

A Guide to the Prince Edward County (Va.) Enslaved and Free Records, 1783-1865 (bulk 1801-1864)

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia 1119465, 1203566, 1203567

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Summary

Barcode numbers

1119465, 1203566, 1203567

Language

English

Collector

Prince Edward County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Physical Characteristics

1.75 cu. ft. (3 boxes)

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

These items came to the Library of Virginia in transfers of court papers from Prince Edward County.

Preferred Citation

Prince Edward County (Va.) Enslaved and Free Records, 1783-1865 (bulk 1801-1864). Local government records collection, Prince Edward County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va. 23219.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Additional records (a register of children and a cohabitation register, 1866) documenting free African Americans living in Prince Edward County before the Civil War are available digitally with searchable transcriptions through the Library of Virginia's Virginia Memory website.

Digital records may be found in the Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative Digital Collection at the Library of Virginia. Search the [Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative Digital Collection](#) Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative Digital Collection available at Virginia Memory.

Historical Information

Prince Edward County was named in honor of Edward Augustus, a son of Prince Frederick Louis, a grandson of George II, and a younger brother of George III. The county was formed from Amelia County in 1753.

An act passed in 1782 by the Virginia legislature made it lawful to emancipate enslaved persons, and also stipulated that liberated enslaved persons neglecting to pay tax levies might be hired out by the sheriff long enough to raise the taxes.

An act passed in 1793 by the Virginia legislature required every free Black or free person of color to be registered and numbered in a book to be kept by the county clerk. Emancipated enslaved persons may have been registered with the court at an earlier date in some localities. Registrations were to be renewed annually at a cost of 25 cents.

An act passed in 1801 by the Virginia legislature required commissioners of the revenue annually to return a complete list of all free Black persons within their districts, with their names, sex, place of abode, and trades, and a copy of the list to be fixed at the courthouse door.

An act passed in 1806 by the Virginia legislature required free African Americans to obtain a license for carrying a firearm.

In 1806, the General Assembly moved to remove the free Black population from Virginia with a law that stated that all emancipated enslaved persons, freed after May 1, 1806, who remained in the Commonwealth more than a year, would forfeit their right to freedom and be sold by the Overseers of the Poor for the benefit of the parish. Families wishing to stay were to petition the legislature through the local county court. Beginning in 1837, freed enslaved persons could petition the local courts for permission to remain.

In September 1831, the Prince Edward County Court ordered the constables of the county's two districts to collect any arms found with any free person, in response to fears aroused by Nat Turner's revolt in August 1831.

An act passed by the Virginia legislature in 1856 allowed free persons who desired to remain in Virginia to petition for reenslavement and choose an enslaver and remain in the state.

The General Assembly passed a law as early as July 1, 1861, calling for the enrollment of free Black persons to work in the public service. From 1862 to 1863, at the request of the president of the Confederate States, the General Assembly passed three more laws that requisitioned enslaved persons to work on fortifications and other works of the public defense. Each county and city were allotted a certain number of enslaved persons that had to be provided to the government under the requisition.

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.

Prince Edward County (Va.) Enslaved and Free Records, 1783-1865 (bulk 1801-1864). These records are comprised mostly of "Court order and reports of fire arms obtained from free persons of color" (1831); "Free Negro Certificates of Registration" (1783, and 1808-1856); "Free Negro Tax records" (1801-1864); "Free papers and affidavits pertaining to the emancipation of Emaline" (1840-1841); "Petitions of reenslavement" (1858-1859); "Requisitions for Public Use" (1861-1865); and Miscellaneous enslaved records (1783, 1794, and 1850).

"Court order and reports of fire arms obtained from free persons of color," 1831, are comprised of a court order directing the two county constables, Joseph Wilson and John Rice, to obtain arms from free persons in the county; and the constables' reports, dated 1831 October 17 and 1831 October 18. The reports list the names of free Black persons and free persons of color found to own weapons, the type of weapon owned, and whether the weapon was confiscated.

"Free Negro Certificates of Registration," 1783, and 1808-1856, record the name of the person, sometimes their age and a brief physical description, and a statement based either on another person's knowledge or on other official documentary evidence seen by the certifier that this person was either born free or was emancipated. If born free, reference is sometimes made to parents. If emancipated, emancipating enslaver, place and date of emancipation, and prior registration are usually mentioned. In addition to the certificates of registration issued by the Prince Edward County Court, there are registers, or certificates of registration, issued by Albemarle County, Bedford County, Buckingham County, Brunswick County, Charlotte County, Cumberland County, Dinwiddie County, Hanover County, Lynchburg, Nottoway County, Petersburg, Richmond, and North Carolina (county unknown). There is also a letter from the clerk of the Prince George County Court requesting documentation of free status for an individual who had moved from Prince Edward to Prince George in 1850, with a copy of the person's tattered register from Prince Edward County.

"Free Negro Tax records," 1801-1864. The collection contains lists of free Black persons and free people of color (1801-1807, 1809, 1811); lists of free Black persons and people of color (1817-1820, undated); lists of free Black persons delinquent on their taxes (1824-1863, undated), and free Black and free persons of color lists (1857-1864, undated). Lists were compiled by the commissioner of the revenue for tax purposes, and records the names of free adult Black persons and persons of color within a district, as well as children, place of abode, and trade or occupation for the adult males and females. The lists for the years 1801-1811 include a description of the person's physical appearance (shade of complexion). Lists of persons delinquent on their taxes, or ordered to be hired out to pay their taxes, typically contain only names, or names and amount of tax owed.

"Free papers and affidavits pertaining to the emancipation of Emaline" 1840-1841. The records are a bill of sale for Emaline, 1840; an affidavit of her emancipation by deed, 1841 June 21, by the enslavers who purchased her; a statement of her intention to petition the court to remain in Virginia; her application for permission to remain in the state, and an affidavit in support of her application to remain in Virginia. The affidavit includes a description of her character and the statement that she would not likely associate with other African Americans, free or bound, if she were given permission to remain in the state.

"Petitions of reenslavement," 1858-1859, filed by Caesar, James (alias Jim Booker), and William.

"Requisitions for Public Use," 1861-1865, include requisition lists filed in local courts and payroll records of the Virginia Engineer. Information found in these records include names of free persons of color and enslaved people, locality of origin, occupation, location of fortification, names of enslavers, and monetary value of enslaved people. More specifically, the records include a list of free Black persons enrolled for public service from 1861 and 1862; a list of enslavers and number of enslaved persons they are required to send, undated; a list of hands, Spring Creek District No. 3 (enslaver, number of enslaved persons between 18 and 55, number sent, and other notes, such as "hired to Government," or "unsound,") 1865 January; and a list of enslavers whose enslaved persons has been impressed 30 days or 12 months, 1865 January.

Miscellaneous Enslaved records, 1783, 1794, and 1850, contain a bill of sale for enslaved persons transferred from Francis Graves to Francis Watkins, 1783 (photocopy); a bill of sale for enslaved persons from John H. Overstreet to Philemon Holcombe, 1794; copies of a Commonwealth Cause against John Andrews, an

enslaver accused of murdering an enslaved man with a blow to the head, 1803; affidavit from Charles W. Friend states that two enslaved persons in his possession, Molley and Daphney, enslaved by Ann Woodson, are too infirm to appear on the tax rolls, 1827; petition of the Executor of J. A. Berkeley to exempt several enslaved persons being held in Powhatan County from the personal property tax in Prince Edward County, 1838; and a letter from J.H. Martin to S.B. Wilson pertaining to an enslaved woman living in the county poorhouse, 1850.

Contents List

Barcode number 1119465: Enslaved and Free Records:

Scope and Content

"Free Negro Tax records" (1821-1823,1844,1856,1863)

Barcode number 1203566: Enslaved and Free Records:

Scope and Content

"Free Negro Certificates of Registration," 1783, and 1808-1856;"Free Negro Tax records," 1801-1864

Barcode number 1203567: Enslaved and Free Records:

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"Court order and reports of fire arms obtained from free persons of color" (1831); "Free papers and affidavits pertaining to the emancipation of Emaline" (1840-1841);"Petitions of reenslavement" (1858-1859); "Requisitions for Public Use" (1861-1865); and Miscellaneous enslaved records (1783, 1794, and 1850).