

A Guide to the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts - Free Black Records, 1833-1863

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia APA 757
Library of Virginia
2016

History

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Title Statement

A Guide to the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts - Free Black Records, 1833-1863

Subtitle: Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts - Free Black Records, 1833-1863

Collection: APA 757

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Publication Statement

Date: © 2016 By The Library of Virginia. All Rights Reserved.

Publisher: Library of Virginia

Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid created in EAD by Renee M. Savits, 12 May 2016

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Accession Number

APA 757

Language

English

Creator

Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts (1776-1928)

Extent

1.95 cu. ft. (4 boxes)

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

The bulk of the Auditor of Public Accounts Free Black Records, 1833-1863, are digitized and available through [Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative Digital Collection](#) on the Library of Virginia website. Please use digital images where possible.

Use Restrictions

These materials are available on microfilm [Misc. reels 1320-1323] and should be served instead of the originals. It should be noted that the filming was done previously and does not follow the current arrangement of the papers.

Act making appropriations for removal of free persons of color (Misc. reel 1320)

Board of Commissioners for the Removal of Free Persons of Color (Misc. Reels 1321 and 1322)

List of Free Negroes and Mulattoes (Misc. Reel 1322)

Receipts, Payments to Lucy Powell (Misc. Reel 1322)

Reports from Localities regarding Liberia (Misc. Reel 1322)

Returns, Commissioners for the Assessment of Free Negroes (Misc. Reel 1321)

Sheriffs' Commissions for Capitation Taxes of Free Negroes (Misc. Reels 1322-1323)

Voluntary Enslavements, Reports, 1857-1860, 1 in. (Misc. Reel 1322)

Acquisition Information

Transferred from the Auditor of Public Accounts in 1913.

Preferred Citation

Virginia. Auditor of Public Accounts (1776-1928). Free Black Records, 1833-1863. Accession APA 757, State government records collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Biographical Information

PUBLIC SERVICE CLAIMS FOR SLAVES AND FREE BLACKS: During the antebellum period the General Assembly passed increasingly restrictive laws in response to white fears of slave crime and insurrection. Procedures were established to compensate slaveholders for the loss of their property when slaves ran away or were imprisoned or executed. Some condemned slaves were transported beyond the state's boundaries to Africa. The American Colonization Society chartered ships to transport free negroes and condemned slaves to Liberia.

Free blacks were discouraged from remaining in Virginia because their presence was a contradiction of the concept of black slavery. Restrictive laws and special taxes, as well as official support for emigration to Liberia, prompted many free blacks to leave. A few were reenslaved "voluntarily" because of debt or criminality. Occasionally a free black was authorized to remain in the state by a special act of the General Assembly for some "essential service".

AUDITOR OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS: Although the colonial government had appointed auditors general from time to time, the office was not established on a permanent basis until after independence was declared. At its first session, which convened on 7 October 1776, the General Assembly passed an act creating a board of three auditors to examine and settle claims concerning receipts and expenditures for military purposes. The confusing financial situation of the state, however, resulted in a series of acts being passed over the next fifteen years elaborating and refining the duties of the auditors. Finally, at its session begun in November 1791, the General Assembly passed an act that combined the duties of the board of auditors and the solicitor general, whose office had been created in 1785 to settle the accounts of the state with the United States, and assigned them to a single auditor of public accounts effective 1 January 1792. The auditor soon became the most powerful fiscal officer in the state. All receipts and disbursements were made only upon his warrant to the treasurer, and his books were the standard against which those of the treasurer were checked.

The first changes were made as the accounts of the revolutionary era were settled. As the state moved into a period of steady financial and governmental growth in the nineteenth century, the number of accounts and funds maintained by the auditor became excessive. Thus, on 24 February 1823 the General Assembly passed an act creating the office of the second auditor to ease the auditor's burden. Although the second auditor handled several large special funds, the auditor continued to be responsible for most of the accounts concerning the daily operation of state government.

During the Civil War both the state government and the pro-Union Restored Government of Virginia, which was based first in Wheeling and then in Alexandria, had auditors of public accounts. After the war, near the end of Reconstruction, the military authorities appointed Major Thaddeus H. Stanton, of the United States Army, as auditor of public accounts. Stanton was paid by the state during his service from 3 April 1869 to 12 February 1870, although he remained an army officer. The position was returned to civilian control on 12 February 1870 with the election of William F. Taylor as auditor by the General Assembly.

Following the Civil War the complexities of an increasingly sophisticated financial world threatened to overwhelm the state fiscal offices, which had changed their practices but little since the end of the eighteenth century. Inadequate bookkeeping procedures and embezzlements of state funds resulted in a public demand for corrective action. It was not until a state government reorganization act was passed by

the General Assembly on 18 April 1927, however, that the demand was satisfied. Effective 1 March 1928 the office of auditor of public accounts and second auditor were abolished and replaced by the office of comptroller--head of the Department of Accounts--to monitor the receipt and disbursement of state funds, and a new office of auditor of public accounts, under the General Assembly, to audit state and local government agencies.

The records of the first auditor of public accounts have not survived intact; periodically they have been subjected to disarrangement or destruction. When the auditor's office was created in 1776, Virginia's seat of government was in Williamsburg. In 1780, when the capital was moved to Richmond, the auditors and their records also moved. At this time, and during Benedict Arnold's raid on Richmond in 1781, some auditor's records were misplaced or destroyed. During the War of 1812, when it was believed that British troops were marching on Richmond, the state's records were loaded onto wagons and hauled to the James River for transportation upstream. Before the boats sailed, however, the alarm proved false and the records were unloaded and returned to the State Capitol.

The next threat to the auditor's records came on the night of 2-3 April 1865, when the evacuation fire broke out as the Confederate garrison abandoned the city. Fortunately, the auditor's records escaped the flames because they were stored in the basement and attic of the State Capitol, which did not burn. Following the capture of Richmond by Union troops, however, a detachment of the Twentieth New York Infantry Regiment served as a guard in the Capitol building and browsed through the records of the state's fiscal offices (sometimes recording candid opinions concerning the late Confederacy in the margins of ledgers and journals). After the state library building was completed on the east side of Capitol Square in the late 1890's the auditor's office moved into it and the older records were stored in the basement. There they remained until 1913, when they were transferred to the custody of the state library.

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.

The Free Blacks Records, 1833-1863, are arranged alphabetically by folder title, with oversized materials arranged to the rear. The records include correspondence, court records, lists, minutes, petitions, receipts, reports, resolutions, and returns regarding the taxation of free blacks and efforts to transport free blacks to the coast of Africa.

The Lists of Free Negroes and Mulattoes, 1833-1836 and 1862-1863, were created by local Commissioners of Revenue and are arranged chronologically and then alphabetically by county name within each year. The lists are a great source for genealogists and contain the names, occupations, and ages of free blacks. Related to the Lists of Free Negroes and Mulattoes are the Returns, Commissioners for the Assessment of Free Negroes, 1852-1860. The Returns are payments made to the local Commissioners of Revenue for assessing the number of free blacks in their localities. The Commissioners were paid two cents per free blacks they assessed and the receipts include the number of free blacks in the county but do not contain names or any other identifying information. The Sheriffs Commissions for Capitation Taxes of Free Negroes records, 1857-1859, are receipts from the Auditor of Public Accounts for payments made to local sheriff's for collecting taxes on free blacks. The sheriffs received a percentage of the capitation taxes on free blacks and the receipts state the amount of money and percentage on the tax they received.

Of note are the receipts, 1835-1849, to Lucy Powell of Lynchburg, Virginia. In 1815 Lucy, a slave belonging to Ptolemy Powell of Spotsylvania County, Virginia, heard of a possible slave revolt being organized by George Boxley. Lucy reported the information to Ptolemy Powell who in turn informed the local magistrate. Local authorities got involved and the insurrection was interrupted. In February 1818 the General Assembly passed an act authorizing Governor James P. Preston to purchase and set free Lucy Powell. An additional act was passed 3 January 1824 that provided Lucy a yearly sum of one hundred dollars as her annual allowance. Included are receipts for the annual payments made from the Court of Hustings of Lynchburg which was then reimbursed by the Auditor of Public Accounts. Additional information can be found in the "Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts from January 1, 1808 to December 31, 1835," Volume X, pgs 433-436 and an article in The Free Lance-Star, Fredericksburg, Virginia, 23 February 2002.

Included is a copy of the 4 March 1833 Act of General Assembly "making appropriations for the removal of free persons of color" to the western coast of Africa and established a board of commissioners charged with carrying out the provisions of the act. Also included are reports, 1833, from localities regarding their ability to find free blacks who were willing to relocate to Liberia. Most of the localities were unable to find free blacks who were willing or able to relocate, although a few such as Bedford, Charlotte, and Fayette Counties, and Petersburg, named some that were willing to move. For those localities that identified free blacks, the reports included names, ages, and sometimes height.

Of note are the Board of Commissioners for the Removal of Free Persons of Color records, 1833-1856, containing correspondence, lists, minutes, oaths, and resolutions. Included are lists of free blacks, lists of free blacks who emigrated to Liberia (including the name of the ship), lists of free blacks willing to emigrate, and resolutions to send money to the American Colonization Society and to those who transported the free blacks to Liberia. The Colonization Board paid fifty dollars for each person transported. Also included is a report of the Board of Commissioners, 1835, containing a list of free blacks transported to Liberia and including their names, ages, and where they had lived in Virginia.

Also of note are the voluntary enslavement petitions, 1857-1860. In 1856 the Virginia General Assembly passed an act allowing free persons of color who desired to remain in the commonwealth to petition for re-enslavement and choose an owner and remain in the state. The records are arranged chronologically and the petitions include the petitioners name, previous owner, means of emancipation, and their desired owner. The new owner also had to pay the court for the purchase of the free person and a value was placed and paid for the reinslaved free black.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged alphabetically by folder title with oversize materials arranged to the rear.

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