

A Guide to the Cumberland County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1789-1863

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia
Library of Virginia
2026

History

Processed by: S. Nerney

Title Statement

A Guide to the Cumberland County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1789-1863

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Publication Statement

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Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from MS Word by Caroline Collins, 29 April 2026

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Collector

Cumberland County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Extent

.45 cu. ft. (1 box); 1 folder

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

IN PROGRESS: Cumberland County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1789-1863, 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 Cumberland County (Va.) as part of an undated accession.

Processing Information

"Free Negro" registrations, certificates, and related records, were originally described as part of the Cumberland County (Va.) Free and Enslaved Records, 1759-1865, but were removed to the present Cumberland County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1789-1863, record to enhance the context between record types in April 2026.

These records have been processed and indexed, and the majority of them scanned, 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: April 2026.

Preferred Citation

Cumberland County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1789-1863. Local government records collection, Cumberland County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

See also: [Cumberland County \(Va.\) Free and Enslaved Records, 1759-1865](#)

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

Additional Cumberland 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:

"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: Cumberland County was named for William Augustus, duke of Cumberland, third son of King George II. It was formed from Goochland County in 1749. The county seat is Cumberland.

Scope and Content

Cumberland County (Va.) Records related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1789-1863, consist of "Free Negro" registrations, affidavits, certificates, and lists, 1808-1863, as well as records related to registrations, 1789-1858, and records related to free persons in want of registration, 1826-1856.

"Free Negro" registrations, affidavits, and certificates, 1808-1863, record the names of free Black and Multiracial people residing in Cumberland County. These records include 237 registrations, as well as two lists. A number of free registrations originated in other Virginia localities, such as Goochland County,

Hanover County, and Lynchburg. Upon their removal to Cumberland County, individuals surrendered their free papers to the court to prove their free status. In such cases, they would have received a Cumberland County free registration to replace the document(s) handed over to the court. The lists, 1852-1863, document the names of individuals registered as free, as well as the names of the those charged with the registration fee and/or the names of those to whom the free papers were delivered.

Records related to registrations, 1789-1858, include:

Affidavits and certificates, 1800-1806, concerning individuals who were formerly enslaved by Joseph Mayo of Henrico County. The following people are named: Doll; Sammy; Grace Mayo; Cuffy, Geoffrey, John, and Moses Gibbson; Becca Mayo; Dula, Effa, Lucy, Randal, Nancy, Chloe, and Will; Sally, Billy, Amy, Betty, and Grace; Affy; Fortune; Lucy; and Moses. Several of the affidavits and certificates include brief physical descriptions of the individual(s) named therein, as well as the names of family members.

Apprenticeship indenture, 1803, for Scipio, son of Doll, who was bound to Charles Creasy.

Free papers, 1816, of Ben, Phill, and Peg, who were emancipated by Joel Megs.

Free registrations, 1789, of 16 individuals, namely Dilsey, Amey, Sam, Jack, Jesse, Rose, James, Jacob, Massie, Flora (2), Dinah, Janey, Grace, Molly, and Moll. They were emancipated by "'An act concerning the emancipation of certain slaves belonging to the estate of Jeseeph [sic] Mayo late of Henrico county.'"

Free registration, 1831, for Lewis Reynolds. It includes a physical description of Reynolds, as well as information related to his submission of a petition to remain in Virginia.

List of names, 1848, which lists the following individuals: Alise Mayo, John William Mayo, Robert Mayo, Samuel Mayo, Robert Jenkins, Edy Jenkins (or Jackson), and Nancy Mayo.

List of names, 1858, which lists the following individuals: Mary Jane Brown, Sarah Elizabeth Brown, William Brown, and Pollard Brown.

Order, 1806, to record deed of emancipation from Willis Wilson to Nathen (or Nathan) Albert.

Records related to Free Persons in want of registration, 1826-1856, are comprised of certificates and letters attesting to the free status of Godfrey Jackson (1826), Maria Cook (1830), Henry Ward (1848), John Battles (1849), and William Riley (or Ryley) (1845, 1854), who had either lost their free papers or were jailed for want of free papers. These records also include an advertisement, 1856, for the lost free papers of Albert Cousins.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: "Free Negro" registrations, certificates, and related records, 1789-1863, arranged chronologically.

Contents List

Series I: "Free Negro" registrations, certificates, and related records, 1789-1863

Extent

Extent: .45 cu. ft. (1 box); 1 folder

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically

Barcode number 1156165: "Free Negro" registrations and certificates, 1789-1860

Barcode number 1156166: Free and Enslaved Records, 1759-1865