

Researching Free African Americans in Virginia

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Types of Records

“Free Negro Register”

1793: Free African Americans who resided in towns had to register at the courthouse; free African Americans not permitted to enter Virginia

1803: Free African Americans who resided in counties had to register at the courthouse

Resources

Library of Virginia, County and City Records on Microfilm: <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/local>

- Court minute and order books may contain similar information to the register
- “Free Negro Registers” may be available on microfilm

_____, *Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative*: <https://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/aan/>

- May include free papers found in local records
- A project is underway to digitize and transcribe the registers so they can be added to *Virginia Untold*

Petitions to Remain in the Commonwealth

1806: Individuals who gained freedom had to petition the General Assembly to remain in the commonwealth within 12 months of manumission

1837: Individuals who gained freedom could petition a local court instead of the General Assembly to remain in the commonwealth within 12 months of manumission

Resources

Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Virginia.

- If action was taken on a petition to the Virginia General Assembly, it was recorded in the published session laws

Library of Virginia, County and City Records on Microfilm: <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/local>

- Court minute and order books may contain references to a petition

_____, *Legislative Petitions Digital Collection*: <http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/petitions>

- Petitions filed with the Virginia General Assembly

_____, *Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative*: <https://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/aan/>

- Petitions filed with localities may be found in local records
- Petitions from the *Legislative Petitions Digital Collection* are included in *Virginia Untold*

Williams, John W. *Index to Enrolled Bills of the General Assembly of Virginia, 1776–1910*. Richmond, VA: Davis Bottom, Superintendent of Public Printing, 1911.

- Petitions to the Virginia General Assembly that were acted upon are indexed in Williams’s book
- Edition to 1862 available through FamilySearch; Edition to 1910 available through HathiTrust and the Internet Archive

“Free Negro Lists”

1801: Lists of free African Americans were to be submitted along with lists of taxable property

Resources

Library of Virginia, Personal Property Tax Records, 1782-1925, On Microfilm:

<https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/pptax.htm>

- Personal property tax rolls may include a list of free African Americans

_____, *Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative*: <https://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/aan/>

- Lists may be found in local records

Delinquent Tax Lists

1782: Free African Americans who do not pay required taxes were to be hired out by the sheriff until enough money was earned to pay the taxes

Resources

Library of Virginia, Land Tax Records, 1782-1927, On Microfilm:

<https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/landtax.asp>

_____, Personal Property Tax Records, 1782-1925, On Microfilm:

<https://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/pptax.htm>

- Personal property tax rolls may include free African Americans

_____, *Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative*: <https://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/aan/>

- Lists may be found in local records

Fugitives from Slavery

Resources

Freedom on the Move: <https://freedomonthemove.org/>

- Digitized newspaper advertisements for fugitives from slavery

Library of Virginia, *Virginia Chronicle*: <https://virginiachronicle.com/>

- Digitized Virginia newspapers that may include advertisements for fugitives from slavery

_____, *Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative*: <https://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/aan/>

- May include local records concerning the sale of enslaved people who attempted to self-emancipate
- May include local records of enslaved people who crossed Union lines during the Civil War

Freedom Suits

Resources

Library of Virginia, *Chancery Records Index*: <https://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/chancery/>

- May include freedom suits heard in local courts of equity

_____, County and City Records on Microfilm: <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/local>

- Court minute and order books may contain references to a petition

_____, *Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative*: <https://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/aan/>

- Includes local court records concerning freedom suits

Sources for Online Publications

FamilySearch: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog>

Google Books: <https://books.google.com/>

HathiTrust Digital Library: <https://www.hathitrust.org/>

Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/>