

A Guide to the Orange County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1803-1860

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1803-1860

A Collection in the Library of Virginia

Library of Virginia

2024

History

Processed by: Jim Watkinson, Eddie Woodward, Lydia Neuroth

Title Statement

A Guide to the Orange County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1803-1860

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Profile Description

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Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Collector

Orange County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

1 volume; 7 items.

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Orange County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1806-1860, 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

The original register came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court records from Orange County in 2024 under accession 54134.

Additional records came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court records from Orange County in an undated transfer.

Processing Information

The "Free Negro" Registration Records, 1831-1860, were originally described as part of the Orange County (Va.) Free and Enslaved Records, but were removed to the present Orange County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, to enhance the context between the record types.

The microfilm of the "List of Free Negroes" was originally described as Orange County (Va.) List of Free Negroes, 1810-1850 circa, but was removed to the present Orange County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, to enhance the context between the record types.

Orange County "Free Negro" Registration Records are believed to have been removed from Orange County (Va.) Judgments by Jim Watkinson around 2009.

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 Eddie Woodward, 2006 May 12; updated by M. Mason, March 2024

Preferred Citation

Orange County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1803-1860. Local Government Records Collection, Orange County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va. 23219.

Alternative Form Available

Orange County "List of Free Negroes" available as microfilm, Orange County (Va.) Reel No. 565.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

See also: [Orange County \(Va.\) Free and Enslaved Records, 1738-1865](#)

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

Additional Orange 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 Note: Orange County, according to most accounts, was named for William of Orange, the Dutch prince who became King William III of England in 1688. It is more probable, however, that it was named for William IV, prince of Orange-Nassau, who married Anne, eldest daughter of King George II, in 1734-the year that Orange County was formed from Spotsylvania County.

Scope and Content

Orange County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1803-1860, consists of the one register, "List of Free Negroes," 1803-1850; "free negro" registrations, 1831-1860; and affidavits, 1817-1829.

The Free Register "List of Free Negroes," 1803-1850, lists the age, name, color, stature, marks or scars, in what court the person was emancipated or whether the person was born free. Some clerks recorded additional information not required by the law. The register is indexed.

"Free Negro" registrations, 1831-1860, consists of several records which contain the name of free Black and multiracial persons; their sex; age; physical description/ complexion; and how they secured their freedom (born free or through a will or deed). These records contain a fair amount of genealogical information as individuals will particularly note matrilineal family lines to denote their free legal status. Names include William Bundy, Hannah Frances Frazier, Susan Bransil, and Fanny McIntosh.

Additionally included are affidavits attesting to the free statuses of Black and multiracial individuals. Includes are an affidavit, 1817, for Henry Bundy; and an affidavit, 1829, for Chaney (or Chany).

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Records related to the registration of free persons, 1803-1860, arranged by records type then chronologically

Contents List

Series I: Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons 1803-1860

Extent

1 volume; 7 items

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Arrangement

arranged by record type then chronologically

Barcode number 0007873377: "Free Negro Register" 1803-1850

Barcode number 1171432: Free and Enslaved Records, 1738-1865