

A Guide to Goochland County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1801-1864

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia
Library of Virginia
2005
Author: Greg Crawford

History

Processed by: Greg Crawford

Title Statement

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Subtitle: Goochland County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1801-1864

Author: Greg Crawford

Publication Statement

File size: ca. 01 Kilobytes

Date: © 2005 By the Library of Virginia. All rights reserved.

Publisher: Library of Virginia

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Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from Archives database, created by Greg Crawford, 16 June 2005

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

Goochland County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Physical Characteristics

1 volume (470 p.); 3 folders

Repository

Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Goochland County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1801-1860, 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 Goochland County in an undated accession.

Processing Information

"Free Negro" Registration Records, 1801-1861, were originally described as part of the Goochland County (Va.) Free and Enslaved Records, but were removed to the present Goochland County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, to enhance the context between record types in June 2024.

The "Register of Free Negroes" 1804-1864 was originally described as Goochland County (Va.) Free Negro Register, 1804-1864, but was removed to the present Goochland County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, to enhance the context between the record types.

These records have been processed, scanned, and indexed by L. Neuroth and other LVA staff for the purposes of digitizing them for the digital project Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative.

Encoded by G. Crawford, 2005; updated by M. Mason, June 2024

Preferred Citation

Goochland County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1801-1864. Local government records collection, Goochland County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia 23219.

Alternative Form Available

Goochland County (Va.) "Register of Free Negroes," 1804-1864 available on microfilm, Goochland County (Va.) Reel No. 43

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

See also: [Goochland County \(Va.\) Free and Enslaved Records, 1726-1867](#)

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

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

Historical Information

Context for Record Type:

"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: Goochland County was named for Sir William Gooch, lieutenant governor of Virginia from 1727 to 1749. It was formed from Henrico County in 1728.

Scope and Content

Goochland County (Va.) records related to the registration of free persons, 1801-1864, consists of one register "Free Negro Register," 1804-1864; free registrations, 1810-1861, and affidavits, 1810-1861.

"Free Negro Register," 1804-1864, records the registration of free Black and multiracial people of Black descent in Goochland County and covers the years 1804 to 1864. 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. Some entries include more detail such as type of hair or stature. 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.

"Free negro" registrations, 1810-1861, are loose records containing the name of the free person, sometimes their age and a brief physical description, and whether this person was born free or was emancipated. Reference is sometimes made to a previous registration in another county. Occasionally the register number is given; this number corresponds to the entry number in the "Free Negro Register," 1804-1864 kept by the clerk of court at the courthouse. Also included in this series are two lists of free persons from 1853 and 1861 with notations either as to their age, their free stats, or some notation about what is to be done with their registration [for example, to be registered or to be removed].

Affidavits and certificates, 1801-1861, undated, consists of official documentation used to verify the free status of Black and multiracial individuals. These include affidavits, sworn statement, based on another person's knowledge or on other official documentary evidence seen by the certifier that the Black or multiracial person in question was either born free or emancipated. Many of these certifications involve the loss of a free person's registration papers and the certifier often is testifying to the circumstances of the loss and that the papers had existed before. Often times, details accompany the affidavits and certificates about the person's life such as their place of birth, their occupation, where they grew up, or how the certifier came to know them.

Lastly, includes one newspaper clipping, 1846, of a advertisement submitted by William Cousins', a free Black man, offering a reward for the return of his purse which contained his free papers. Include a note by the court stating to renew Cousins' registration when required.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Records related to the registration of free persons, 1801-1864, arranged by records type then chronologically

Contents List

Series I: Records related to the registration of free persons, 1801-1864

Extent

1 volume; 3 folders

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Arrangement

arranged loosely by record type then chronologically

Barcode number 1147037: Free and enslaved records, 1726-1867

Barcode number 1120353: Free Negro Register, 1804-1864

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