



LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

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Telling the African American Story: It's More Than Just a Month at the Library of Virginia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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(Richmond, Virginia) – In 1926, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, pioneering author, historian, and Buckingham County native, founded “Negro History Week,” which eventually evolved into the Black History Month that we celebrate each February. The Library of Virginia offers a range of resources and programs that demonstrate our commitment to African American history and culture—not just during February, but throughout the entire year and into the future.

VIRGINIA UNTOLD: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN NARRATIVE

One of our newest and most exciting projects is a partnership with the Virginia Museum of History and Culture (VMHC) to provide greater access to a database of names of free people of color and enslaved Virginians in the period before 1865. In early January of 2019, the unique content of the VMHC’s *Unknown No Longer* database (more than 500 documents and nearly 12,000 names) was merged with the Library of Virginia’s *Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative* database (more than 10,000 records), providing researchers with unprecedented access to an expanded collection of resources on the history of enslaved African Americans in Virginia. We thank our friends at the VMHC, especially president and CEO Jamie O. Bosket, for bringing this partnership to fruition.

This collaboration allows researchers to access one site to discover stories such as that of Peter Spain, a man enslaved by Robert Spain of Dinwiddie County. After Robert emancipated Peter, the General Assembly of Virginia passed an act in 1811 permitting Peter and other former enslaved individuals to remain in the commonwealth. Later, Peter Spain filed his “Free Negro” certificate with county authorities—a document found in *Virginia Untold*. Now, this document is linked to his 1840 will and other records found in *Unknown No Longer*. Spain left property to relatives and emancipated an unnamed woman whom he clearly considered his wife. Spain strikes through the words “wife,” because, according to Virginia law, enslaved people could not legally marry one another or free persons of color. Thanks to the database merge, we have a fuller picture of Peter Spain’s family and their struggles under the slave laws of Virginia. To view the riches in the combined database, go to virginiamemory.com/collections/aan.

Both *Unknown No Longer* and *Virginia Untold* are sponsored in part by a generous grant from Dominion Energy. *Virginia Untold* also receives federal funding through the Library Services and Technology Act administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

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GENEALOGY WORKSHOPS

Discovering and providing access to hard-to-find records is a key component of our commitment to serving the research community. To assist both new and experienced researchers, we offer an ongoing series of workshops on finding your family roots in the Library's collections (lva.virginia.gov/public/genealogy_workshops). Attendees learn how to find sources and apply research methodology to their family history. Our workshop entitled **African American Research at the Library of Virginia: Genealogy to 1870** will be held twice this year, including a presentation at the American Revolution Museum in Yorktown.

ONLINE EXHIBITIONS & RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

While the Library continues to plan and launch innovative ways to document our state's rich African American history and culture, we also provide access to past projects. Many of our exhibitions are archived on our website for researchers (viriniamemory.com/exhibitions), including ***To Be Sold: Virginia and the American Slave Trade***, an exploration of Richmond's infamous but important role in America's domestic slave trade, and ***Remaking Virginia: Transformation through Emancipation***, the story of emancipation in Virginia. All of our projects contribute to the resources on our education portal, ***Document Bank of Virginia*** (edu.lva.virginia.gov/dbva), where teachers and students can find fascinating documents on the African American experience for projects and classroom use.

CELEBRATIONS

The Library does not ignore Black History Month, however. Our longest running African American program, **Strong Men & Women in Virginia History**, takes place each February, when the Library partners with Dominion Energy to honor remarkable Virginians who have made a difference in the commonwealth and beyond in a variety of fields. You can read the inspiring biographies of this year's honorees on the Library's new **Virginia Changemakers** website (edu.lva.virginia.gov/changemakers/strong-mw-2019). The annual program includes an awards ceremony, a student essay contest, a poster sent to every public school in Virginia, an exhibition displayed at the Library in February, and a traveling version of the exhibition. Visit our events calendar (lva.virginia.gov/news/calendar) to find out when the exhibition might be at a location near you.

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