



LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

Sandra Gioia Treadway
Librarian of Virginia

Library of Virginia Commemorates Juneteenth with *Freedom on Paper*

An exhibition of “Free Negro Registers” from the Virginia Untold Project will be on display June 13–27, 2022, at the Library

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RICHMOND, VIRGINIA – In celebration of Juneteenth, the holiday that commemorates the ending of slavery in the United States, visitors to the Library of Virginia will have the rare opportunity to view a selection of “Free Negro Registers” displayed in the lobby. These records demonstrate Virginia's efforts to control and regulate its growing free Black population from the late 18th century to the Civil War. The registers provide the names, ages, and physical descriptions of free Black and multiracial individuals who were required to register in their Virginia locality. The documents are part of the Library’s Local Government Records Collection, which holds 39 volumes of “Free Negro Registers” from 17 Virginia localities.

To regulate the movements of free people of color, the Virginia General Assembly in 1793 required that “free Negroes or mulattoes . . . be registered and numbered in a book to be kept by the town clerk, which shall specify age, name, color, status and by whom, and in what court emancipated.” Once their status was recorded in the clerk’s register, free individuals received a loose certificate containing largely the same identifying information, which they were required to carry with them at all times and renew every three years.

“The register books demonstrate the unending challenges to being a free person of color in antebellum Virginia,” said Lydia Neuroth, project manager for the Library’s Virginia Untold digital collection. “While declared ‘free’ on paper, their lives were closely surveilled by white officials restricting their mobility, autonomy, and humanity. I hope visitors will recognize the importance of learning from these historic documents. We must share these stories.”

EXHIBITION

Freedom on Paper

An Exhibition of “Free Negro Registers” from the Virginia Untold Project

June 13–27, 2022 | Free

Location: Pre-function Hall, Library of Virginia, 800 East Broad Street, Richmond 23219

The Library’s first floor is open Monday–Saturday, 9:00 AM–5:00 PM, but will be closed Saturday–Monday, June 18–20, 2022, for the Juneteenth Holiday.

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On **Friday, June 17, 11:00 AM–2:00 PM**, the public is invited to meet with Lydia Neuroth, project manager for Virginia Untold, to ask questions about the records and learn about the Library's efforts to digitize, preserve, and make them more accessible. The Virginia Untold project provides digital access to collections from Virginia localities relating to enslaved and free Black individuals prior to 1866. For more information, go to lva-virginia.libcal.com/event/9202269 or contact Neuroth at lydia.neuroth@lva.virginia.gov or 804.692.3772.

Juneteenth in Virginia

Established as an official Virginia state holiday in June 2020, Juneteenth refers to June 19, the date in 1865 when the Union Army arrived in Galveston, Texas, and announced that the Civil War was over and that enslaved persons were free under the Emancipation Proclamation. Although the proclamation had become official more than two years earlier on January 1, 1863, freedmen in Texas adopted June 19 as the date they celebrated freedom from slavery. Colloquially known as Juneteenth, celebrations continued into the 20th century, and in 1980 the Texas state legislature established June 19 as a state holiday. In the years following the Civil War, Emancipation Day celebrations in Richmond often took place on April 3, the date Union forces entered the city.

Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative

The Virginia Untold project provides digital access to records in the Library of Virginia's collections that document some of the lived experiences of enslaved and free Black people. These materials include local court records, state records, personal papers, business records, newspapers, maps, photographs, books, journals, and more, dating back to the 17th century. Collectively, the experiences found in Virginia Untold form a 400-year-old narrative of a people that has been only partially told, if not altogether ignored. This project recognizes the value of these records in enabling all Virginians to explore their individual and collective pasts. Learn more at www.vamem.com/vauntold.

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About the Library of Virginia

The Library of Virginia is one of the oldest agencies of Virginia government, founded in 1823 to preserve and provide access to the state's incomparable printed and manuscript holdings. Its collection, which has grown steadily through the years, is the most comprehensive resource in the world for the study of Virginia history, culture, and government with over 130 million items in the collections. The Library also engages the public through in-person and virtual events, education programs, and online resources that reach nearly 4 million individuals each year throughout the commonwealth and beyond. Visit www.lva.virginia.gov.

May 18, 2022