

A Guide to the Rockingham County (Va.) Free Negro and Slave Records, 1783-1861 and undated

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia 1159564

Library of Virginia

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Descriptive Summary

Barcode number

1159564

Language

English

Collector

Rockingham County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Physical Characteristics

0.45 cu. ft. (1 box)

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 shipments of court papers from Rockingham County.

Preferred Citation

Rockingham County (Va.) Free Negro and Slave Records, 1783-1861 and undated. Local government records collection, Rockingham County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va. 23219.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Additional Rockingham County free negro and slave records can be found on microfilm at the Library of Virginia. Consult ["A Guide to Virginia County and City Records on Microfilm."](#)

Rockingham County is one of Virginia's Lost Records Localities. Additional Rockingham County Court Records may be found in the Virginia Lost Records Localities Collection at the Library of Virginia. Search the [Lost Records Localities Database](#) found at the Library of Virginia web site.

Historical Information

Rockingham County was named for Charles Watson-Wentworth, second marquis of Rockingham, who supported the colonists in their disputes with Great Britain. It was formed from Augusta County in 1778.

An act passed by the Virginia legislature in 1803 required every free negro or mulatto to be registered and numbered in a book to be kept by the county clerk. The register listed 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.

In 1806, the General Assembly moved to remove the free negro population from Virginia with a law that stated that all emancipated slaves, 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 slaves could petition the local courts for permission to remain.

Created in 1778. A courthouse fire in 1787 destroyed wills and estate records, primarily. In June 1864 during the Civil War, court records (mostly volumes) were removed from the courthouse and loaded on a wagon to be taken to place of safety on or beyond the Blue Ridge. The wagon was overtaken by Union troops near Port Republic and set on fire, which was put out by local citizens. Many order books, deed books, will books, and fiduciary books, however, were lost or severely damaged by the fire. The loose records that remained at the courthouse were undamaged. Pre-1865 records including deeds and wills were rerecorded following an act of assembly passed in November 1884.

Scope and Content

Rockingham County (Va.) Free Negro and Slave Records, 1783-1861. The collection contains Free Negro Registrations, 1812-1861; Free Negro Registrations Refused, undated; Free Negro Affidavits and Certificates, 1810-1859; Bills and Deeds of Emancipation, 1783-1833; a Free Negro List, 1860; Slave Bills of Sale, 1784-1796 and 1842; Orders and Presentments Concerning Freed Negroes Remaining Illegally in Virginia, 1818, 1826, and 1846 (photocopies); Miscellaneous Records, 1783-1806.

Free negro registrations, certifications and affidavits contain the name of the free person, sometimes the individual's age and a brief physical description, and a statement or affidavit 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 owner, place and date of emancipation, and prior registration as a free negro are usually mentioned. Occasionally the register number is given; this number corresponds to the entry number in the register of free negroes kept by the clerk of court at the courthouse. Sometimes other evidence such as a will or deed of manumission was also presented as evidence of free status.

Free Negro Registrations Refused (undated) contains two registrations refused on the grounds that the individuals were not born in Rockingham County.

Bills and Deeds of Emancipation (1783-1833) state the name of the slaveowner, the name of the slave to be freed, the date the slave shall achieve freedom, the date the manumission was proved or certified, and sometimes a reason why the owner decided to emancipate the slave.

The Free Negro List (1860) was compiled for tax purposes. It contains a list of Free Negroes above the age of 12 in the district of tax commissioner H.A. Chrisman in 1860. The list includes name, gender, age, and occupation.

Slave Bills of Sale (1784-1796, 1842) contain the name of the seller, the name of the purchaser, and the name of the enslaved person or persons being sold. Descriptions of persons being sold usually include age and family relationships among the persons being sold.

Orders and Presentments Concerning Freed Negroes Remaining Illegally in Virginia (1818, 1826, 1847). These records (photocopies) are comprised of a summons (1818) and two jury presentments (1826 and 1847) pertaining to whether to allow certain free negroes to continue living in the county in violation of a law requiring them to leave the Commonwealth within a year of their emancipation.

Miscellaneous records contain an agreement between Thomas Lewis and Jean Hughes regarding lending a slave Letty, 1789; a list of slaves taxable for Thomas and Reuben Moore, 1789; and a circular from Governor John Page and the Board of Council regarding counsel for slaves on trial.

Index Terms

Corporate Names:

Rockingham County (Va.) Circuit Court

Subjects:

African American apprentices--Virginia--Rockingham County.

Free African Americans--Virginia--Rockingham County.

Geographical Names:

Rockingham County (Va.)--History

Genre and Form Terms:

Affidavits--Virginia--Rockingham County.

Agreements--Virginia--Rockingham County.

Certificates--Virginia--Rockingham County.

Emancipations--Virginia--Rockingham County.

Free negro lists--Virginia--Rockingham County.

Free negro and slave records--Virginia--Rockingham County.

Lawsuits--Virginia--Rockingham County.

Local government records--Virginia--Rockingham County.

Registrations (licenses)--Virginia--Rockingham County.

Tax and fiscal records--Virginia--Rockingham County.