
NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

How Old Was Charity Stinchcomb?

By Paul K. Graham, CG, AG

Did Charity—a freed woman—live more than a century?

Census enumerator Philip L. Hampton must have loved a good story. In 1880 he visited families in the shadow of Georgia's Stone Mountain, a prominent granite monolith dominating DeKalb County's skyline. Unlike his counterparts, Hampton diligently annotated the population schedule with his district residents' disabilities—from Melvin Crawford's "general debility from pneumonia" to the village marshal's syphilis.¹

On 12 June 1880 Hampton visited Charity Stinchcomb and her daughter Mariah and found a tale to tell. Charity, born in Virginia, "knits stockings." "Sold from her parents [when she was] 3 years old," she "appears stout & eats heartily." Her age, likely self-reported, was 106.² In the "Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent Classes" census schedule Hampton listed Charity with no disability except "old age—106 years."³

Is the age correct? Was Charity a centenarian? Did she live through the American Revolution and the Civil War? She likely adopted the Stinchcomb surname after being emancipated. The name leads to records created while she was enslaved, which answer these questions.

In 1870 Charity and Mariah lived in Fayette County, Georgia, thirty miles southwest of Stone Mountain. Charity reportedly was one hundred years old.⁴ While suggesting exaggeration, the age supports the 1880 claim of advanced years.

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1. 1880 U.S. census, DeKalb Co., Ga., population schedule, Stone Mountain, Georgia Militia District 1045, enumeration district (ED) 54, p. 18, dwelling 158, family 163, Melvin W. Kimbrell household, and p. 20, dwell. 177, fam. 183, Melvin Crawford household; National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) microfilm T9, roll 143.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 22, dwell. 203, fam. 209, Charity Stinchcomb household.

3. *Ibid.*, Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent Classes sch., p. 3, illegible dwell. and fam. details, Charity Stinchcomb; NARA microfilm T1137, roll 26.

4. 1870 U.S. census, Fayette Co., Ga., pop. sch., p. 131, dwell. 1043, fam. 984, Hiram Blalock household; NARA microfilm M593, roll 149.

Nathaniel Stinchcomb, a white man born on 20 November 1799, also lived in Fayette County.⁵ Having won lottery land there in 1821, he was a county pioneer. Nathaniel and Levi Stinchcomb had won land while living in Penn's District in Elbert County.⁶ Levi and Absalom "Stinchcomb" were the only Stinchcombs enumerated in Georgia in 1820;⁷ Absalom was the only one of that surname to register for the state's 1805 land lottery.⁸ Absalom and his wife Mary left wills in Elbert County:

- On 10 May 1833 Absalom bequeathed his "wife Mary my negroe [sic] man Reuben and negroe woman Charity & negroe girl Liza." To the grandchildren of his son Levi, Absalom left "one negroe girl by the name of Mariah & after the death of my wife Mary I give to them the said Grand children the negroe girl Liza both of said negroes to be for the benefit of said children and not to be sold untill [sic] the youngest of them shall become of the age of twenty one years."⁹
- On 24 October 1836 Mary left "my Daughter Polly Sewell one negro woman called Charity."¹⁰

Stinchcomb ownership of Charity and Mariah in the 1830s indicates they were the Fayette County women in 1870 and the DeKalb County women in 1880. Born around 1813–14, Mariah was nineteen or twenty when Absalom died.¹¹ Absalom's slave trio—Reuben, Charity, and Liza—implies a family group; moreover, it suggests Liza, besides Mariah, was Charity's daughter.

A deed gives clues to Charity's age. On 16 September 1793 Philip Penn, for fifteen pounds, sold Absalom Stinchcomb "a negro girl named Charity, about

5. 1870 U.S. census, Fayette Co., Ga., pop. sch., p. 92, dwell. 720, fam. 672, Nat. Stinchcomb household. Also, Stinchcomb Family Cemetery (Peachtree City, Georgia), Nathaniel Stinchcomb grave marker; viewed by author 22 August 2010. The marker reads: "Nathaniel Stinchcomb Born Nov. 20, 1799[;] Died Aug. 9, 1889."

6. Listing for Nathaniel Stinchcomb, Elbert Co. vol. for 1821 land lottery; Georgia Surveyor General, Lists of Fortunate Drawers, 1807–1832, Record Group 3-5-23; Georgia Archives, Morrow. Nathaniel appears on the first federal census of Fayette County. See 1830 U.S. census, Fayette Co., Ga., Dist. 9, p. 189, Nathaniel Stinchcomb household; NARA microfilm M19, roll 17.

7. 1820 U.S. census, Elbert Co., Ga., p. 189, Levi Stinchcomb and Absalom Stinchcomb households; NARA microfilm M33, roll 8.

8. Paul K. Graham, *1805 Georgia Land Lottery Persons Entitled to Draws* (Decatur, Ga.: Genealogy Co., 2005), 527.

9. Elbert Co., Record Book 1830–1835, p. 328, Absalom Stinchcomb (will dated 20 May 1833, proved 4 November 1833); Probate Court, Elberton; microfilm 209,536, item 2, Family History Library (FHL), Salt Lake City.

10. Elbert Co., Will Book A:15, Mary Stinchcomb (will dated 24 October 1836, proved 6 March 1837); Probate Court.

11. For Mariah's age, see 1870 U.S. census, Fayette Co., Ga., pop. sch., p. 131, dwell. 1043, fam. 984, Hiram Blalock household. Also, 1880 U.S. census, DeKalb Co., Ga., pop. sch., ED 54, p. 22, dwell. 203, fam. 209, Charity Stinchcomb household.

eleven years old, which girl I gave to Stinchcomb about seven years ago.”¹² Penn’s deed brings the story back to Stone Mountain in 1880, where Charity told the enumerator she had been sold and separated from her parents at age three.

The deed clarifies Charity’s story. Brought to Georgia from Virginia as a child, she was a Stinchcomb slave in Elbert County until at least 1836. After Absalom and Mary died, Charity’s trail goes cold until 1870.¹³ Charity lived to see the end of American slavery and her children free, wherever they lived.

How old was Charity? Penn’s deed shows she was born about 1782, as the Revolutionary War was ending. Thus, she was about ninety-eight in 1880. Given Charity’s advanced years, the eight-year age discrepancy in the census is understandable, especially because Philip Hampton’s notes helped convey something of Charity’s spirit. His annotations open a small window into the life of a woman strong enough to live a century.

12. Elbert Co., Deed Book B:24, Penn to Stinchcomb; Superior Court, Elberton.

13. No woman of Charity’s age appears in census slave schedules for Nathaniel Stinchcomb and Joseph Sewell (husband of Polly (Stinchcomb) Sewell). See 1860 U.S. census, Elbert Co., Ga., slave sch., Elbert Dist., p. 30, col. 1, lines 3–4, Jos. Sewell. Also, 1860 U.S. census, Fayette Co., Ga., slave sch., p. 10, col. 2, lines 35–40, Nathl. Sincomb. No details concerning Charity were found in Elbert Co., minutes, searched from 1836 to 1865; Ordinary Court, Elberton; FHL microfilms 209,565–67. Charity was not freed, an act requiring legislative approval. Only one slave was legally freed in Georgia between 1835 and 1865. See “An Act to manumit a negro man slave, named Boston . . .,” *Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Georgia, Passed in Milledgeville, at a Biennial Session, in November, December, January, February and March* (Milledgeville: Boughton, Nisbet and Barnes, 1856), 539–40.

A “Sick or Temporarily Disabled” Corpse

For Flora Burnet, a fifty-one-year old single mother, the 1880 enumerator wrote “Corps[e]” under “Is the person (on the day of the Enumerator’s visit) sick or temporarily disabled, so as to be unable to attend to ordinary business or duties? If so, what is the sickness or disability?” Flora had died a few days earlier.

See 1880 U.S. census, Marion Co., S.C., Bethea Twp., enumeration district 85, p. 8, dwelling/family 3, Flora Burnet; National Archives microfilm publication T9, roll 1234. For Flora’s death date, see Annette Blansett, Pedigree Chart 12, citing a family Bible record in a now-unknown location; Blansett/Crolley family charts and group sheets, 1965–81, contributor’s files.

—Contributed by Sabrina Peterson