

A Guide to the Pittsylvania County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1807-1865

Pittsylvania County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1807-1865
1807-1865

A Collection in the Library of Virginia
Library of Virginia
2024

History

Processed by: Chris Smith; Lydia Neuroth

Title Statement

A Guide to the Pittsylvania County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1807-1865

Subtitle: Pittsylvania County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1807-1865

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Publication Statement

Date: © 2024 By The Library of Virginia. All Rights Reserved.

Publisher: Library of Virginia

Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from MS Word, created by Mary Ann Mason, 26 January 2024

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Collector

Pittsylvania County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

.23 cubic feet (1 box); 1 volume.

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Pittsylvania County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1807-1865, 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

"Free Negro" Registrations came to the Library of Virginia in transfer of court papers from Pittsylvania County in an undated accession.

Original register volume came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from Pittsylvania County in 2023 under accession number 54027.

Processing Information

The "Free Negro Registration" Records, 1821-1864, were originally described as part of the **Pittsylvania County (Va.) Free and Enslaved Records, 1860-1864** but were removed to the present Pittsylvania County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1807-1865 to enhance the context between the record types.

The loose registrations were originally processed and indexes in 2018 by Chris Smith. The Register volume was processed by Lydia Neuroth in 2023. These records have been scanned and indexed for the purposes of digitizing them for the digital project Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative.

Encoded by M. Mason, January 2024

Preferred Citation

Pittsylvania County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1807-1865. Local government records collection, Pittsylvania County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

See also: [Pittsylvania County \(Va.\) Free and Enslaved Records, 1860-1864](#)

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

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

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.

"Free Negro" Registrations

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, color, status and by whom, and in what court emancipated." These entries often coincided with the creation of a loose certificate containing largely the same identifying information.

Documents in this collection differ from the bound volumes referred to as "registers." These registration records typically appear in the form of certificates or handwritten statements recording the free status of a Black or multiracial person. They can include the free person's name, sometimes age, a brief physical description, and the circumstances of the person's freedom or emancipation, parents, former enslaver, place

or date of emancipation. There are also affidavits that were given by individuals affirming a free person's status, as well as written descriptions of free people. In some cases, a person would not have a registration to submit to the court. Instead they produced some other form of identification proving their free status, for example, a deed of emancipation, a will, an apprenticeship indenture, or an affidavit of someone testifying to their character and status.

Locality History: Pittsylvania County was named in honor of William Pitt, first earl of Chatham, the English statesman. It was formed from Halifax County in 1766. The county court first met on 26 June 1767. The county seat is Chatham.

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.

Pittsylvania County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1807-1865, includes the bound "Register of Free Negroes" and loose "Free Negro" Registrations.

Register of Free Negroes, 1807-1865, kept by Clerks of the Court William Tunstall and Langhorne Scruggs, records the registration of free Black and multiracial people of Black descent in Pittsylvania County and covers the years 1807 to 1865. The clerk recorded, in a narrative style, the name, age, height, complexion, marks and scars, and in what court the person was emancipated or if the person was born free. The volume includes a seven-page index with about 293 numbered pages. 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. Pagination kept by the clerk is disrupted in error on page 39 (page numbers 40-41 are skipped) and page 230 (there are two page 231). Registration numbers still appear in sequence indicating that no information appears to be missing.

"Free Negro" Registrations, 1821-1864, consists of twenty-two registrations which contains the name of free Black and multiracial persons; their sex; age; physical description/ complexion; and how they secured their freedom (born free or through a will or deed). These records contain a fair amount of genealogical information as individuals will particularly note matrilineal family lines to denote their free legal status.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1807-1865

Contents List

Series I: Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1807-1865

Extent

.23 cubic feet (1 box); 1 volume

Arrangement

by record type; then chronologically

Barcode number 0007864784: Register of Free Negroes, 1807-1865

Barcode number 0007696169: Free and Enslaved Records 1821-1864