

A Guide to the Staunton (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1810-1864

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia
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History

Processed by: C. O'Brien and LVA staff

Title Statement

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Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from MARC record, created by Catherine O'Brien, 14 June 2007

Language Usage: Description is in English

Revision Description

2013-11-21 Converted to schema conforming EAD by dtd2schema.vh.xsl.

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Collector

Staunton (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

1 volume; 1 folder; 1 microfilm reel (28 images)

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Staunton (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1810-1864, 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 Staunton (Va.) in 2024 under accession number 54093 and as part of an undated accession. Digital images of the register were produced by the Library of Virginia Imaging Services in 2024 and accessioned under accession number 54093.

Processing Information

"Free Negro" Registration Records, 1837, 1850-1861, were originally described as part of the Staunton (Va.) Free and Enslaved Records, 1845-1861, but were removed to the present Staunton (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1810-1864, to enhance the context between record types in October 2024.

The Staunton (Va.) "Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes," 1810-1864, was microfilmed by the Library of Virginia on 19 October 1987.

Digital scans of the register, which is retained in the locality, were produced by the Library of Virginia Imaging Services in 2024.

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

Encoded by C. O'Brien: June 2007; updated by C. Collins: October 2024.

Preferred Citation

Staunton (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1810-1864. Local government records collection, Staunton (Va.) Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Alternative Form Available

The Staunton (Va.) "Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes," 1810-1864, is available on microfilm, Staunton (Va.) Reel No. 15.

The Staunton (Va.) "Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes," 1810-1864, is available as an inkjet facsimile.

Custodial History

The Staunton (Va.) "Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes," 1810-1864, was transferred to the Library of Virginia from the Circuit Court of Staunton (Va.) in 2024 under accession number 54093 for digitization. The register was returned to the locality in 2024 by request of the clerk of the Circuit Court. Contact the clerk of the Circuit Court for access. Staunton (Va.) Circuit Court, 113 E. Beverley Street #300, Staunton, Virginia, 24401.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

See also: [Staunton \(Va.\) Free and Enslaved Records, 1845-1861](#)

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

Additional Staunton (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: Staunton, in Augusta County, was named, according to most authorities, for Rebecca Staunton, wife of Sir William Gooch, lieutenant governor of Virginia from 1727 to 1749. Staunton was laid out in 1748 at the site of the Augusta County courthouse and was established as a town in 1761. It was incorporated as a town in 1801 and as a city in 1871.

Scope and Content

Staunton (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1810-1864, consist of one "Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes," 1810-1864, as well as a loose registration, 1850; two affidavits, 1837, 1855; an exception, 1861; and a letter, 1853.

The Staunton (Va.) "Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes," 1810-1864, records the registration of free Black and multiracial people of Black descent in Staunton and covers the years 1810 to 1864. 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. In some instances, the clerk recorded information not required by law, such as the previous place of registration or name of the person's mother.

The loose registration, 1850, documents the free status of Abbey Epperson, "a dark Mulatto woman about Twenty years of age Five feet 2 ¼ inches high." According to the registration, Epperson was born free.

The affidavits, 1837, 1855, are comprised of an affidavit, 1837, certifying the free status of Rebecca Grigsby (or Griggsby), and an affidavit, 1855, in which Caroline Kinney asserted that her free papers had been mislaid. A presentment, filed with the affidavit, lists the names, ages, heights, complexions, and marks and scars of Kinney's children. The "Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes" includes Kinney and her children: see entries 174 through 178.

The records also include an exception, 1861, submitted by George Dennis Harris, who had petitioned the court to be registered as free. The court initially ordered that he be registered, but ultimately rescinded their decision. Prior to petitioning the court to be registered in Staunton, Harris was registered as free in Richmond City.

Additionally, the records consist of a letter, 1853, written in response to a request for a copy of Edmund Triplett's registration. It states that Triplett was registered in November 1847.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1810-1864, arranged loosely by record type then chronologically.

Contents List

Series I: Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1810-1864

Extent

1 volume; 1 folder

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Arrangement

Arranged loosely by record type then chronologically

Barcode number 1138036: Free and Enslaved Records, 1811-1863

Barcode number 0007874723: "Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes," 1810-1864 [inkjet facsimile]

Library of Virginia