



LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

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Remaking Virginia: Transformation through Emancipation to Open July 6 at the Library of Virginia ~Exhibition Runs Through March 26, 2016~

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For Immediate Release

(Richmond, Va.)--Even as the Civil War was still being fought, the status of almost half a million African Americans in Virginia began to change. No longer were they someone else's property—they were free. African Americans anticipated the promise of change from their former status as slaves: the promises of education, political participation, and full citizenship. Yet, in their struggle to achieve these goals, freedmen and freedwomen faced the hostility of their former masters and the society that had long benefitted from their labor. The Library of Virginia's upcoming exhibition *Remaking Virginia: Transformation through Emancipation* offers a look at the changing world African American and white Virginians faced during Reconstruction. The exhibition, which opens July 6 and runs through March 26, 2016, shows that Reconstruction was a time when many promises were made but few were kept.

Remaking Virginia: Transformation through Emancipation explores how the end of slavery and emancipation affected every Virginian, forcing people to renegotiate and transform their relationships. Using personal stories from the collections at the Library of Virginia, the exhibition focuses on how African Americans made the change from property to citizens and examines the societal transformation experienced by all Virginians through topics including labor, church, education, families, political rights, military service, and violence. *Remaking Virginia* highlights how the end of slavery was radical and affected everyone. The exhibition also tackles the important question of who controlled the public memory in the decades after the Civil War.

The *Remaking Virginia* exhibition challenges visitors to rethink and reassess what they know, or think they know, about this critical period in American history. The exhibition covers issues such as the meaning of freedom for African Americans and white Virginians, the central importance of suffrage and access to education for African Americans' pursuit of equality, and the competing agendas of individuals, as well as state and federal government policies to reshape Virginia's society. *Remaking Virginia: Transformation through Emancipation* further delves into difficult subjects, such as how the national government's compromises and eventual capitulation failed to secure a permanent transition to equality and freedom for the newly freed; how the postwar economy limited freed people's ability to achieve freedom and equality as promised in the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution; and, ultimately, how the chaos

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and tensions that existed in postwar Virginia foreshadowed the emergence of the Jim Crow era, which codified racial segregation, and the 1902 Virginia Constitution, which denied African American men the right to vote. Not until the civil rights movement of the mid-twentieth century were many of the rights and privileges that emancipation had promised finally realized.

Items on display include:

- The Fifteenth Amendment. Celebrated May 19th 1870. 1870. James C. Beard, artist. Thomas Kelly, published. Colored lithograph.
- Ballot Box from King George County. 1866. Painted cardboard. King George County (Va.) Court Records, 1800–1909.
- Letter from Ellen O’Keeffe to Provost Marshal General, Richmond, May 10, 1865, requesting permission to keep open her store, located at the corner of 21st and Franklin Streets.
- “List of male free negroes over the age of 16 years in the County of New Kent on 12th day of Jany 1866.” Perhaps the first census of African American men in New Kent County.
- Marriage license between Samuel Gravely and Delear Martin, both of Henry County. April 8, 1866. After emancipation, African American marriages were recognized legally.
- Letter from Stephen Fleming, New Orleans, to Governor Francis H. Pierpont, Richmond, May 21, 1865, requesting the governor’s help in locating family members. Fleming had been sold south about 1850 and wanted to locate any family members who remained in Virginia.
- Contract between Jordan Burnett, Fannie Burnett, Betsy Burnett, Julia Burnett, Dick Burnett, and Ellen Burnett and William D. Floyd, Lunenburg County, November 28, 1865. The Burnetts contracted to work as laborers for Floyd for one year and receive one-fourth of all corns, oats, tobacco, and cotton grown during 1866.
- Proposed 14th Amendment (text) sent to governors from U.S. Department of State, June 16, 1866.
- “List of Members, Officers, and Employees of the State Constitutional Convention of Va.” 1867–1868. Includes first African Americans elected in Virginia

Complementing the exhibition will be resources for teachers and students, a website, a traveling exhibition, and a series of public programs. For more information on events related to the exhibition, please see www.lva.virginia.gov. The exhibition is free and open to the public Monday through Saturday, 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM, excluding state holidays.

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About the Library of Virginia

The Library of Virginia (www.lva.virginia.gov), located in historic downtown Richmond, holds the world's most extensive collection of material about the Old Dominion and has been a steward of the common-

wealth's documentary and printed heritage since 1823. The story of Virginia and Virginians has been told in many ways since 1607. At the Library of Virginia it is told through more than 119 million manuscripts and nearly 2.5 million books, serials, bound periodicals, microfilm reels, newspapers, and state and federal documents, each an individual tile in the vast and colorful mosaic of Virginia's experience.

Editor's Advisory: Images available upon request.

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