

A Guide to the Rockbridge County (Va.) Free Negro and Slave Records, 1836-1864

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History

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Descriptive Summary

Barcode number

1138033

Language

English

Collector

Rockbridge County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

.225 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 transfers of court papers from Rockbridge County.

Preferred Citation

Rockbridge County (Va.) Free Negro and Slave Records, 1836-1864. Local government records collection, Rockbridge County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va. 23219.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Additional Rockbridge 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."](#)

Historical Information

Rockbridge County was formed in 1778 from Augusta and Botetourt Counties. An additional part of Botetourt County was added in 1785.

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.

Scope and Content

Rockbridge County (Va.) Free Negro and Slave Records, 1836-1864. The collection is comprised of free negro registrations, 1836-1860; applications and petitions to remain in the state, 1841-1855; petitions for voluntary reduction to slavery, 1859-1862; a photocopy of the index to register of free negroes, 1831-1860; and various free negro and slave records, 1849-1864.

Free negro registrations document the name, age, physical appearance, and circumstances of free birth or emancipation of free African Americans living in Rockbridge County between 1836 and 1860.

Applications and petitions to remain in the state contain the petition, sometimes supporting lists of names from citizens, and other paperwork related to various requests by emancipated slaves to remain in Virginia. One petition from 1855 is a list of citizens requesting that no emancipated slaves be allowed to remain due to the effect it may have on their slaves.

Petitions for voluntary reduction to slavery are requests from free persons of color to be enslaved and names the person they choose to be their master. Accompanying paperwork sometimes includes a copy of their free negro registration papers.

Index to the register of free negroes is a photocopy of the index found with the volume of Register of Free Negroes, 1831-1860.

Various free negro and slave records include: records documenting the emigration of the Othello Richards

family and others from Rockbridge County to Liberia in 1850. These records are comprised of a letter requesting documentation of the free status of the emigrants (Othello Richards, his wife Mary and her child, Fanny Alexander, and her two young children), and a court record certifying their free status. Also included are a power of attorney and bills of sale documenting Othello Richards' purchase of his wife Mary and her child and four other individuals in 1849 and 1850. The letter is from R.W. Bailey, an agent who accompanied the emigrants to Liberia.

Also included are a letter to the jailor of Carroll County requesting the return of slave Hiram who has run away from Messrs. Lowe and Simmons of Georgia, 1851; a receipt for the sale of a woman and child from William H. Williams to E.C. Corbett, 1851; contracts for slave hires, 1862-1864; and two letters and a petition, 1864, pertaining to the requisition of slaves for work on the fortifications near Richmond, 1863-1864. The petition questions the free status of William Howard and requests that he be requisitioned as a slave to work on fortifications in Richmond.

Index Terms

Persons:

Richards, Othello.

Corporate Names:

Rockbridge County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Subjects:

African Americans--Employment--Rockbridge County (Va.)--Civil War, 1861-1865.

Free African Americans--Virginia--Rockbridge County.

Liberian American families--Virginia--Rockbridge County.

Requisitions, Military--Virginia--Rockbridge County.

Slaves--Emancipation--Virginia--Rockbridge County.

Slaveholders--Virginia--Rockbridge County.

Geographical Names:

Rockbridge County (Va.)--History--19th century.

Genre and Form Terms:

Bills of sale for slaves--Virginia--Rockbridge County.

Contracts--Virginia--Rockbridge County.

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

Free negro registrations--Virginia--Rockbridge County.

Fugitive slaves--Virginia--Rockbridge County.

Letters (correspondence)--Virginia--Rockbridge County.

Local government records--Virginia--Rockbridge County.

Petitions--Virginia--Rockbridge County.

Receipts (financial records)--Virginia--Rockbridge County.