

A Guide to the Amelia County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1794-1866

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History

Processed by: S. Nerney

Title Statement

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Profile Description

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Language Usage: Description is in English

Revision Description

2013-11-21 Converted to schema conforming EAD by dtd2schema.vh.xsl.

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Collector

Amelia County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Physical Characteristics

3 volumes; 9 folders; 1 microfilm reel

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Amelia County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1794-1866, are digitized and available through [Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative Digital Collection](#) on the Library of Virginia website. Please use digital images.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

These records came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from Amelia County (Va.) in 2001 under accession numbers 37990, 37993, and 37995; in 2003 under accession number 40724; and as part of an undated accession.

The microfilm of the "Free Negro" registers was created by the Library of Virginia's Imaging Services Division at an unknown date.

Processing Information

"Free Negro" affidavits, certificates, and registrations, 1794-1866, were originally described as part of the Amelia County (Va.) Free and Enslaved Records, 1801-1866, but were removed to the present Amelia County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1794-1866, to enhance the context between record types in January 2025.

The microfilm of the "Free Negro" registers, 1804-1865, was originally described as part of the Amelia County (Va.) "Free Negro" Registers, 1804-1865, but were removed to the present Amelia County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1794-1866, to enhance the context between record types in January 2025.

The registers were conserved by Etherington Conservation Services in 2013.

These records were processed, scanned, and indexed by S. Nerney, C. Freed, L. Neuroth, and LVA Staff for the purposes of digitizing them for the digital project Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative at an unknown date.

Encoded by S. Nerney: March 2013; updated by C. Collins: January 2025.

Preferred Citation

Amelia County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1794-1866. Local government records collection, Amelia County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Alternative Form Available

The Amelia County (Va.) "Free Negro" registers are available on microfilm, Amelia County (Va.) Reel No. 84.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

See also: [Amelia County \(Va.\) Free and Enslaved Records, 1801-1866](#)

Records related to free and enslaved people of Amelia County (Va.) and other localities are available through the [Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative Digital Collection](#) on the Library of Virginia website.

Additional Amelia County (Va.) court records can be found on microfilm at The Library of Virginia web site. Consult ["A Guide to Virginia County and City Records on Microfilm."](#)

Historical Information

"Free Negro" Registers

In 1793, the Virginia General Assembly specified that "free Negroes or mulattoes" were required to be registered and numbered in a book to be kept by the town clerk, which shall specify "age, name, colour, and stature, by whom, and in what court the said negro or mulatto was emancipated; or that such negro or mulatto was born free." The process was extended to counties in 1803. Although some clerks were already

recording such features, an 1834 Act of Assembly made it a uniform requirement to record identifying marks and scars and the instrument of emancipation, whether by deed or will. This bound register often coincided with a loose certificate containing largely the same identifying information. Both the registration system and the process of renewal was enforced differently in the various Virginia localities. Thus, the information found in these registers may differ from year to year and across localities.

The register books resulting from the administration of the 1793 and 1803 Act of Assembly are evidence of Virginia legislators' reaction to a quickly growing free Black and Multiracial population in Virginia in the post Revolutionary War period. Acts such as these allowed white officials to police the activities and movement of free Black community members throughout the state thereby restricting their autonomy.

"Free Negro" Registrations

In 1793, the Virginia General Assembly specified that "free Negroes or mulattoes" were required to "be registered and numbered in a book to be kept by the town clerk, which shall specify age, name, color, status and by whom, and in what court emancipated." These entries often coincided with the creation of a loose certificate containing largely the same identifying information.

Documents in this record group differ from the bound volumes referred to as "registers." These registration records typically appear in the form of certificates or handwritten statements recording the free status of a Black or Multiracial person. They can include the free person's name, sometimes age, a brief physical description, and the circumstances of the person's freedom or emancipation, parents, former enslaver, place or date of emancipation. There are also affidavits that were given by individuals affirming a free person's status, as well as written descriptions of free people. In some cases, a person would not have a registration to submit to the court. Instead, they produced some other form of identification proving their free status, for example, a deed of emancipation, a will, an apprenticeship indenture, or an affidavit of someone testifying to their character and status.

Locality History: Amelia County was named for Amelia Sophia Eleanora, daughter of King George II. It was formed from Prince George and Brunswick Counties by an act passed in 1734 to take effect on 25 March 1735. The county court first met on 9 May 1735. The county seat is Amelia.

Scope and Content

Amelia County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1794-1866, consist of three "Free Negro" registers, 1804-1865, and "Free Negro" affidavits, certificates, and registrations, 1794-1866.

Amelia County (Va.) "Free Negro" Register, 1804-1835, records the registration of free Black and Multiracial people of Black descent in Amelia County and covers the years 1804 to 1835. The clerk recorded name, age, height, complexion, marks and scars, and in what court the person was emancipated or if the person was born free. There is no index. It includes page numbers. In some instances, the clerk recorded information not required by law such as the name of the former enslaver, previous place of registration, or place of birth. The volume also includes the Amelia County (Va.) Register of Estrays, 1791-1819, which records lost livestock with descriptions of the animal's color, markings, and where found.

Amelia County (Va.) "Free Negro" Register, 1835-1855, records the registration of free Black and Multiracial people of Black descent in Amelia County and covers the years 1835 to 1855. The clerk recorded name, age, height, complexion, marks and scars, and in what court the person was emancipated or if the person was born free. There is no index. It includes page numbers. In some instances, the clerk recorded information not required by law such as the name of the former enslaver, previous place of registration, or place of birth. The volume also includes the Amelia County (Va.) Surveyor of Roads or Road Book, 1836-1855, which records alphabetically the names of road surveyors and the area of the county for which each surveyor is responsible for keeping in good maintenance. Following this list is a list of bridges, the undertaker responsible for the maintenance of each, and the expiration date of each term of service.

Amelia County (Va.) "Free Negro" Register, 1855-1865, records the registration of free Black and Multiracial people of Black descent in Amelia County and covers the years 1855 to 1865. The clerk recorded name, age, height, complexion, marks and scars, and in what court the person was emancipated or if the person was born free. There is no index. It includes page numbers. In some instances, the clerk recorded information not required by law such as the name of the former enslaver, previous place of registration, or place of birth. The volume also includes the Amelia County (Va.) Freedmen's Marriage License Book, 1865-1869, which records the date, name of bride and groom, whether the bride is of lawful age, and the name of who gives consent to marry if the bride is not of lawful age. Sometimes the family relationship of the person giving the consent is noted. The first entry is from August 1865 and the last from November 1869. There is no index.

"Free Negro" affidavits, certificates, and registrations, 1794-1866, undated, record the free person's name, sometimes age, a brief physical description, and the circumstances of the person's freedom or emancipation. If born free, a reference is sometimes made to the parents. If emancipated, emancipating enslaver, place and date of emancipation, and prior registration are usually recorded. These records include affidavits, which were given by individuals affirming a free person's status and sometimes contained written descriptions of

free persons. An 1863 affidavit filed with these records contains a list of names and birthdates of about twenty people. In addition, some of the loose registrations match information found in the bound volumes of registered "free negroes" kept in the courthouse.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1794-1866, arranged loosely by record type then chronologically.

Contents List

Series I: Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1794-1866

Extent

3 volumes; 9 folders

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Arrangement

Arranged loosely by record type then chronologically

Barcode number 1138339: "Free Negro" Register; Estrays Book, 1804-1835; 1791-1819

Barcode number 1138340: "Free Negro" Register; Surveyors of Roads, 1835-1855; 1836-1855

Barcode number 1138338: "Free Negro" Register; Freedmen's Marriage License Book, 1855-1865; 1865-1869

Barcode number 1160443: Free and Enslaved Records, 1781-1866

Barcode number 0007416401: Free and Enslaved Records, 1816, 1864 [oversize folder]