

Debra DeBerry
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DEKALB COUNTY

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DeKalb Clerk Debra DeBerry Initiates Project to Digitize Property Records Documenting the Sell and Purchase of Enslaved Persons

DECATUR, GA – DeKalb County Superior Court Clerk, Debra DeBerry, is spearheading a groundbreaking initiative to digitize records documenting the sale and purchase of enslaved persons in DeKalb County, Georgia. The goal of this project is to create an easily accessible online database, allowing users to search and explore these historical records. With the Clerk's Office safeguarding property records dating back to 1838, Clerk DeBerry envisions that this undertaking will provide a valuable resource for individuals seeking to uncover their family heritage. Moreover, it will serve as a crucial tool for historians, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which enslaved individuals were part of the economic fabric that built DeKalb County and impacted the growth of the wider region and nation.

Similar initiatives have shed light on the documentation of enslaved persons, often listing them as property alongside real estate owned by plantation owners and businesses. The extent and depth of this specific project, however, remain uncertain, as the available information relies heavily on the level of detail recorded. “We are embarking on a discovery mission about the history of DeKalb County and its ties to the antebellum period,” DeBerry states. “The immense contributions of many named and nameless African Americans continues to unfold, I believe it is important for my office to do its part in chronicling that history.” This project aims to enhance research on the slavery era in Georgia, which has often been overlooked due to the unfortunate loss of historical records during the campaigns of the Civil War era. The initial work has begun with the property deed records and eventually will expand to records from the DeKalb County Sheriff's Office, DeKalb County Probate Court, and the DeKalb Historical Center.

Commissioner Robert Patrick commits his support of this important project, by pledging funds to support the researchers who will review the records. “In recognition of DeKalb's 200th anniversary, I'm honored that my office can contribute to this historic and impactful records project being led by Clerk DeBerry. Understanding the full history of slavery and its impact is important to our county, especially as diverse as we are in DeKalb. While we can't change the past, we can do our part to understand it, how it's impacted who we are today, and continue the healing process,” Commissioner Patrick said.



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Clerk Debra DeBerry and Commissioner Robert Patrick, along with intern Ashlin Culpepper, view Property Books in the Clerk of Superior Court's Record Room.

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