



Tell Us Your Story

Ralph Edwards

For many African Americans the U.S. census, beginning in 1870 listing African Americans by name, is the first definitive family record. Slaveholders did not maintain genealogical records of enslaved Africans. In 1890, my Grandmother (Eliza Wilton Edwards) is listed as a child in the family home in Natchitoches, Louisiana. Her maternal grandmother lived with the family and her paternal grandparents and great-grandmother are listed as next-door neighbors. The census indicates that both sets of grandparents and great-grandmother had previously lived in Arkansas.

We are not certain if the families came to Louisiana enslaved or free, before or after Emancipation. If after Emancipation, it is likely that they traveled to the "Deep South" searching for family members. Most freedmen put as much distance between themselves and past enslavement as possible and went North.

This family unity continued over generations. My Great-Grandmother, Myra Brent Wilton, fled Boyce to Alexandria, LA after the family church was burned down by the KKK. She purchased land and materials to build a second church, Wilton United Methodist Church (1905). My grandmother and her siblings raised their families on contiguous properties in Alexandria near the church.



PHOTOS: Lois Hazel Edwards, Eliza Wilton Edwards, Myra Brent Wilton

