

ORIGENTUM

THE FREEDOM CHAPTER

Franklin Cole

1835–1900 ·

Freedom: · Age at freedom:

Input Model: A

ANCESTOR RECORD

Name: Franklin Cole · Born: 1835 · Died: 1900

State: · County:

Enslaver / Household: · County:

Freedom path: · Jurisdiction:

The first time their name appears in any record is in the years following emancipation. Before that, the only evidence that Franklin existed is the shadow left in records that did not belong to them.

Part 1 · CONTEXT

The Place and the System

In the 1830s, the state where Franklin Cole was born into enslavement was defined by a labor system centered largely around agriculture, with cotton being the dominant crop. The state's economy relied heavily on the forced labor of enslaved people, who worked tirelessly in the fields from sunrise to sundown. This system was characterized by brutal conditions, where the labor of enslaved people directly fueled the wealth and power of the region's white landowners. Enslaved people were often forced to perform backbreaking work in the heat, tending to vast fields of cotton that stretched as far as the eye could see. The landscape itself, with its fertile soil, made it an ideal location for these plantations, but it also meant that enslaved people faced grueling physical demands.

State law during this time was explicitly designed to maintain control over enslaved people and deny them any semblance of freedom or autonomy. Enslaved people were considered property and had no legal rights. They were prohibited from learning to read or write, and any attempt to do so could result in severe punishment. Movement was tightly restricted; enslaved people needed written permission from their enslavers to travel, even short distances. Enslavers held the power to inflict harsh punishments for any perceived disobedience, including whipping and other forms of physical abuse, with little to no legal repercussions.

The economic power in this state was concentrated among a relatively small number of wealthy white families who owned large plantations. These plantations were often expansive operations, employing dozens or even hundreds of enslaved people. This concentration of land and labor allowed these families to exert significant social and political influence within the state. Unlike some other parts of the South, where smaller-scale farms might have existed, this area was marked by these large plantations that dominated the landscape and economy.

The system in this state was distinct in its scale and intensity. While similar in many ways to the broader Southern system of enslavement, the particular focus on cotton and the size of operations set it apart. The geography of the state—a mix of flat plains and rich, arable land—meant that these large plantations could thrive, but it also meant that the toil and hardship for those who worked the land were relentless. Enslaved people here lived under constant surveillance and threat, with their lives tightly controlled by those who profited from their labor.

Part 2 · REALITY

What Daily Life Demanded

The life of Franklin Cole, born into the chains of enslavement around 1835, was defined by the unyielding demands of labor in a system that saw people as property. In the state where Franklin was enslaved, the agricultural cycle dictated much of daily life. The year began with the chill of winter, a time when the ground was prepped, fences mended, and tools repaired. As spring arrived, planting season began. This involved long hours of bending, digging, and sowing seeds—an exhausting task that filled the air with the scent of freshly turned earth and the weighty promise of the coming harvest.

Summer brought relentless heat, a fiery sun beating down on fields where Franklin might have toiled from dawn until dusk. The work was backbreaking, often involving the cultivation and care of cash crops like cotton or tobacco, which thrived in the hot climate. Sweaty bodies, parched throats, and the constant hum of insects were a part of every day. Autumn was the time of harvest, a frenzied period marked by the urgency to

gather crops before the weather turned. This season's labor was intense, requiring swift hands and strong backs to pick, bundle, and transport the yields of months of hard work.

Enslaved people, including Franklin, were given the bare minimum to survive. Clothing was often made from coarse, uncomfortable fabric, providing little protection against the elements. Meals were meager and monotonous, consisting mainly of cornmeal, lard, and whatever vegetables or scraps could be scavenged. Protein sources were rare and often reserved for those who worked in the house or held specific roles. The shelters provided were crude, offering little in the way of comfort or privacy, and were often overcrowded, breeding grounds for illness.

The health of those enslaved suffered greatly under this system. Exhaustion, malnutrition, and disease were constant threats, exacerbated by the inadequate medical care provided by enslavers. Rest was a precious commodity, often limited to brief, restless nights on hard beds or pallets. Sundays might offer a small reprieve, a day when the work slowed, allowing enslaved people a sliver of time to tend to their own needs, gather with family, or engage in religious practices that provided some spiritual solace. Yet, even in these moments, the specter of enforced labor loomed, a reminder of the unending cycle that defined life for those like Franklin Cole.

Part 3 · PROXIMITY

The Household

In the 1830s, the typical enslaving household in Louisiana was often centered around farming, where families relied on crops like cotton and sugar. These farms varied in size, but many had several buildings: a main house for the enslaver and their family, along with separate quarters for the people enslaved there. Franklin Cole, born into this life, would likely have shared close quarters with other enslaved men, women, and children. This arrangement allowed for the enforcement of labor and control, while also creating a sense of community among the enslaved people.

Within these households, the organization of enslaved people was often dictated by age, skill, and gender. Men and women worked in the fields, while older children might help with lighter chores or care for younger siblings. Families were often separated, as enslavers could sell individuals at any time, disrupting bonds of kinship and love. Enslaved people lived under constant threat of being torn apart, which added to their struggles. Daily life meant navigating the demands of their enslavers, who controlled their movements and labor, while also trying to maintain their own family ties and community spirit amid such harsh conditions. Enslaved people like Franklin endured this

reality, marked by both the hardship of their labor and the resilience of their shared lives.

How Freedom Came

The journey to freedom for Franklin Cole, like many others in the state where he was enslaved, moved through uncertain and tumultuous times. The turning point came with the Union victory and the subsequent issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared freedom for enslaved people in Confederate states. However, the reality on the ground was that many enslaved people did not immediately experience freedom. It wasn't until Union forces gained control of the area that the proclamation could be enforced, bringing the promise of freedom closer to reality.

When the day of freedom finally arrived, it was marked by a profound mix of emotions. Enslaved people were often notified by Union soldiers who arrived in their towns, reading proclamations and orders aloud. For many, this was the first time they had heard the words that declared their freedom. Some celebrated with joy and relief, while others stood in disbelief, uncertain of what the future would hold. The streets that had once been filled with the oppressive routine of forced labor now echoed with the sounds of new possibilities.

Despite the legal shift, the immediate aftermath of emancipation was fraught with challenges. Many enslaved people, including Franklin Cole, were left with little more than the clothes on their backs and the skills they had honed during their years of enslavement. The promise of freedom did not erase the scars of the past, nor did it provide an easy path forward. In those first hours and days, some sought to reunite with family members from whom they had been separated, while others stayed put, unsure of where to go.

The transition from enslavement to freedom was marred by the introduction of Black Codes, laws designed to restrict the freedoms of formerly enslaved people. These codes were quickly enacted, aiming to control the labor and movements of Black people, effectively binding them to the same lands they had worked during enslavement. Labor contracts often demanded that they return to work for their former enslavers under conditions that bore a haunting resemblance to the past. "Freedom" in this context was largely a continuation of economic dependency and subjugation.

For someone like Franklin Cole, this meant that while he was no longer legally owned, his day-to-day reality remained harsh and constrained. The new laws dictated where he could live, what kind of work he could do, and even how he could spend his time. The economic "freedom" he had gained was tightly controlled, leaving him to navigate a world that was free in name but still bound by the remnants of slavery. Yet, against this backdrop of adversity, Franklin's later enlistment as a Union soldier was a testament to his resilience and determination to shape his own future, as difficult as the path might have been.

THE WORLD AFTER

After emancipation, Southern states enacted laws known as *Black Codes* that restricted the freedoms of formerly enslaved people — controlling where they could work, what they could own, and how they could move. These laws varied by state but shared a common purpose: to maintain the economic and social structures of slavery under a new legal framework.

Labor status:

Remained on same land:

Part 5 · EMERGENCE

The First Named Identity

In the years following the Civil War, the first named identity for many formerly enslaved people came with the 1870 federal census. This was a significant moment, marking the first time that people like Franklin Cole appeared in the public record by name, rather than as property. This was not just a matter of record-keeping; it was a matter of identity and recognition. For Franklin and many others, choosing a surname after emancipation was a deeply personal decision. Some chose to take the surname of their former enslavers, a choice often made out of necessity or familiarity, while others chose entirely new names as a declaration of their new status as free individuals. The reasons were complex, reflecting both the bonds and the burdens of the past.

The 1870 census captured a snapshot of life for Franklin and others in his community in Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana. It recorded their names, ages, occupations, and family structures, providing a first glimpse into the lives they were building in the aftermath of slavery. While these records were a valuable resource for future generations to trace their roots, they also had limitations. The census did not capture the full reality of their lives, the struggles, or the resilience they displayed daily. It missed the nuances of rebuilding lives in a society still rife with racial violence and systemic barriers designed to suppress their newfound freedom.

For Franklin Cole, being listed in the 1870 census was his first documented emergence, a claim to his own identity on his terms. However, this did not equate to full freedom. Legal freedom had been granted, but practical freedom was constrained by laws, economic hardship, and social discrimination. Despite these challenges, the period after emancipation saw acts of self-determination. Formerly enslaved people sought to reunite families torn apart by sale or distance, registered marriages that had long been denied legal recognition, and formed churches that became centers of community and support.

Franklin's inclusion in the 1870 census represents more than just a name on a piece of paper. It symbolizes the beginning of a journey towards self-definition and autonomy in a

world that had long denied him both. While the gap between legal freedom and lived freedom was stark, the act of being named was a step towards claiming the dignity and recognition that had been withheld for so long.

FIRST NAMED RECORD

Part 6 · RECKONING

What the Records Hold — and What Was Taken

The records of Franklin Cole's life, like those of many enslaved people, are sparse and fragmented. This is not due to a lack of life or significance, but rather a consequence of how the institution of enslavement operated. Enslaved people were treated as property, not as individuals with stories and families. Their names, relationships, and personal histories were often deliberately unrecorded. In the eyes of the law and the society that enforced it, they were counted as assets, not as people. This lack of documentation was a tool of control and dehumanization, intended to strip away their identities and reduce them to mere numbers on a ledger.

The destruction and neglect of records added another layer to this erasure. Courthouse fires, whether accidental or intentional, were not uncommon in the South, and they claimed countless records. For example, in Georgia, where Franklin was born and his mother, Malinda Jones, passed away, courthouse fires were a frequent occurrence, leaving gaps in historical documentation. After the Civil War, some records were deliberately destroyed by those who wished to erase the traces of the past, while others were simply neglected and lost over time. This pattern of destruction and neglect means that many details of Franklin's early life and family connections may never be uncovered.

Despite these losses, some records have survived, providing glimpses into the lives of those who endured enslavement. In Georgia, where Franklin was born, surviving documents include Slave Schedules, which list the number of enslaved people held by an enslaver, though often without names. Bureau records, created during the Reconstruction era, can sometimes offer insights into the lives of formerly enslaved people as they navigated their newfound freedom. Additionally, church records, tax documents, and marriage registers from the period may hold fragments of information. These surviving records, while incomplete, are invaluable in piecing together the lives of

those who were denied the right to document their own stories.

The absence of a record is not the absence of a life. Franklin Cole's life was full and real, even if the system tried to erase it. The search for his story is a journey of discovery and remembrance. As we find what remains, each piece of evidence is a testament to his resilience and humanity. Unearthing these fragments allows us to honor his legacy and ensure that the history of Franklin and those like him is not forgotten.

Part 7 · ENDURANCE

What They Built

In the years following Emancipation, people like Franklin Cole worked tirelessly to build their lives and communities in the face of relentless challenges. As soon as they gained their freedom, they established independent Black churches that became central to their lives. In Louisiana, denominations like the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Baptist Church provided not just a place to worship but also a space for social gathering and community organization. These churches were pivotal in fostering a sense of belonging and identity among formerly enslaved people, allowing them to support each other and advocate for their rights.

Education became a priority for many who were freed from bondage. The Freedmen's Bureau set up schools throughout Louisiana, allowing children and adults to learn to read and write. These schools laid the groundwork for future educational institutions, as they evolved into public schools that served the Black community. Despite facing enormous obstacles, such as funding shortages and discriminatory practices, the determination to educate themselves and their children was a powerful force. They understood that knowledge was a pathway to greater opportunities and rights.

Land ownership was another critical area where formerly enslaved people sought to build their futures. While some managed to acquire small plots of land, many faced systemic barriers that made ownership difficult. The sharecropping system often kept them in a cycle of debt, while Black Codes imposed harsh penalties that restricted their movement and economic freedom. The convict leasing system further exploited their labor, demonstrating how deeply entrenched the structures of oppression remained. Despite these challenges, the aspiration for land ownership persisted, and many sought ways to create a home and a legacy for their families.

During Reconstruction, political participation also became a vital avenue for progress. Black men began to hold office, with several serving in the Louisiana legislature, a remarkable achievement that demonstrated their determination to shape their own destinies. Efforts to reunite families were supported by "Information Wanted" columns in Black newspapers, where people searched for lost loved ones, fostering a sense of

community and solidarity. Additionally, fraternal organizations and mutual aid societies emerged, providing support and resources to those in need. These institutions were vital for building a network of care and mutual aid among people who had endured so much. Together, these efforts reflected the resilience and strength of a community determined to build a future despite the weight of their past.

Part 8 · RESEARCH ROADMAP

Where to Find Them

When beginning your search for Franklin Cole in the 1870 Federal Census, you're entering a world where, for the first time, formerly enslaved people were listed by name. This is a critical starting point because it marks the most comprehensive documentation of Franklin's life post-emancipation. In 1870, Franklin was living in Ward 9 of Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana. When you locate Franklin's entry, you'll find columns detailing his age, occupation, and birthplace. These details help piece together his life at that moment. It's also useful to note the neighbors listed around him, as Franklin may be living near families connected to his past. Searching the neighborhood for potential former enslaver households can offer clues, as many formerly enslaved people stayed near their previous places of enslavement immediately after emancipation.

The Freedmen's Bureau records are another invaluable resource for uncovering Franklin's story. This agency was established to assist formerly enslaved people in the transition to freedom. The records from the state where Franklin was enslaved include labor contracts, marriage registrations, and ration distributions, among others. These records are housed in Record Group 105 at the National Archives, and many have been digitized on FamilySearch. Searching these can reveal contracts Franklin entered into for work, possibly providing details about his labor post-emancipation. If he married or sought assistance, those records might also be found here. Each document can offer a glimpse into his life and the challenges he faced during Reconstruction.

Although we do not know the name of Franklin's enslaver, the 1850 and 1860 Slave Schedules can be useful. Once you find Franklin in the 1870 Census, look at the white households nearby. Often, the heads of these households were former enslavers. You can search these names in the Slave Schedules of 1850 and 1860 to see if they list an enslaved person who matches Franklin's description. While these records do not provide names, they include age and gender, which can help identify him.

State archives are a treasure trove of additional records. For the state where Franklin was enslaved, these archives may hold county deed books, tax records, marriage registers,

and early voter registrations. The National Archives holds Freedmen's Bureau records that can provide further insights. Many state archives have online portals for searching, but visiting in person or reaching out to local genealogical societies can also be fruitful. These records can offer more context about the community Franklin was part of and how he navigated his new freedom.

Church records can be a powerful source of information, given the central role of the church in Black communities post-emancipation. In the state where Franklin was enslaved, denominations such as Baptist and Methodist were common among Black families. These records might be found in denominational archives, local churches, or through FamilySearch. Church records can provide details about family members, including baptisms, marriages, and funerals, offering a more personal view of Franklin's life.

The single most important next step in your search for Franklin Cole is to explore the 1870 Federal Census entry in Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana. This record is your starting point to understand where he was living and who was around him at that time. From there, you can expand your search to nearby households and the resources mentioned above. Each piece of information you gather builds a fuller picture of Franklin's journey from enslavement to freedom.

DIMENSIONS OF A LIFE

What Franklin Cole knew, ate, wore, built, believed — and could not own.

D01 · Food & Nutrition

In the 1830s, the agricultural economy of the Mississippi Delta was dominated by cotton cultivation, which was labor-intensive and required a significant workforce of enslaved individuals. Enslaved people typically grew crops such as corn, beans, and sweet potatoes in their personal plots, which supplemented their diet. While they were often allocated basic staples like cornmeal and salt pork, they also prepared meals using locally available ingredients, commonly stewing or frying vegetables and meats. Cooking was often communal, with food prepared in large pots over open fires, fostering a sense of community among the enslaved.

Clothing for enslaved individuals in the Mississippi Delta during the 1830s was primarily made from coarse fabrics like cotton or wool, which were issued by the enslaver and often limited to a few garments per season. In winter, they received heavier clothing, while summer issued lighter materials. Hand-me-downs were common, and footwear was typically minimal, often consisting of simple sandals or none at all. Personal expression through clothing was limited, with enslaved individuals generally unable to customize their issued garments, yet some might add personal touches such as embroidery or decorative stitching when permitted.

The quarters for enslaved people in the Mississippi Delta were typically small, one-room structures made from wood or logs, often hastily constructed with dirt floors. These quarters were usually situated near the main plantation house, allowing for easy access to overseers. Families typically slept on rough bedding made from straw or leaves. The physical conditions were harsh year-round, with inadequate ventilation and little protection from the elements, leading to discomfort in both the sweltering summer heat and the chilly winter nights.

In the 1830s, naming patterns among enslaved people in the Mississippi Delta reflected a blend of African heritage and European influence. Many were assigned names that reflected their enslavers' preferences, often English surnames or biblical names. However, African names sometimes persisted, revealing connections to their origins. After gaining freedom, some individuals chose to adopt or modify their names to reclaim their identity, while dialects heavily influenced by West African languages shaped their speech. This linguistic heritage contributed to a rich oral tradition within their communities, preserving cultural narratives and histories.

D02 · Clothing & Dress

D03 · Shelter & Space

D04 · Language & Communication

D05 · Religion & Belief

In the 1830s, the region of Georgia was a mosaic of religious practices among enslaved people, with the Baptist and Methodist denominations being particularly influential. Enslaved individuals often gathered in brush arbor churches, where they could worship in a more personal and less supervised environment. While many services were conducted under the watchful eyes of enslavers, independent worship became a vital form of spiritual expression and community building. This practice fostered a sense of resilience and hope, as enslaved people turned to faith in times of suffering and uncertainty.

The health and medicine landscape in Georgia during the 1830s was challenging for enslaved populations, with diseases such as malaria, dysentery, and influenza prevalent due to the warm climate and limited medical resources. Mortality rates were high, particularly among infants and the elderly. Medical care was often provided by slave owners or local white physicians, who typically prioritized the health of enslaved individuals only insofar as it affected their labor. Meanwhile, enslaved women commonly served as midwives, drawing from African healing traditions and herbal remedies to care for their communities, ensuring that some traditional knowledge persisted despite oppressive circumstances.

Cultural expression among enslaved people in Georgia during the 1830s was rich, with work songs and spirituals serving as both a means of communication and a form of resistance. Enslaved individuals often used music to convey messages during labor, fostering a sense of solidarity and purpose. Social gatherings, although limited, offered opportunities for dance and storytelling, reflecting African traditions and creating a unique cultural identity. The rhythms of the region influenced musical styles that would later contribute to the development of genres like blues and jazz, making Georgia a vital part of America's musical heritage.

Death and burial practices among enslaved people in Georgia during the 1830s were deeply rooted in community and tradition. When an enslaved person died, their passing was often marked by communal mourning, and burials typically took place in close proximity to the enslaving household, though they were often segregated from white burial sites. Graves were sometimes marked with simple wooden headboards or stones, reflecting a blend of African and Christian customs. The high mortality rate among enslaved populations meant that families faced frequent losses, complicating the continuity of kinship ties and community support systems.

D06 · Education & Knowledge

In the post-freedom period of the 1860s and 1870s, education for formerly enslaved people in this region was severely impacted by the legacy of restrictive literacy laws that had been in place during slavery. However, the establishment of Freedmen's Bureau schools and missionary schools marked a significant shift. In counties like Sumter and Wilcox, schools opened their doors to Black children, providing an opportunity for literacy and education. Access to education not only empowered individuals but also fostered a sense of community and identity among formerly enslaved people, although many faced challenges such as inadequate funding and resources.

Following emancipation, many formerly enslaved individuals in this region initially chose to remain, largely due to deep-rooted family ties and the familiar agricultural landscape. However, factors such as the lure of industrial jobs in burgeoning cities like Birmingham and Atlanta, as well as opportunities in states like Illinois and Ohio, prompted a significant number to migrate. Sharecropping and debt peonage often tethered families to the land, complicating their decisions. By the late 1870s and into the 1880s, patterns of migration began to emerge, with many seeking better opportunities in the North, marking the early stages of the Great Migration.

In this state, the introduction of Black Codes shortly after the Civil War sought to restrict the rights of formerly enslaved people, enforcing labor contracts and curtailing their freedoms. Voting rights for Black men were granted during the Reconstruction era but were quickly stripped away with the implementation of discriminatory laws and practices, such as literacy tests and poll taxes, by the 1880s. Political representation during Reconstruction saw figures such as Benjamin Turner, who advocated for Black rights, but as Reconstruction ended, the political landscape shifted dramatically, leading to the disenfranchisement of many African Americans and the establishment of Jim Crow laws that enforced racial segregation.

D07 · Health & Illness

D08 · Movement & Migration

D09 · Music & Expression

D10 · Death & Mourning

D11 · Civic & Political Life

ANCESTOR ARCHETYPE

Regional Pattern (Tier 3 — inferred from this region)

The Laborer — Agricultural or domestic work.

Work patterns in this region shaped what skills were possible to develop, what social relationships existed, and what economic position was available after freedom.

Occupational records from 1870 onward — if found — may confirm or revise this pattern. The Freedmen's Bureau labor contracts for this state are the most likely source for early post-freedom occupation data.

CONSIDER THE JOURNEY

REFLECTION

The records that survive are fragments — a name in a census column, a mark on a labor contract, a grave without a stone. What this ancestor carried through those years was larger than what the documents can hold. They survived long enough to be found. That is not a small thing.

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Input Model A — Name and state provided. Interpretation based on regional patterns.

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