

# A Guide to the Accomack County (Va.) Deeds of Emancipation, 1783-1824

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia  
Library of Virginia  
2024

## History

**Processed by:** LVA Staff

## Title Statement

A Guide to the Accomack County (Va.) Deeds of Emancipation, 1783-1824

**Subtitle:** Accomack County (Va.) Deeds of Emancipation

**Author:** Caroline Collins

## Publication Statement

**Date:** © 2024 By The Library of Virginia. All Rights Reserved.

**Publisher:** Library of Virginia

## Profile Description

**Creation:** Machine-readable finding aid derived from MS Word, created by Caroline Collins, 12 August 2024

**Language Usage:** Description is in English

## Descriptive Summary

### Language

English

### Collector

Accomack County (Va.) Circuit Court.

### Physical Characteristics

4 folders.

### Location

Library of Virginia

### Repository

Library of Virginia

## Administrative Information

### Access Restrictions

Accomack County (Va.) Deeds of Emancipation, 1783-1824, 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 came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from Accomack County (Va.) as part of an undated accession.

## Processing Information

Accomack County Deeds of Emancipation were originally described as part of the Accomack County (Va.) Free and Enslaved Records, 1758, 1799-1861, but were removed to the present Accomack County (Va.) Deeds of Emancipation, 1783-1824, record to enhance discoverability in August 2024.

These records were scanned and indexed by LVA staff for the purposes of digitizing them for the digital project Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative at an unknown date.

Encoded by C. Collins: August 2024.

## Preferred Citation

Accomack County (Va.) Deeds of Emancipation, 1783-1824. Local government records collection, Accomack County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

# Adjunct Descriptive Data

## Related Material

See also: [Accomack County \(Va.\) Free and Enslaved Records, 1758, 1799-1861](#)

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

Additional Accomack 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."](#)

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

## Historical Information

**Context of Record Type:** Deeds of emancipation and manumission record an enslavers' intent to emancipate enslaved people from bondage. Some of the earliest legal manumissions in Virginia occurred in the early 1770s. However, there was a sharp rise following the 1782 manumission act that allowed enslavers to privately emancipate enslaved people "by last will and testament or other instrument in writing sealed." They were no longer required to seek a special act from the General Assembly. These documents sometimes include an enslavers' intent for emancipation ranging from religious and moral motivations to binding legal agreements.

Deeds of emancipation and manumission essentially provide the same information and there is little difference between the two. Both include the name of the enslaver, the name of the enslaved person to be freed, the date of anticipated freedom, the date the manumission was proved or certified, and as mentioned, sometimes a reason why the enslaver decided to emancipate the enslaved person. In a deed of manumission, an enslaver directly freed an enslaved person by manumission. In a deed of emancipation, an enslaved person could be freed after the enslaver's death by those executing a last will and testament.

**Locality History:** Accomack County was named for the Accomac Indians, who lived on the Eastern Shore at the time of the first English settlement in Virginia. The word means "on-the-other-side-of-water place" or "across the water." It was one of the original eight shires, or counties, first enumerated in 1634 and spelled Accomac without the k. The county's name was changed to Northampton County in 1643. The present county was formed from Northampton about 1663. In October 1670, the General Assembly temporarily reunited Accomack and Northampton Counties as Northampton County. In November 1673, Accomack County was again separated from Northampton. In early records, the county's name was spelled many ways. In 1940 the General Assembly adopted the present spelling, Accomack. The county gained a small part of the southern end of Smith's Island from Somerset County, Maryland, in 1879, after the United States had approved boundary changes between Virginia and Maryland that had been agreed to in 1877. The county seat is Accomac.

**Lost Locality Note:** A significant number of loose records from the 1700s suffered extreme water and pest damage. Volumes that record deeds, court orders, and wills exist.

## Scope and Content

Accomack County (Va.) Deeds of Emancipation, 1783-1824, include 4 folders of deeds of emancipation and manumission and affidavits certifying that enslaved persons were emancipated by deed. The deeds typically record the name of enslaver, the name of the enslaved person or persons to be freed, the date the enslaved person or persons achieved freedom, and the date the manumission was proved or certified. Sometimes, the deeds describe the reason for emancipation or manumission.

## Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Deeds of Emancipation, 1783-1824, arranged chronologically.

## Contents List

### **Series I: Deeds of Emancipation, 1783-1824**

#### **Extent**

4 folders

**Physical Location** Library of Virginia

#### **Arrangement**

Arranged chronologically

**Barcode number 1138011: Free and Enslaved Records, 1744-1861**

Library of Virginia