

AFRICAN VIRGINIANS PRIOR TO 1865: A SELECTED GUIDE TO HISTORICAL, BIOGRAPHICAL AND GENEALOGICAL SOURCES

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Some Important Virginia Repositories

Library of Virginia <http://www.lva.lib.va.us/>
Alderman Library, University of Virginia <http://www.lib.virginia.edu/alderman/>
Virginia Historical Society <http://www.vahistorical.org/>
Colonial Williamsburg <http://www.history.org/research/>
Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary <http://www.swem.wm.edu/>
Other university, public and special libraries may have holdings of importance.

Abolitionist and other Antebellum literature – See digital images at *Making of America*
<http://www.hti.umich.edu/m/moagrp/> and <http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/moa/>

Business records – Stores may name free blacks as customers.

Cemetery records – Local historical societies may have identified African-American cemeteries.

Censuses and substitutes:

Muster of inhabitants 1624/5 – Identifies earliest African settlers.

Rent rolls or land tax records (1600s-1865) – Show land ownership by free blacks.

Tithable lists (before 1782) – Name heads of household (free blacks), enumerate (and may name) slaves over age 16.

Tobacco tenders lists – 1724 law recorded males over age 10, including slaves (few lists survive)

Personal property tax lists (from 1782) – Name heads of household, enumerate slaves (1782 list may name slaves, including those over age 12).

U.S. Census, 1790-1860 – Name freedmen, count slaves. A few may identify slaves by name (cf. Hampshire County, 1860).

Church Records – May report African members, baptisms, marriages, burials.

Civil War and Reconstruction

Census of African-American inhabitants, 1865/66.

Registrations of freedmen's marriages; cohabitations; children whose parents had ceased to cohabit.

Records of the Freedmen's Bureau – reports, correspondence, statistics.

<http://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/freedmens-bureau/>

Court Minutes – Registration of slaves (give slave's name, age, owner).

Registration of free blacks (identify person, details should be recorded in a special register).

Court actions against slaves and freedmen. Reports of runaways and crimes.

Family Histories – See especially this compilation:

Heinegg, Paul. *Free African Americans of North Carolina, Virginia, and South Carolina*, 5th edition (Baltimore: Clearfield, 2005). A compendium of family histories.

Historic Sites – African American Heritage in Virginia, Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, Charlottesville. Heritage sites database at <http://aaheritageva.org/>.

Historical Works – Study the general and special histories of each local area. A few overviews:

“Don't Grieve After Me”: The Black Experience in Virginia 1619-1986 (Hampton Univ., 1986).

The Free Negro in Virginia 1619-1865, by John H. Russell. (Johns Hopkins, 1913; repr. 1969).

Foul Means: the Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660-1740, by Anthony S. Parent Jr. (Univ.N.C., 2003)

Internet: Race & Slavery Petitions Project (University of North Carolina, Greensboro)
<http://library.uncg.edu/slavery/>

African American Genealogy <http://www.accessgenealogy.com/african/virginia/>

Land Records (deed books) Include sales of slaves, emancipations of slaves.

Deeds and contracts related to freedmen.

Manuscripts Farm books (plantation records). Correspondence.

Military Records Military service of freedmen and perhaps of slaves.

Newspapers. Earliest newspaper in Virginia: *The Virginia Gazette* (1736).

Notices of runaway slaves. Sales of slaves.

Reports of trials and other news affecting blacks.

Periodicals – Statewide titles include *The Virginia Genealogist*, *Magazine of Virginia Genealogy*, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, *William and Mary Quarterly*, *Tyler's Quarterly*. Many other local and regional publications of genealogical and historical societies.

Petitions – Petitions to the General Assembly were presented by citizens on many matters.

Free blacks requested to remain in Virginia or to return to the state.

Whites petitioned for repayment of expenses in capturing escaped slaves.

Probate Records – Slaves named in bequests, itemized in inventories, auction reports.

Registers of Free Colored Persons – Maintained by county clerk from about 1800. Describe each free person and gives the circumstances of their freedom.

School Records – Few opportunities for blacks to gain an education.

Directories – Directories of cities will name free black inhabitants. Earliest: Norfolk, 1801, Richmond 1819.

Vital Records – Virginia began keeping official marriage registers in 1780, birth and death registers in 1853. (Some Virginia counties have surviving marriage bonds or other evidence of marriage prior to 1780.) These would have been preserved at the county courthouse, but a sizable number of courthouses have been burned. Beginning in 1853, annual registers of births, marriages and deaths were submitted by each county clerk to the State Auditor of Public Accounts. Those registers are preserved today at the Library of Virginia. They include birth and death records for slaves, and all three types of records for free blacks.

Compilations of Sources (selected examples):

Peters, Joan W. *Prince William County Census, free Negro Families: 1810, 1840-1860* (author, 1996).

Peters, Joan W. *Slave & Free Negro Records from the Prince William County Court Minute & Order Books; 1752-1763, 1766-1769, 1804-1806, 1812-1814, 1833-1865* (author, 1996).

Scheel, Eugene M. *African American Heritage [map], Prince William County* (Prince William County Historical Commission, 2000).

Turner, Ronald R. *Prince William County, Virginia, African American Marriages, 1854-1934* (author, 2002).

U. S. Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. *Records ... Virginia, 1865-1870* [microfilm]. Partial index: Lawson, Jacqueline A. *An index of African Americans indentified in selected records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands* (1995).

KNOWN SURVIVING MARRIAGE REGISTERS AND 1865/66 CENSUS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN VIRGINIA

[Prepared by Carolyn Goudie, Library of Virginia, 1998,
with many later additions by RELIC. Some are online]

Child = Register of children whose parents had ceased to
cohabit, which the father recognizes to be his.

Cohab = Cohabitation register.

Marr = Freedmen's marriage register.

CH = Courthouse

LVA = Library of Virginia www.lva.lib.va.us

NARA = National Archives www.archives.gov

Alexandria (Arlington) County – 1865 census (LVA)

Amelia County – Marr 1865-1869 (LVA)

Augusta County – Child, Cohab (LVA)

Buckingham County – Child (LVA)

Caroline County – Marr (CH); Child, Cohab (LVA)
also online at

<http://resources.umwhisp.org/freedmen/Registry1866.htm>

Culpeper County – Child, Cohab, Marr (LVA) [Abstracted
by Robert A. Hodge, *Some Pre-1871 Vital Statistics
on Colored Persons of Culpeper County, Va.*
(Fredericksburg: Author, 1978)]

Floyd County – Child, Cohab (LVA)

Fluvanna County – Child, Cohab (LVA)

Gloucester County – Marr (NARA)

Goochland County – Cohab (LVA); Marr (NARA)

Hanover County – Marr (CH, LVA)

Louisa County – Marr (NARA)

Lunenburg County – Cohab (LVA)

Lynchburg – Register of colored population of 1865 (LVA)

Montgomery County – Register of colored population, 1865
(NARA); Cohab (LVA)

Nelson County – Marr (NARA)

New Kent County – 1866 list of male freed negroes and
former owners (LVA)

Prince Edward County – Child, Cohab (LVA)

Princess Anne County – Register of colored population,
1865 (NARA)

Rappahannock County – Marr (at CH, LVA has film)

Roanoke County – Child, Cohab (LVA)

Rockbridge County – Marr (NARA)

Smyth – Cohab (LVA)

Surry County – Marr (at CH, LVA has film)

Warren County – Cohab (LVA)

Washington County – Cohab (LVA)

Wythe County – Child, Cohab (LVA)

York County – Register of colored population (NARA and
film at Yorktown Library)

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