

A Guide to the Middlesex County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1787-1862

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1787-1862

A Collection in the Library of Virginia

Library of Virginia

2007

History

Processed by: Sarah Nerney

Title Statement

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Publication Statement

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Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from MS Word, created by Sarah Nerney 03 May 2007

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Collector

Middlesex County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Physical Characteristics

Digital images; 7 items

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Middlesex County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1787-1862, 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" 1787-1801, came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court records from Middlesex County in an undated accession.

Processing Information

The "Free Negro" Registration Records, 1787-1801, were originally described as part of the Middlesex (Va.) Free and Enslaved Records, but were removed to the present Middlesex (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, to enhance the context between the record types.

The microfilm of the two "Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes," volumes were originally described as Middlesex County (Va.) Registers of Free Negroes and Mulattoes, 1800-1862, but was removed to the present Middlesex (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1803-1860 to enhance the context between the record types.

These records have been processed, scanned, and indexed by L. Neuroth and other LVA staff for the purposes of digitizing them for the digital project Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative.

Encoded by; updated by M. Mason, April 2024

Preferred Citation

Middlesex County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1787-1862. Local Government Records Collection, Middlesex County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va. 23219.

Alternative Form Available

Middlesex County "Registers of Free Negroes and Mulattoes" are available as microfilm, Middlesex County (Va.) Reel No. 74 and Reel No. 126. This includes transcription and the original 1827-1862 volume.

Custodial History

The original registers came to the Library of Virginia as a loan for digitization from Middlesex County in 2024 under accession 54149 and were then returned to the locality by request of the Clerk.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

See also: [Middlesex County \(Va.\) Free and Enslaved Records, 1764-1800](#)

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

Additional Middlesex 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."](#)

Middlesex County (Va.) is one of Virginia's Lost Records Localities. Additional Middlesex County Court Records may be found in the [Lost Records Localities Digital Collection](#) on the Library of Virginia website.

Location of Originals

Original "Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes," 1827-1862, retained in locality by retained in locality by Clerk of the Circuit Court for Middlesex County.

Original "Order Book, Pages 267-549", 1799-1803, containing the "Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes," 1800-1826, retained in locality by Clerk of the Circuit Court for Middlesex County.

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 Note: Middlesex County was named probably for the English county. It was formed from Lancaster County by 30 October 1669.

Lost Locality Note: Created in 1669. Numerous loose records from the nineteenth century are missing, including chancery, judgments, and commonwealth causes. Most volumes (including deed books, will books, and order books) exist because court clerk Philemon T. Woodward removed them from the courthouse for safekeeping during the Civil War.

Scope and Content

Middlesex County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1800-1862, consists of "Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes," 1800-1826; "Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes," 1827-1862; and loose "Free Negro" Registrations, 1787-1801.

"Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes," 1800-1826, consists of two pages kept by the clerk of the court and exist as part of the Middlesex "Order Book, Pages 267-549," 1799-1803 [the last pages of the conserved volume]. The register documents the name of the free Black and multiracial person, Certificate number, by whom emancipated or born free, age, height, complexion, and date of certificate (later entries include scars). Includes about seventy- six names, as well as the loose registration of Samuel Coleman (formerly enslaved by Eliza Read, and emancipated 1793, certificate dated 1803 [see: "Free Negro" registrations]).

"Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes," 1827-1862, is a full volume kept by the clerk of the court which consists about 27 leaves. The register documents the name of the free Black and multiracial person, date of certificate, by whom emancipated or born free, Certificate number, age, height, complexion, and marks or scars. Around 1859 the entries move from a column structure to long-hand text description.

"Free Negro" Registrations, 1787-1801, consists of seven items including a certificate, 1787, for Nancy Going (also Gowen) records in Essex County; affidavit, 1802, of Frederick Noell certifying Betsey Going (also Gowen) to be the daughter of Nancy Going; certificate, 1802, of Betsey Going; certificate, 1793, for Samuel "Sam" Colman; and affidavit, 1801 of William Emmerson making oath to the free status of Charity [majority documented in the "Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes," 1800-1826 as well].

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Records related to the registration of free persons, 1787-1862, arranged by records type then chronologically

Contents List

Series I: Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons 1787-1862

Extent

digital images; 7 items

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Arrangement

arranged by record type then chronologically

Barcode number 1156114: Free and enslaved records, 1764-1802

Barcode number 0007880039: "Free Negro Register" 1827-1862

Barcode number 0007880043: "Free Negro Register" 1800-1826

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