

A Guide to the Fairfax County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1822-1861

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1822-1861

A Collection in the Library of Virginia
Library of Virginia
2007

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History

Processed by: S. Nerney

Title Statement

A Guide to the Fairfax County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1822-1861

Subtitle: Fairfax County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons

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Publication Statement

Date: © 2007 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 MARC record, created by Sarah Nerney, 12 October 2007

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

Fairfax County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Physical Characteristics

1 microfilm reel

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Fairfax County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1822-1861, 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

Fairfax County (Va.) Reel No. 56 was generated by the Administrative Services Department, Department of Environmental Management, Fairfax County, Virginia, at an unknown date.

Digital images of the registers were given to the Library of Virginia by the clerk of the Fairfax County Circuit Court in July 2021.

Processing Information

The microfilm of the "Free Negroes" registers was originally described as Fairfax County (Va.) Registers of "Free Negroes," 1822-1861, but was removed to the present Fairfax County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1822-1861, record to enhance the context between record types in June 2025.

These records were processed and indexed by S. Nerney and LVA staff for the purposes of digitizing them for the digital project Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative circa 2007.

Encoded by S. Nerney: October 2007; updated by C. Collins: June 2025.

Preferred Citation

Fairfax County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1822-1861. Local government records collection, Fairfax County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

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

Additional Fairfax 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."](#)

Fairfax County is one of Virginia's Lost Records Localities. Additional Fairfax 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 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.

Locality History: Fairfax County was named for Thomas Fairfax, sixth baron Fairfax of Cameron, proprietor of the Northern Neck. It was formed from Prince William County in 1742. Part of Loudoun County was added in 1798. The county seat is the city of Fairfax.

Lost Locality Note: Original wills and deeds as well as many other loose papers were destroyed during the

Civil War; deed books for twenty-six of the fifty-six years between 1763 and 1819 are missing. Numerous pre-Civil War minute books are missing as well.

Scope and Content

Fairfax County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1822-1861, consist of two "Free Negro" registers, 1822-1861.

Fairfax County (Va.) Register of "Free Negroes," 1822-1835, records the registration of free Black and multiracial people of Black descent in Fairfax County and covers the years 1822 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.

Fairfax County (Va.) Register of "Free Negroes," 1835-1861, records the registration of free Black and multiracial people of Black descent in Fairfax County and covers the years 1835 to 1861. 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.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1822-1861, arranged loosely by record type then chronologically.

Contents List

Series I: Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1822-1861

Extent

Extent: 1 microfilm reel

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Arrangement

Arranged loosely by record type then chronologically

Fairfax County (Va.) Reel No. 56: Registers of Free Negroes, 1822-1861