

A Guide to the Warren County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1836-1861

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1836-1861

A Collection in the Library of Virginia

Library of Virginia

2023

History

Processed by: L. Neuroth

Title Statement

A Guide to the Warren County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1836-1861

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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, 13 December 2023

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Collector

Warren County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

.25 cubic feet (1 box); Digital Images.

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1836-1861, 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 items came to the Library of Virginia in transfers of court papers from Warren County, in 2000 under accession number 37580 and 37581, as well as in 2023 under accession number 54002.

Processing Information

The "Free Negro Registration" Records, 1836-1861, were originally described as part of the **Warren County (Va.) Free and Enslaved Records, 1836-1861** but were removed to the present Warren County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1836-1861 to enhance the context between the record types.

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

Encoded by M. Mason, December 2023

Preferred Citation

Warren County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1836-1861. Local government records collection, Warren County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va. 23219.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

See also: [Warren County \(Va.\) Free and Enslaved Records, 1836-1861](#)

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

Additional Warren County (Va.) court records can be found on microfilm at the Library of Virginia. 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 Note: Warren County was named for Joseph Warren, the revolutionary patriot who sent Paul Revere and William Dawes on their famous rides and who was killed at the Battle of Bunker Hill. The county was formed from Shenandoah and Frederick Counties in 1836.

Scope and Content

Warren County (Va.) Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, 1836-1861 consists of pages of the "Free Negro Register," 1856-1859; "Index to County Court Minute Books A, B, and C from Free Negro Register, 1836-1859"; and "Free Negro" Registrations (includes affidavits of freedom, certificates of freedom, loose register certificates, and requests for free papers).

The "Free Negro Register," 1856-1859, is incomplete and consists of four loose pages that appear to have been extracted from an original volume that recorded the registrations of free Black and multiracial people of Black descent in the Warren County. The original register likely covered the years 1836 to 1862 [based on the date range of loose registers] and is not extant. 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.

Entries in Warren County Minute Book C align with the names and biographical information recorded in the registrations for years 1856 to 1859. Additional information on free Black and multiracial people who were recorded in pages of the register book no longer extant can be found in Warren County Minute Books A, B, and C. Additionally included, is a cross-reference document "Index to County Court Minute Books A, B, and C from Free Negro Register," compiled by an unknown researcher. This document provides names of the free individuals and references the page in which that registration was recorded in the Warren County Minute Books.

"Free Negro" Registrations, 1836-1861, consists of several affidavits of freedom (statements sworn before the court by an individual vouching for a Black or multiracial individual's legal status as a free person. This includes on of Hannah Henry, daughter of Delilah Henry who was enslaved and later emancipated by the estate of Robert Carter); several certificates of freedom and twenty-five loose register certificates (these are certified and recorded in the court and typically correspond to the bound "Free Negro Register" kept by the clerk) and a request for free papers, 1857, by Jas. W. Hendrick to Col. Robert Turner seeking to obtain free person for Nancy Walker.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged into

- Series I: Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons, loosely arranged by record type then chronological

Contents List

Series I: Records Related to the Registration of Free Persons 1831-1861

Extent

.25 cubic feet (1 box)

Arrangement

loosely by record type then chronological

Barcode number 1208718: Free and Enslaved Records 1836-1861