

A Guide to the Chesterfield County (Va.) Petitions for Re-Enslavement, 1862

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1862

A Collection in the Library of Virginia

Library of Virginia

2025

History

Processed by: S. Nerney

Title Statement

A Guide to the Chesterfield County (Va.) Petitions for Re-Enslavement, 1862

Subtitle: Chesterfield County (Va.) Petitions for Re-Enslavement

Author: Caroline Collins

Publication Statement

Date: © 2025 By The Library of Virginia. All Rights Reserved.

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Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from MS Word by Caroline Collins, 3 December 2025

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Collector

Chesterfield County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Extent

1 item

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Chesterfield County (Va.) Petitions for Re-Enslavement, 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

These records came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from Chesterfield County (Va.) as part of an undated accession.

Processing Information

Chesterfield County Petitions for Re-Enslavement 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.) Petitions for Re-Enslavement, 1862, record to enhance discoverability in December 2025.

Chesterfield County Petitions for Re-Enslavement 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.

Encoded by C. Collins: December 2025.

Preferred Citation

Chesterfield County (Va.) Petitions for Re-Enslavement, 1862. Local government records collection, Chesterfield County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

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: Petitions for Re-enslavement consist of petitions of free Black individuals choosing to be re-enslaved. An act passed by the Virginia General Assembly in 1806 required formerly enslaved people to leave the commonwealth within twelve months of being granted their freedom. Individuals were forced to leave behind family, friends, and community who remained enslaved. In addition, many emancipated people did not have the financial means or social support to move to a free state. One option to preserve family and relationships was to return to slavery. In 1856, the Virginia legislature passed an act allowing free Black individuals who desired to remain in the commonwealth to petition for re-enslavement. Only a small number of free Black Virginians petitioned the courts to re-enslave themselves to an enslaver of choice, and an even smaller percentage succeeded. Many petitioners chose enslavers they knew well or who owned a spouse or family member. These petitions include the petitioner's name, previous enslaver, means of emancipation, and new desired enslaver.

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

Chesterfield County (Va.) Petitions for Re-Enslavement, 1862, include a petition, in which John Green, a "free man of color," sought permission to "sell himself into slavery" to Henry Covington. There is no indication as to whether or not his petition was granted.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Petitions for Re-Enslavement, 1862, arranged chronologically.

Contents List

Series I: Petitions for Re-Enslavement, 1862

Extent

Extent: 1 item

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically

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

Library of Virginia