

A Guide to the Alexandria (Va.) Petitions to Remain in the Commonwealth, 1834, 1853

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1834, 1853

A Collection in the Library of Virginia
Library of Virginia
2025

History

Processed by: S. Nerney

Title Statement

A Guide to the Alexandria (Va.) Petitions to Remain in the Commonwealth, 1834, 1853

Subtitle: Alexandria (Va.) Petitions to Remain in the Commonwealth

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Publication Statement

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Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from MS Word by Caroline Collins, 11 June 2025

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Collector

Alexandria (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

3 items

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Alexandria (Va.) Petitions to Remain in the Commonwealth, 1834, 1853, 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

These records came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from Alexandria (Va.) as part of an undated accession.

Processing Information

Alexandria (Va.) Petitions to Remain in the Commonwealth were originally described as part of the Alexandria (Va.) "Free Negro" and Slave Records, 1800-1853, but were removed to the present Alexandria (Va.) Petitions to Remain in the Commonwealth, 1834, 1853, record to enhance discoverability in June 2025.

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

Encoded by C. Collins: June 2025.

Preferred Citation

Alexandria (Va.) Petitions to Remain in the Commonwealth, 1834, 1853. Local government records collection, Alexandria (Va.) Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

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

Additional Alexandria (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."](#)

Historical Information

Context for Record Type: Sometimes referred to as "Applications to Remain," these records are applications that formerly enslaved individuals submitted to state and local courts for permission to remain in Virginia with their free status. The Virginia General Assembly passed a law stating that all formerly enslaved people freed after 1 May 1806 who remained in Virginia more than twelve months could be put on trial by the state. Individuals who wished to remain in the commonwealth were to petition the state legislature. In 1816, a new Act of Assembly gave the local courts power to grant permission to remain. The documents in these cases will include: the name(s) of the petitioner(s), the circumstances of free status, and a request to remain in the county. Individuals needed to prove that they had in fact been emancipated. Therefore, application packets might also include supporting documents such as the formerly enslaved person's register, a copy of a will or deed of emancipation, or witness statements known as affidavits.

Locality History: Alexandria in Fairfax and Arlington Counties, was named for John Alexander, an early owner of the tract in Fairfax County on which the town was located. The act to establish Alexandria was passed in 1749. Its site had previously been known as Hunting Creek Warehouse and as Belhaven. Alexandria was incorporated as a town in 1779 and was ceded to the federal government in 1789 for use as part of the site of the new national capital. It officially became part of the District of Columbia in 1801 and was renamed Alexandria County by Congress. By an act of 9 July 1846, Alexandria County, including the town of Alexandria, was retroceded to Virginia, which took jurisdiction over the area on 20 March 1847. The town was incorporated as a city in 1852.

Scope and Content

Alexandria (Va.) Petitions to Remain in the Commonwealth, 1834, 1853, consist of several documents related to the petitions of two individuals. These petitions are applications that formerly enslaved individuals submitted to state and local courts for permission to remain in Virginia with their free status. The petitions often include the formerly enslaved individual's name, their method of emancipation, name of their former enslaver, and whether the application/petition was successful or not. Petitions may also include affidavits signed mainly by white residents or witness statements again provided by white residents. Additional names of enslaved or free Black and Multiracial individuals can be found in these records.

These records include a notice, 1834, regarding Martha Ann Honesty's plans to submit an application to remain in the state, and a petition, 1853, requesting that George Brooks be allowed to remain in the state. Brooks, emancipated by Harriet Brooks, was described by the witnesses who signed his petition as a "correct, respectful & obliging drayman."

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Petitions to Remain in the Commonwealth, 1834, 1853, arranged chronologically.

Contents List

Series I: Petitions to Remain in the Commonwealth, 1834, 1853

Extent

Extent: 3 items

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically

Barcode number 1138013: Free and Enslaved Records, 1800-1853

Library of Virginia