bibb County, Alabama—and the growing network of enslaved individuals and families documented to have been linked to this family.

While this method can serve for a time, it holds its challenges, and we ask the software providers to create a permanent solution. In the next section we offer suggestions for how this new solution might function.

Proposed Beyond Kin Module: Introduction

We propose that online software developers create a module to link families with their Beyond Kin. Certainly the connection of the enslaved and their slaveholders will offer tremendous help in the complex process of documenting all of the people involved. But the tool we propose could be used for other relationships between people who were not biologically or legally kin but were tied in critical ways.

Possible uses beyond slavery include documentation of:

- Orphans in institutions
- Prisoners
- Apprentices and indentured servants
- Neighbors
- Business partners
- Military comrades

It can be used to document what Elizabeth Shown Mills refers to as the FAN club: friends, associates, and neighbors. These associations often shaped the destiny of our families and hold the clues to their movements, the naming of their children, who married whom, and who is buried where. The software changes we propose would allow us to create a tangible bridge between traditionally separate family trees.

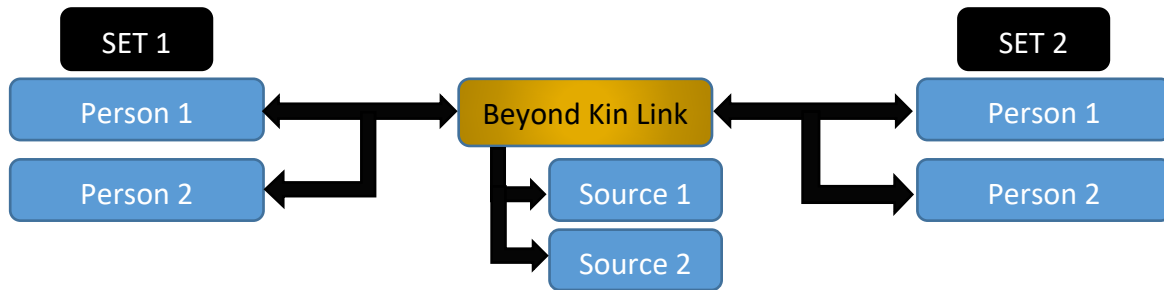


To promote the use—and better, the *consistent* use—of this new methodology, we encourage its promotion under a recognizable name and symbol. We propose that it be “The Beyond Kin Project” with a symbol something like this one, with the hope of building this as a sense of a *movement* and not just a method. The sooner we have software to support the movement, the more effective it can be.

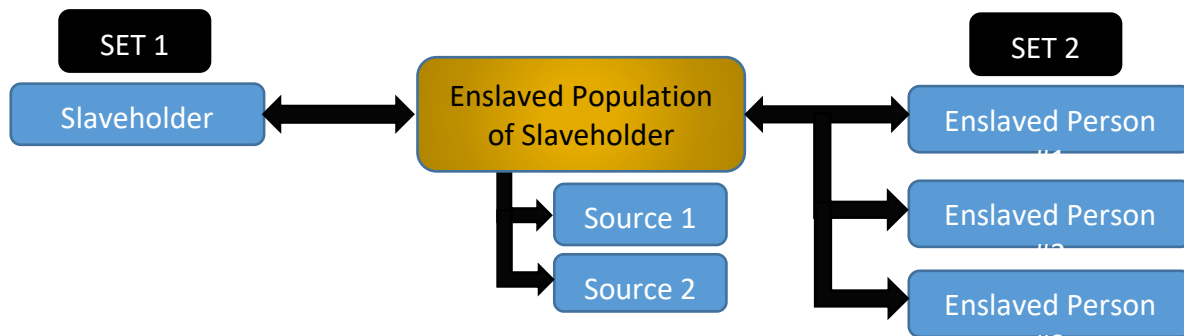
Beyond Kin Module Schematic

In its simplest dynamic, we need a Beyond Kin Module that can sit between the standard ancestral records in genealogy software and use the existing source technology to link two sets of individuals (such as slaveholders with enslaved personnel or the members of a family with their neighbors). A record in the Beyond Kin Module would identify a type of link between one set of people and another and allow the genealogist to attach sources that document the relationship. The link record will have a one-to-many relationship with the individuals in each of the two sets of people and with the sources.

The Beyond Kin link, in the case below, accomplishes three things simultaneously. It turns the individuals in Set 1 into a group. It turns the individuals in Set 2 into a group. And it links the two sets by some joint bond, which is documented with one or more sources.



In the case where the Beyond Kin relationship is a slaveholder with his or her enslaved population, the theoretical diagram might look like this:



Set 1 can be composed of the individual or group for whom the genealogist is creating the thorough life documentation, generally their own ancestor. As descendants of a person in Set 2 eventually find the proof that connects them to this ancestor, the Beyond Kin links will lead them to deeper information. The descendant of an enslaved person will, in the slaveholder's ancestral profile, discover the movements of the family, purchases, inheritances, disasters, and other events that would have affected their own ancestor's story.

The Beyond Kin link will only need to be created once to appear in the records of all of the people selected in either Set 1 or Set 2. The source then only needs to be attached once and is accessible for every person, even if it is a slave population of 400—all attached in the one Beyond Kin link.

If the descendant of the enslaved person initiates the Beyond Kin link, his or her own ancestor might be Set 1, and Set 2 could include every slaveholder who owned their ancestor at some point. Or they might choose to create a new Beyond Kin link for each of these relationships. Each researcher can use the tool in the way best suited for their needs.

The Complex Layering of Beyond Kin Links

The documentation of enslaved persons is complicated by the common practice among American slaveholders of referring to their enslaved persons by an Anglicized given name only. In the rare documents where enslaved persons are mentioned, as often as not they are *described* rather than named. Each new document a researcher discovers might refer to the same person by a different name or description.

Researchers participating in the Beyond Kin Project will be encouraged to use a consistent format in naming enslaved persons, as they are added to the database. The given name will be the description or name (or both) offered by the source at hand—anything that will help us to distinguish one person from another. And the surname will be the name of the institution where the person was held, enclosed in parentheses.

Naming Scenarios

| If Name Extracted From | Given Name | Surname |
|--|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1850 slave census record for Jacob Newell Mayberry, page/image 3, 1 st column, line 6, mulatto male, age 30 | 3a6 Mulatto Male c1820 | (JN Mayberry Plantation) |
| Property inventory of probate file bequeathing to Patricia Coleman “Negro boy Jim \$250” | Jim boy \$250 | (Patricia Coleman Farm) |
| University of Alabama board of trustees minutes allowing funds to replace blouse for “Mary the laundry slave” | Mary the laundress | (University of Alabama) |

To keep order in the growing documentation of a slaveholder’s enslaved personnel, and to allow for meaningful comparison between them, a new Beyond Kin link should be created for every new document that surfaces with names or descriptions of the personnel. As they change slaveholders, Beyond Kin links will be created between the enslaved person and his or her new slaveholder. The Beyond Kin links keep a bread-crumbs trail for this enslaved person back to every situation of enslavement.

Some lists of a slaveholder’s enslaved population will be comprehensive lists, like censuses, by their nature indicating that the list contains every individual. Others may mention one or a few members of a larger slave population, as in a runaway advertisement or a sale or purchase. Some will name the people, others will describe them, and some will only mention them as “Jacob

Mayberry’s negro man.” But every description, no matter how generic, matters and must be captured.

An enslaved individual will inevitably have multiple ancestry records until these variations can be intelligently merged. For example, the following enslaved woman, who I believe (but have not definitively proven) to have taken the post–Civil War name Spicey Davidson, was linked to three different slaveholders in four different source documents. She therefore had four different ancestry identities with different names, until all the variations were matched and merged:

Multiple Identities for Spicey until Merged

| Slaveholder | Beyond Kin Link | Enslaved Person |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Jacob N. Mayberry | Enslaved Population/1850 Slave Census | 3a2 Female c1804 (JN Mayberry Plantation) |
| Jacob N. Mayberry | Enslaved Population/Probate Inventory of Jacob Mayberry 1853 | Spicey with Jack and Mary \$400 (JN Mayberry Plantation) |
| Mary Coleman Mayberry | Enslaved Population/Will of Jacob Mayberry 1853 | Spicey married to Jack (M Mayberry Farm) |
| Wiley J. Coleman | Enslaved Population/Probate Inventory of Wiley Coleman 1822 | Spicey \$400 (Wiley J. Coleman Plantation) |

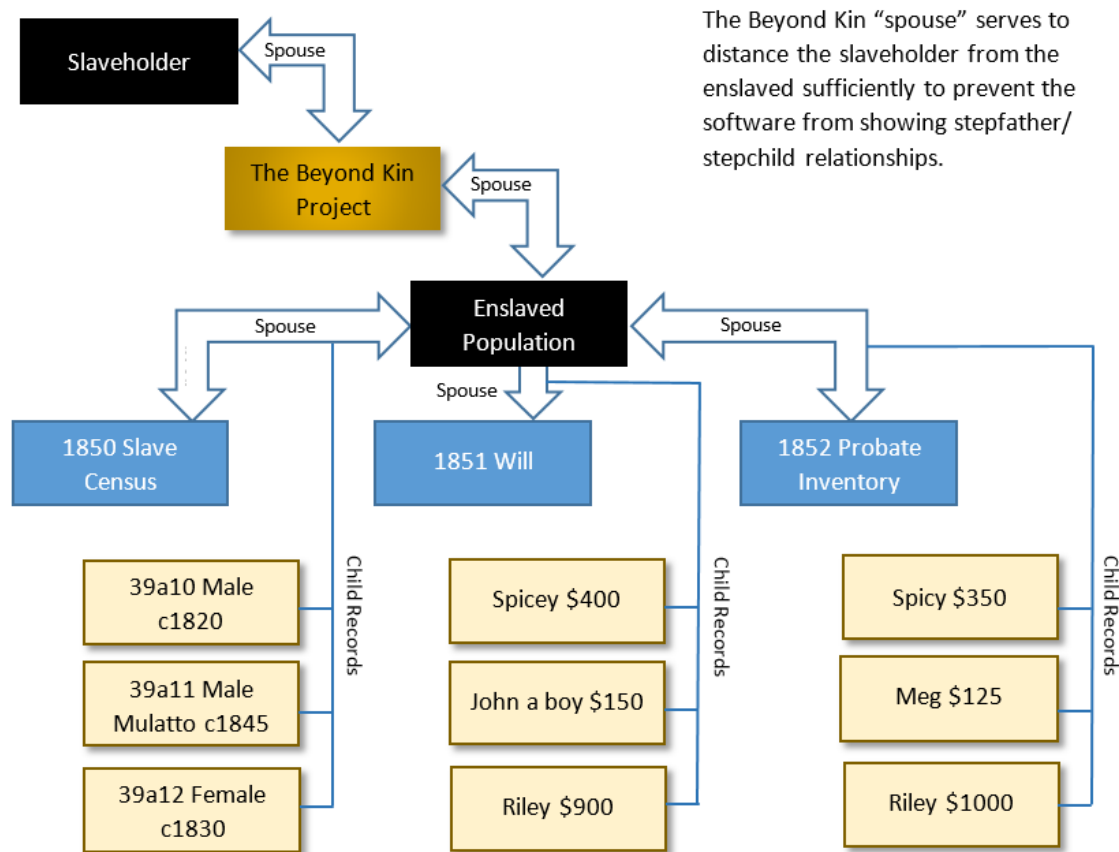
Once a researcher has determined that the various enslaved records all belong to the same person, they can be merged, using the software’s merging capabilities. Assuming the merge tool is as robust as needed, the work done on the various records will remain intact, only now merged beneath one individual.

Appendix A: The Beyond Kin Workaround

Our experimentation with establishing Beyond Kin links using existing software has proven the value of this idea. While the method we have developed suffers some limitations, it offers a very useful workaround, until more permanent software structures take its place.

We tie people and groups together using the spouse and children connections existing in software solutions like Ancestry.com, Family Tree Maker, and RootsMagic. It also works with FamilySearch and Legacy, though their inability to allow same-sex spousal relationships and to use the Unknown gender type when a marriage is reflected makes these somewhat less flexible.

We recommend that any attempts to create Beyond Kin links between slaveholders and their enslaved personnel begin with the slaveholder's record and work outward, given that most records of use will be associated more directly with the slaveholder's family.



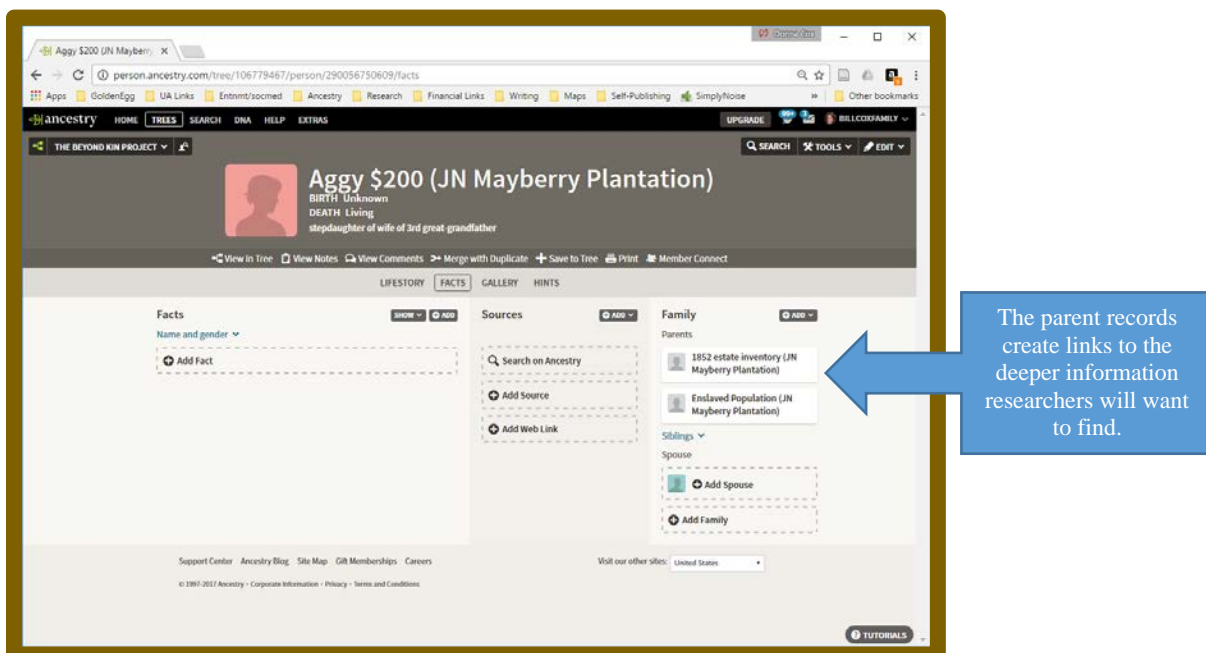
The first spouse attached to the slaveholder will have the given name "The Beyond Kin Project," with the surname being the institution where the enslaved population worked. So the whole name of this first spouse might look like this:

The Beyond Kin Project (JN Mayberry Plantation)

The Beyond Kin Project spouse will only be necessary until the new module can be created. This spouse serves the function of distancing the slaveholder from the enslaved population sufficiently to prevent the population from appearing as step-children of the slaveholder. It also creates a flag on a slaveholder's record that tells anyone doing research that there is another layer of the ancestor's story. People who happen upon *The Beyond Kin Project* spouse and are curious about it will likely do an Internet search, which will allow us to introduce them to the method. Until the new software module is available, we will use the Golden Egg Genealogist website (gegbound.com) to host the instructions and promotional materials for the Beyond Kin Workaround. We hope, therefore, that the sheer act of people using this method will be its best promotional tool.

The next spousal relationship required to do the Beyond Kin workaround is to marry *The Beyond Kin Project* spouse to a spouse named *Enslaved Population (JN Mayberry Plantation)*. This spouse will then be married to another spouse that identifies the source that provides information on some or all of the slaveholder's enslaved persons. A typical spouse name might be *1850 Slave Census (JN Mayberry Plantation)*. The use of the same last name on every ancestry record involved allows you to have this group sortable in your indexes.

The enslaved persons will then be added as children of the marriage between *Enslaved Population* and *1850 Slave Census*. As described in the Beyond Kin Module Proposal, the given name will be the enslaved person's name, if available, and any descriptive text that will help to distinguish this individual from others. For people extracted from the slave censuses, we encourage the use of a code that alerts others coming along behind you to which person *exactly* you were extracting. The name *38a23 mulatto male c1840 (JN Mayberry Plantation)*, refers to a man who shows up on page (or image) 38, first column, line 23, described as a male of mulatto race, age 10. By using the approximate birth year, rather than the age, you have a better chance of matching this person to those who might appear in other records, also indicating a c1840 birth year. An enslaved person's record, created in this basic way will look something like this:



The *Enslaved Population* ancestry record becomes a collection point for all of the information a researcher has captured. This profile can grow very long, when there are multiple source records and a large number of enslaved persons to document. A typical record for a farm with three or four enslaved persons might look like this:

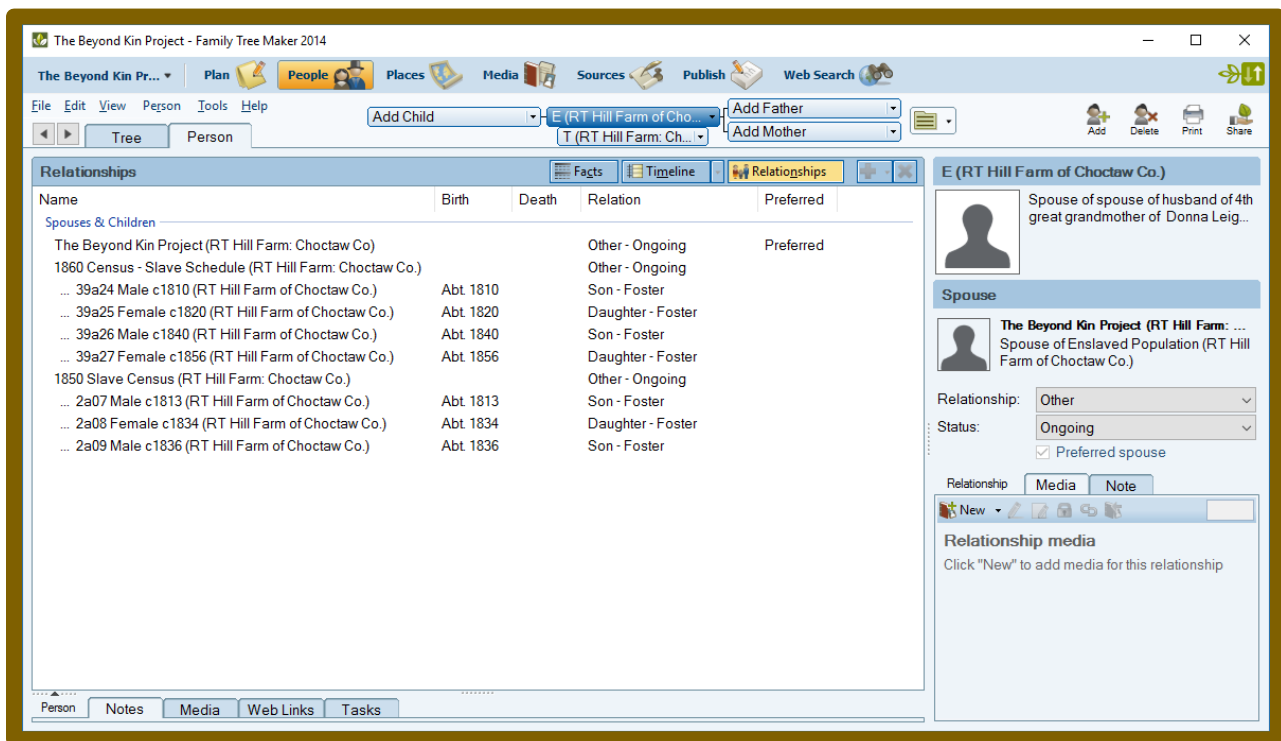
The screenshot shows an Ancestry.com profile for "Enslaved Population (RT Hill Farm of Choctaw Co.)". The profile is organized into sections: Facts, Sources, and Family. The Family section is divided into Parents, Spouse, and Spouse & Children. The Spouse section contains one entry: "The Beyond Kin Project (RT Hill Farm: Choctaw Co)". The Spouse & Children section contains two groups of entries. The first group includes three entries: "1850 Slave Census (RT Hill Farm: Choctaw Co.)", "2a07 Male c1813 (RT Hill Farm of Choctaw Co.) 1813-", and "2a08 Female c1834 (RT Hill Farm of Choctaw Co.) 1834-". The second group includes five entries: "1860 Census - Slave Schedule (RT Hill Farm: Choctaw Co.)", "39a24 Male c1810 (RT Hill Farm of Choctaw Co.) 1810-", "39a25 Female c1820 (RT Hill Farm of Choctaw Co.) 1820-", "39a26 Male c1840 (RT Hill Farm of Choctaw Co.) 1840-", and "39a27 Female c1856 (RT Hill Farm of Choctaw Co.) 1856-".

This "spouse" links back to the slaveholder.

These "spouses" collect the names or descriptions of enslaved persons who appear in a particular source, each becoming a "child" to the Enslaved Population/Source "marriage."

One of the key values of documenting these links comes in comparing the names in multiple sources together to try to identify matches and the people who seem to have no match. These raise questions about purchases and sales of enslaved persons, births, deaths, and other possibilities.

In the example below, the number of enslaved persons on the RT Hill Farm of Choctaw County, Alabama, was three in 1850 and four in 1860. To look at the years of birth, it would seem that the 1860 census has an entirely different list. But it is more likely that the ages given in the censuses were guesses. It is very possible that *2a07 Male c1813* from the 1850 census was also *39a24 Male c1810* from 1860. The young female, aged 4, in the 1860 census might have been a new purchase or inheritance. Or she could have been offspring of one or two of the other enslaved persons. These questions begin to put a human story on the technical descriptions offered by the censuses and inspire other potential avenues to search.



In the Beyond Kin Workaround method, as in the proposed software module, the goal will be to find the records that have been entered multiple times for a single person and merge them together. Ideally, the most important merge will happen when you have confirmed that an enslaved person for which you have incomplete name/descriptions matches a person after the Civil War with a complete name and the potential to connect to the descendants.

Merging can create a need for cleanup—something that should cease to be a problem if we can shift to the proposed software module. It will leave an audit trail of the various places an enslaved person has shown up in records and can demonstrate multiple slaveholders. One thing we

lose in the merge is the automatic ability to click through to all of the slaveholders' records. You can click through only the most recent parent records.

The audit trail appears in two places. First, it will appear in alternate parents, all set up as foster relationships—the last slaveholder as “preferred.” This is a useful expedient, but will get somewhat intimidating to some researchers. The new software module would eliminate the problem. Here is what you see in Spicey’s “Edit Relationship” view in Ancestry.com:

Edit Relationships for Spicey married to Jack (M Mayberry Farm)

Father + Add Alternate Father

- Will of JN Mayberry (M Mayberry Farm) Foster
- 1852 estate inventory (JN Mayberry Plantation) Foster
SET AS PREFERRED
- 1850 slave census (JN Mayberry Plantation) Foster
SET AS PREFERRED
- Enslaved Population (Wiley J. Coleman Plantation) Foster
SET AS PREFERRED

Mother + Add Alternate Mother

- Enslaved Population (M Mayberry Farm) Foster
- Enslaved Population (JN Mayberry Plantation) Foster
SET AS PREFERRED
- Estate of Wiley Coleman 1822 (Wiley J. Coleman Plantation) Foster
SET AS PREFERRED

Spouse + Add Spouse

- Jack married to Spicey (M Mayberry Farm) Spouse

Children of Spicey \$400 (Wiley J. Coleman Plantation) and Jack married to Spicey (M Mayberry Farm) + Add Child

- Mary dau Jack & Spicey (M Mayberry Farm) Biological

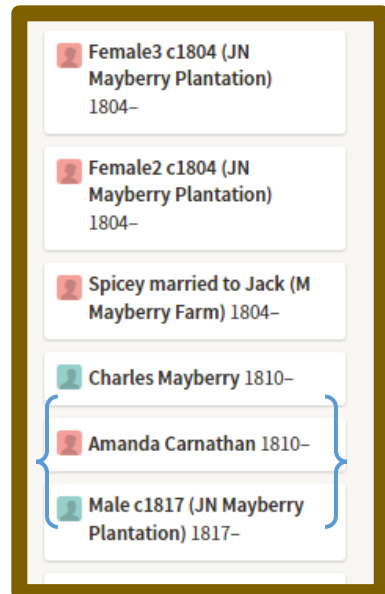


Merging multiple records of the same enslaved person will create an audit trail of the names/descriptions used and the institutions where he or she worked.

The second aspect of the audit trail is in the collection of alternate names—each adding descriptive text to the enslaved person’s record, and via the surname, giving the name of their place of enslavement at the time the description was created. One name will be chosen as “preferred,” but the other names should be preserved as alternates, creating a paper trail of the various descriptions of this person. Spicey’s record above has these alternates.

As the record of an enslaved person is finally matched with a full name in later records, the final name will begin to take the place of the descriptions that were used earlier.

Original lists of enslaved persons will begin to show more refined names/descriptions as records are merged. Charles and Amanda have been merged with post-Civil War census records.



One complication in using the workaround lies in the fact that fellow enslaved persons are set up as siblings. The software packages tend to resist the marriage of siblings, even when they have been set up as foster children in the same household. The temporary workaround is to create duplicate records for one of the two people who are marrying, marry them to the enslaved partner, then merge the new record with its duplicate.

Workaround Wrap-up

Fortunately, much of the work a researcher will do as part of the workaround will transfer over when the new Beyond Kin module is implemented in software. The creation of the many ancestral records for the enslaved, with the careful naming processes, will carry over. The new links will be created, adding each person, then the old pseudo-spouses and pseudo-parents can be removed. From that time forward, the complications will disappear in tying the Beyond Kin.

Appendix B: The Beyond Kin Project Leaders



Donna Cox Baker

Donna Cox Baker traded her first career in computer communications for one in historical publishing in 2002, when she was chosen as the new editor-in-chief of *Alabama Heritage* magazine. Since 2011, she has also been acquiring history manuscripts for the University of Alabama Press. She serves as a committee co-chair for the Alabama Bicentennial Commission, overseeing statewide genealogy projects. She contributes a regular magazine department called “Adventures in Genealogy” to *Alabama Heritage* and launched a new blog in 2016 called “The Golden Egg Genealogist,” online at gegbound.com. She has a PhD in history from the University of Alabama. A Birmingham native, she now lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.



Frazine K. Taylor

Frazine K. Taylor, former Head of Reference for the Alabama Department of Archives and History, has guided, taught, and promoted genealogical research for more than 25 years. A noted state leader on matters of African American heritage, genealogy, and archival studies, she serves on multiple boards and frequently speaks at symposia, workshops, and conferences in Alabama, the South, and further afield. Her book *Researching African American Genealogy in Alabama: A Resource Guide* (NewSouth Books, 2008) encapsulates her quarter-century of professional experience for a broad audience. She earned a master’s degree in information studies from Atlanta University. A Wetumpka native, she now lives in Montgomery, Alabama.