

A Guide to the Washington County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1795-1831,1863

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia

Library of Virginia

2025

History

Processed by: S. Nerney; L. Neuroth

Title Statement

A Guide to the Washington County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1795-1831,1863

Subtitle: Washington County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1795-1831,1863

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Publication Statement

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Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from MS Word, created by Mary Ann Mason, 21 February 2025

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Collector

Washington County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

digital images; 1 item [photocopy].

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

[In process] Washington County (Va.) Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes, 1795-1831, is 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

Washington County (Va.) Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes, 1795-1831, digital images transferred to the Library of Virginia in 2025 under accession 54391.

Processing Information

The Library of Virginia's Virginia Untold Project Manager scanned the original pages of the Washington Free Register volume at the Washington County Circuit Court in 2024.

Registration of Robert Evans, originally described as only item in "Washington County (Va.) Free and Enslaved" record but included in this record in February 2025 to increase context between record types. Redescription resulted in deleting the previously "Washington County (Va.) Free and Enslaved" record.

Encoded by S. Nerney in 2009; Updated by M. Mason, February 2025

Preferred Citation

Washington County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1795-1831,1863[Include volume name if applicable]. Local government records collection, Washington County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Custodial History

Register of Robert R. Evans, 1863, came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from Washington County under the accession number 44413. The original has since been returned to the clerk of court's office in Washington County.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

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

Additional Washington 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.](#)"

Washington County is one of Virginia's Lost Records Localities. Additional Washington County Court Records may be found in the Virginia Lost Records Localities Collection at the Library of Virginia. Search the "Lost Records Localities Database" found at the Library of Virginia web site.

Location of Originals

Robert R. Evans, 1863 September 23, free registration is located in the Washinton County Circuit Court. Contact Clerk of the Court for access.

Historical Information

Context for Recprd 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: Washington County is the first locality in the United States known to have been named for George Washington. It was formed from Fincastle County in 1776, and a part of Montgomery County was added in 1777.

Lost Locality Note: Court first met on January 18, 1777. Minute books for the periods 1787-1819 and 1821-1837 and many loose papers were lost on December 15, 1864, when the courthouse was burned during Stoneman's Raid. The fire was set by Union captain James B. Wyatt of the 13th Tennessee Cavalry. Wyatt, who was raised in Washington County, sought revenge for what he claimed was a wrong done against him by a county court judge before the war.

Scope and Content

Washington County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1795-1831, 1863, consists of digital images of the county's "Free Negro" Register, 1795-1831; and a "Free Negro" Registration, 1863.

Washington County (Va.) "Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes", 1795-1831, consists of digital images of five pages of a volume. These five pages record the registration of free Black and Multiracial people of Black descent in Washington County and covers the years 1795-1831. The pages record twenty registrations, the clerk noting name, age, height, complexion, marks and scars, and in what court the person was emancipated or if the person was born free. Does not include an index. Page numbers are indicated in pencil as 172-176.

"Free Negro" Registration, 1863, consists of the registration of Robert R. Evans, 1863 September 23. Evans states that he was thirty-eight years old and was born free in Ashe County, North Carolina [photocopy].

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Records related to the registration of free persons, 1795-1863, arranged by records type then chronologically

Contents List

Series I: Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1795-1834, 1863

Extent

digital images items; 1 item

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Barcode number 0007900354: Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes, 1795-1831

Barcode number 0007903019: Free and Enslaved Records, 1863

