

A Guide to the Chesterfield County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1792-1863

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia
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2003

History

Processed by: C. Childs

Title Statement

A Guide to the Chesterfield County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1792-1863

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Creator

Chesterfield County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Physical Characteristics

.225 cu. ft.; 3 volumes; 1 microfilm reel

Physical Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Chesterfield County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1792-1863, 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 were transferred to the Library of Virginia from Chesterfield County (Va.) as part of an undated accession. The free registers were microfilmed by LVA's Imaging Services Branch at an unknown date.

Processing Information

"Free Negro" registrations, 1792-1861, were originally described as part of the Chesterfield County (Va.) Free and Enslaved Records, 1760-1862, but were removed to the present Chesterfield County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1792-1863, record to enhance the context between record types in January 2026.

The "Free Negro" registers were originally described as Chesterfield County (Va.) "Free Negro" Registers, 1804-1854, but was removed to the present Chesterfield County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1792-1863, record to enhance the context between record types in January 2026.

"Free Negro" registrations were found among Chesterfield County (Va.) Dead Papers. They 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.

The "Free Negro" registers were processed by C. Childs circa 2003, and digital images of the "Free Negro" registers were produced by Backstage Library Works in 2021.

Encoded by C. Childs: July 2003; updated by C. Collins: January 2026.

Preferred Citation

Chesterfield County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1792-1863. Local government records collection, Chesterfield County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Alternative Form Available

The Chesterfield County "Free Negro" Registers are available on microfilm, Chesterfield County (Va.) Reel No. 351.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

See also: [Chesterfield County \(Va.\) Free and Enslaved Records, 1760-1862](#)

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

Additional Chesterfield County (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:

"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 record group 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: Chesterfield County was named for Philip Dormer Stanhope, fourth earl of Chesterfield, British statesman and diplomat, and was formed from Henrico County in 1749. The county seat is Chesterfield Court House. Part of Henrico County was added to Chesterfield in 1922.

Scope and Content Information

Chesterfield County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1792-1863, consist of 379 "Free Negro" registrations, affidavits, and certificates, 1792-1861; the Chesterfield County (Va.) "Free Negro" Register and Book of Estrays, 1804-1830; the Chesterfield County (Va.) "Free Negro" Register and Book of Estrays, 1805-1863; and the Chesterfield County (Va.) "Free Negro" Register, 1853-1854.

Chesterfield County (Va.) "Free Negro" Register, 1804-1830, records the registration of free Black and Multiracial people of Black descent in Chesterfield County and covers the years 1804 to 1830. The clerk recorded name, age, height, complexion, marks and scars, and in what court the person was emancipated or if the person was born free. There is no index. It includes page numbers. 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.

Chesterfield County (Va.) Book of Estrays, 1804-1830, contains various records giving public notice of valuable, tame animals, either lost or found wandering and presumed escaped from their owners, allowing the owners to reclaim the animals. Entries generally indicate by whom the animal was taken up, before what justice the person went and when, and the description and appraisal (value) of the animal.

Chesterfield County (Va.) "Free Negro" Register, 1830-1853, records the registration of free Black and Multiracial people of Black descent in Chesterfield County and covers the years 1830 to 1853. The clerk recorded name, age, height, complexion, marks and scars, and in what court the person was emancipated or if the person was born free. There is no index. It includes page numbers. 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.

Chesterfield County (Va.) Book of Estrays, 1805-1863, contains various records giving public notice of valuable, tame animals, either lost or found wandering and presumed escaped from their owners, allowing the owners to reclaim the animals. Entries generally indicate by whom the animal was taken up, before what justice the person went and when, and the description and appraisal (value) of the animal.

Chesterfield County (Va.) "Free Negro" Register, 1853-1854, records the registration of free Black and Multiracial people of Black descent in Chesterfield County and covers the years 1853 to 1854. The clerk recorded name, age, height, complexion, marks and scars, and in what court the person was emancipated or if the person was born free. There is no index. It includes page numbers. 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.

The "Free Negro" registrations, affidavits, and certificates, 1792-1861, record the names of free Black and

Multiracial people residing in Chesterfield County. A number of registrations correspond to entries in the "Free Negro" registers. There are multiple registrations for some individuals, as a 1793 law required registrations be renewed every three years. In general, renewal was enforced irregularly across different localities.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Registers of "Free Negroes," 1804-1863, arranged chronologically by entry date.
- Series II: "Free Negro" registrations, affidavits, and certificates, 1792-1861, arranged chronologically.

Contents List

Series I: Registers of "Free Negroes," 1804-1863

Extent

Extent: 3 volumes

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically by entry date

Barcode number 1116521: Chesterfield County (Va.) "Free Negro" Register and Book of Estrays, 1804-1830

Barcode number 1156600: Chesterfield County (Va.) "Free Negro" Register and Book of Estrays, 1805-1863

Barcode number 1156601: Chesterfield County (Va.) "Free Negro" Register or List of "Free Negroes" Registered, 1853-1854

Series II: "Free Negro" Registrations, Affidavits, and Certificates, 1792-1861

Extent

Extent: .225 cu. ft.

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically

Barcode number 1116535: Free and Enslaved Records, 1790-1862