

A Guide to the Brunswick County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1803-1864

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1803-1864

A Collection in the Library of Virginia

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History

Processed by: Library of Virginia staff

Title Statement

A Guide to the Brunswick County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1803-1864

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Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from being created directly into EAD, created by Sarah Nerney, 29 March 2006

Language Usage: Description is in English

Revision Description

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

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Creator

Brunswick County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Physical Characteristics

3 volumes; 4 folders; 1 photostatic negative volume; 3 microfilm reels

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Brunswick County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1803-1864, 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

A portion of these records were transferred to the Library of Virginia from Brunswick County (Va.) in 2022 under accession number 53886 and as part of an undated accession.

Digital images of the Register of "Free Negroes," 1803-1820, and the Register of "Free Negroes," 1820-1850, were obtained from the National Museum of African American History and Culture by the Brunswick County Circuit Court at an unknown date and transferred to the Library of Virginia in 2022. They were accessioned under accession number 54085. Digital images of the Register of "Free Negroes," 1850-1864, were produced by the Library of Virginia Imaging Services around 2022 and accessioned under accession number 54085.

The microfilm copies of the registers were generated by the Library of Virginia Imaging Services in 1974.

Processing Information

"Free Negro" registrations and certificates, 1823-1850, were originally described as part of the Brunswick County (Va.) Free and Enslaved Records, 1851-1862, but were removed to the present Brunswick County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1803-1864, record to enhance the context between record types in January 2025.

Brunswick County (Va.) Reel Nos. 95, 126, and 134 were originally described as Brunswick County (Va.) Registers of "Free Negroes," 1803-1850, but were removed to the present Brunswick County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1803-1864, record to enhance the context between record types in January 2025.

The microfilm copies of the registers were generated by the Library of Virginia Imaging Services in 1974.

Digital images of the Register of "Free Negroes," 1803-1820, and the Register of "Free Negroes," 1820-1850, were transferred to the Library of Virginia in 2022 for inclusion in Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative Digital Collection. Digital images of the Register of "Free Negroes," 1850-1864, were produced by the Library of Virginia Imaging Services around 2022.

These records were processed and indexed by L. Neuroth and LVA staff for the purposes of digitizing them for the digital project Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative around 2022 and at an unknown date.

Encoded by S. Nerney: March 2006; updated by C. Collins: January 2025.

Preferred Citation

Brunswick County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1803-1864. Local government records collection, Brunswick County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Alternative Form Available

The Brunswick County (Va.) Register of "Free Negroes," 1803-1820, is available on microfilm, Brunswick County (Va.) Reel No. 126.

The Brunswick County (Va.) Register of "Free Negroes," 1820-1850, is available on microfilm, Brunswick County (Va.) Reel No. 134.

The Brunswick County (Va.) Register of "Free Negroes," 1850-1864, is available on microfilm, Brunswick County (Va.) Reel No. 95.

The Brunswick County (Va.) Register of "Free Negroes," 1850-1864, is available as a photostatic negative.

Custodial History

The Register of "Free Negroes," 1850-1864, was transferred to the Library of Virginia from the Circuit Court of Brunswick County in 2022 under accession number 53886 for digitization. It was returned to the locality in 2023 by request of the clerk of the Circuit Court.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

See also: [Brunswick County \(Va.\) Free and Enslaved Records, 1851-1862](#)

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

Additional Brunswick 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.](#)"

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

Location of Originals

The original registers are retained in the locality. Contact the clerk of the Circuit Court for access. Brunswick County Circuit Court, 216 North Main Street, Lawrenceville, VA 23868-0160.

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: Brunswick County was named for the duchy of Brunswick-Lüneburg, one of the German possessions of King George I. It was formed by statute in 1720 from Prince George County and on 31 October 1723 the boundaries of the county were ordered to be laid out, but, because of the sparse population, the county court first met in June 1732. Brunswick County was enlarged by the addition of parts of Surry and Isle of Wight Counties in 1733. The county seat is Lawrenceville.

Lost Locality Note: Most loose records prior to 1781 are missing. Pre-1781 volumes that record deeds, court orders, and wills exist.

Scope and Content

Brunswick County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1803-1864, consist of three

"Free Negro" registers, 1803-1864, and four folders of free registrations and certificates, 1823-1850, undated.

Brunswick County (Va.) Register of "Free Negroes," 1803-1820, records the registration of free Black and Multiracial people of Black descent in Brunswick County and covers the years 1803 to 1820. 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. The register does not include index or page numbers. In some instances, the clerk recorded information not required by law such as the name of the name of the former enslaver, previous place of registration, place of birth, or the person's trade or occupation.

The volume also contains the Brunswick County (Va.) Processioners' Returns, 1795-1816, and the Brunswick County (Va.) Register of Dower Slaves, 1805-1815. Brunswick County (Va.) Processioners' Returns, 1795-1816, include entries containing the area processioned with geographical landmarks, roads, property lines noted, the names of the persons present, the date(s) when the processioning occurred, the names of the processioners, and the date that the return was recorded in the county court. Brunswick County (Va.) Register of Dower Slaves, 1805-1815, is comprised of seven registrations listing the enslaved people inherited as a result of dower rights or the rights of a widow in her husband's estate. The entries include the name of the enslaver, the name of the person owning the dower right, sometimes the name of the deceased husband, and the name(s) and age(s) of the enslaved people.

Brunswick County (Va.) Register of "Free Negroes," 1820-1850, records the registration of free Black and Multiracial people of Black descent in Brunswick County and covers the years 1820-1850. 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. The register does not include an index or 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, place of birth, or their trade or occupation.

Brunswick County (Va.) Register of "Free Negroes," 1850-1864, records the registration of free Black and Multiracial people of Black descent in Brunswick County and covers the years 1850-1864. 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, but the register 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 contains Brunswick County (Va.) Order Book 39, 1864-1868, which records all matters brought before the court when it was in session. It provides synopses of cases in a neater, more organized form. A wide variety of information is recorded including deeds, chancery causes, judgments, and records of legal disputes heard before the county court.

Registrations and certificates of "free negroes and mulattoes," 1823-1850, undated, typically record the free person's name, 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, the emancipating enslaver, place and date of emancipation, and prior registration are usually recorded. There may also be affidavits and certificates that were given by individuals affirming a free person's status, as well as written descriptions of free persons. In addition, some of the loose registrations and certificates match information found in the bound volumes of registers kept in the courthouse.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1803-1864, arranged loosely by record type then chronologically.

Contents List

Series I: Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1803-1864

Extent

3 volumes; 4 folders

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Arrangement

Arranged loosely by record type then chronologically

Barcode number 0007872276: Register of "Free Negroes," Processioners' Returns, and Register of Dower Assignments, 1795-1820

Barcode number 0007872278: Register of “Free Negroes,” 1820-1850

Barcode number 0007820883: Register of “Free Negroes,” 1850-1864

Barcode number 1138017: Free and Enslaved Records, 1823-1862

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