

A Guide to the Northumberland County (Va.) Petitions for Re-enslavement, 1857,1860

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1857,1860

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History

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Title Statement

A Guide to the Northumberland County (Va.) Petitions for Re-enslavement, 1857,1860

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Profile Description

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Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Collector

Northumberland County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Physical Characteristics

2 items; digital images.

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Northumberland County (Va.) Petitions for Re-Enslavement, 1857,1860,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 Northumberland County in 2007 under accession number 43283.

Processing Information

Northumberland County Petitions for Re-Enslavement were originally described as part of the Northumberland County (Va.) Free and Enslaved Records, but were removed to the present record to enhance discoverability in November 2025.

These records have been processed, scanned, and indexed by Library of Virginia staff for the purposes of digitizing them for the digital project Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative.

Encoded by M. Mason: November 2025.

Preferred Citation

Northumberland County (Va.) Petitions for Re-Enslavement, 1857-1860. Local government records collection, Northumberland County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

See Also: [Northumberland County \(Va.\) Free and Enslaved Records](#)

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

Additional Northumberland 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: 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: Northumberland County was probably named for the English county. It was formed about 1645 from the district of Chickacoan, the early seventeenth century name for the region between the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers.

Scope and Content

Northumberland County (Va.) Petitions for Re-Enslavement, 1857, 1860, includes a petition for Jerry Glascock and George Kent.

Jerry Glascock's petition for re-enslavement, 1857, contains the circumstances of his emancipation, his rationale for requesting re-enslavement, and his choice of James Kelly as his enslaver. The case also contains a record of the court's examination of the parties involved in the case to ensure the absence of fraud or collusion; a bond, a summons, and two copies of William Kelly's will emancipating Glascock, and the rest of humans Kelly enslaved, proven in Lancaster County 1847. In his will, Kelly provides five hundred dollars for each person he emancipates and requests that his brother purchase a plantation for the emancipated individuals in a state that admits free Black individuals.

George Kent's petition for re-enslavement, 1860, contains the circumstances of his emancipation by the will of B. Burgess, his rationale for requesting re-enslavement in Virginia over freedom in Africa, and his choice of Samuel B. Burgess as his new enslaver. The case also contains a summons and Burgess' bond.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Petitions for Re-Enslavement, 1857-1860 arranged chronologically.

Contents List

Series I: Petitions for Re-Enslavement, 1857,1860

Extent

2 items; Digital Images [Use digital Images]

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Barcode number 1189869: Free and Enslaved Records, 1786-1862

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