

A Guide to the Accomack County (Va.) Free and Enslaved Records, 1758, 1799-1861

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia
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History

Processed by: LVA Staff

Title Statement

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Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from Archives database, created by Sarah Nerney, 3 October 2005

Language Usage: Description is in English

Revision Description

2014-02-12 Converted to schema conforming EAD by dtd2schema.vh.xsl.

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Creator

Accomack County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Physical Characteristics

1.35 cu. ft. (2 boxes); 1 volume; 1 microfilm reel

Repository

Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

The bulk of the Accomack County (Va.) Free and Enslaved Records, 1758, 1799-1861, are digitized and available through [Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative Digital Collection](#) on the Library of Virginia website. Please use digital images where possible.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

These records came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from Accomack County (Va.) in 2007 under accession number 43554, in 2009 under accession number 44262, and as part of an undated accession.

Processing Information

Starting in 2023, Library of Virginia archival staff in partnership with the Virginia Untold Project Manager began efforts to describe records related to free and enslaved Black and multiracial people in a manner that improved the historical context of the records. In doing so, in some cases material once described within the "Free and Enslaved" record group for a locality may no longer be described within this record. When this has occurred, please see the Processing Information and Related Materials section for records that have been described separately.

Apprenticeship Indentures were removed from this record in October 2024 and are now described in Accomack County (Va.) Apprenticeship Indentures, 1744, 1786-1796, 1820-1872.

Certificates of Importation were removed from this record in August 2024 and are now described in Accomack County (Va.) Certificates of Importation, 1795-1815.

Deeds of Emancipation were removed from this record in August 2024 and are now described in Accomack County (Va.) Deeds of Emancipation, 1783-1824.

"Free Negro" Registrations were removed from this record in August 2024 and are now described in Accomack County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1793-1863.

Petitions to Remain were removed from this record in August 2024 and are now described in Accomack County (Va.) Petitions to Remain in the Commonwealth, 1846-1854.

These records were processed, scanned, and indexed by 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: October 2005; updated by C. Collins: August 2024.

Preferred Citation

Accomack County (Va.) Free and Enslaved Records, 1758, 1799-1861. Local government records collection, Accomack County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Alternative Form Available

The Accomack County (Va.) List of "Free Negroes," 1804, is available on microfilm, Accomack County (Va.) Reel No. 193.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

See also: [Accomack County \(Va.\) Apprenticeship Indentures, 1744, 1786-1796, 1820-1872](#)

See also: [Accomack County \(Va.\) Certificates of Importation, 1795-1815](#)

See also: [Accomack County \(Va.\) Deeds of Emancipation, 1783-1824](#)

See also: [Accomack County \(Va.\) Petitions to Remain in the Commonwealth, 1846-1854](#)

See also: [Accomack County \(Va.\) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1793-1863](#)

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

Additional Accomack 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."](#)

Accomack County is one of Virginia's Lost Records Localities. Additional Accomack County Records may be found in the [Lost Records Localities Digital Collection](#) available on the Library of Virginia website.

Historical Information

Context for Record Type:

Free and Enslaved Records

The Free and Enslaved Records collection is comprised of miscellaneous records related to the regulation and policing of both enslaved and free Black and Multiracial people in Accomack County. The localities/local government authorities were largely responsible for enforcing laws that restricted the movement of enslaved and free Black and multiracial people and the resulting documentation was often filed in the circuit courts. The ways in which local authorities enacted legal measures against or on behalf of enslaved and free Black and multiracial people varied from locality to locality; therefore, records were not necessarily standardized or filed and retained in a consistent manner. This collection is topical and a means by which to compile miscellaneous documents related to free and enslaved people that are not established local government record types.

See: the [Virginia Untold Record Types](#) on the Library of Virginia website for additional context concerning Fiduciary Records, "Free Negro" Tax Records, Requisitions for Public Use, and Runaway Records.

Locality History: Accomack County was named for the Accomac Indians, who lived on the Eastern Shore at the time of the first English settlement in Virginia. The word means "on-the-other-side-of-water place" or "across the water." It was one of the original eight shires, or counties, first enumerated in 1634 and spelled Accomac without the k. The county's name was changed to Northampton County in 1643. The present county was formed from Northampton about 1663. In October 1670, the General Assembly temporarily reunited Accomack and Northampton Counties as Northampton County. In November 1673, Accomack County was again separated from Northampton. In early records, the county's name was spelled many ways. In 1940 the General Assembly adopted the present spelling, Accomack. The county gained a small part of the southern end of Smith's Island from Somerset County, Maryland, in 1879, after the United States had approved boundary changes between Virginia and Maryland that had been agreed to in 1877. The county seat is Accomac.

Lost Locality Note: A significant number of loose records from the 1700s suffered extreme water and pest damage. Volumes that record deeds, court orders, and wills exist.

Scope and Content

Materials in the Library of Virginia's collections contain historical terms, phrases, and images that are offensive to modern readers. These include demeaning and dehumanizing references to race, ethnicity, and nationality; enslaved or free status; physical and mental ability; religion; sex; and sexual orientation and gender identity.

Accomack County (Va.) Free and Enslaved Records, 1758, 1799-1861, consist of Fiduciary Records, 1815-1823; "Free Negro" Tax Records, 1802-1825, 1850-1861; Requisitions for Public Use, undated; Runaway Records, 1758; and additional records of various types, 1799, 1816-1831, 1851.

Fiduciary Records, 1815-1823, undated, consist of reports compiled by representatives of the court that document either the sale or the valuation and division of enslaved persons. They contain the names of the enslaved, their appraised value or the amount for which they were sold, and the names of those to whom they were sold or devised. The sale or valuation and division of the enslaved persons occurred as part of the settling of estates.

"Free Negro" Tax Records, 1802-1825, 1850-1861, are comprised of lists of "free negroes," 1804-1805, 1850-1861, as well as lists of insolvent "free negroes" and "free negroes" owing taxes, 1802, 1813-1815, 1824-1825, 1851. The lists of "free negroes," compiled by commissioners of revenue, list "free negroes" over twelve years of age residing in several Accomack County parishes or districts. They varyingly document the names, sex, ages, places of abode, and occupation of each individual. The lists of insolvent "free negroes" and "free negroes" owing taxes include the names of each individual and sometimes the amount of taxes owed. Several of the lists include language directing that the free individuals be hired out for their taxes.

Requisitions for Public Use, undated, consist of a list of "free negroes" who worked on Civil War fortifications. The list records the names of 40 individuals, as well as the number of days each individual worked on the fortifications.

Runaway Records, 1758, include an advertisement concerning Will, who was enslaved by Landon Carter of Richmond County. The ad posits that Will traveled to Rippon Hall in Williamsburg, where he formerly worked, and retrieved Sarah, his sister. According to the ad, Will and Sarah then removed to the Eastern Shore with a man named Peter.

Additional single items relating to the documentation of free and enslaved Black and multiracial individuals in and around Accomack County, Va., include:

An account, undated, of persons enslaved by George Abbott who were hired out between 1766 and 1774. The enslaved individuals named include Sue, Hagar, Bob, Stephen, Fame, Rachel, Jane, Spencer, Branton, Leah, George Douglas, Jacob, and Sarah.

An account, undated, of Black persons held in slavery during the lifetime of the unnamed widow of [illegible] Saylor. The persons held include Babel (55), Suthey [or Southey] (45), Thomas (32), Ned (28), and Ader (33).

An affidavit, undated, related to the free status of Agness and Laura. The affiant asserts that Agness and Laura were not free, despite both John Watters and Solomon Ewell emancipating Agness and Laura in their wills. Instead, the affiant claims that they belong to Solomon Ewell's heirs.

A certificate, 1831, concerning William Henderson's desire to avoid paying taxes on Mery and Harry, whom he considered to be "of no value."

Two lists, 1831, undated, of "free negroes" who remained in the Commonwealth more than 12 months following their emancipation or the occurrence of their "right to freedom." The lists include the name of the emancipated person, and sometimes the method of their emancipation and the name of their former enslaver.

An order, undated, revoking the sale made of John Brister, a "free negro," due to its illegality.

An order, undated, commanding the deputy sheriff to remove Jacob Burton from jail and "put him on board some vessel bound to the Port of New York."

A report, undated, related to the sale of Nat, enslaved by Obediah John Godwin. David D. Abbott, Godwin's guardian, was directed to sell Nat by the court because of his supposed "bad character".

Reports, 1816, pertaining to the manumission of Joseph and Nancy, who were enslaved by Azeriah Bloxum. Peggy, Bloxum's widow, sought compensation for their emancipation.

A report of sale, 1799, concerning the sale of George, enslaved by the estate of Henry Garrett, to Smith Horsey.

A schedule, 1822, of property "given up at the suit of Edmund Nock" belonging to Tinney Dennis, a free woman of color. The property includes a "negroe man" named Isaac.

A warrant, 1821, for James Selby, who was accused of selling Peter, a "free negroe Boy," as an enslaved person.

A warrant and bond, 1851, concerning Levin Crippin, a free man "not entitled to residence in the Commonwealth." Crippin was born in Virginia, but resided in Philadelphia for an indeterminate amount of time before returning to Virginia.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Free and Enslaved Records, 1758, 1799-1861, arranged loosely by record type then chronologically.

Contents List

Series I: Free and Enslaved Records, 1758, 1799-1861

Extent

1.35 cu. ft. (2 boxes); 1 volume; 1 microfilm reel

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Arrangement

Arranged loosely by record type then chronologically

Barcode number 1138011: Free and Enslaved Records, 1744-1861

**Barcode number 1200487: Free and Enslaved Records, 1804-1861
[oversize]**

Barcode number 1182611: Judgment and Lien Docket; List of "Free Negroes" Over Twelve Years of Age, 1849-1852

