

DEATH RECORDS

Related to Black and African American History

Researching the history and genealogy of people of Black descent in America, particularly in Virginia, requires a specialized approach. This guide is meant to be supplemental to the resources highlighted in the 2026 Virginia Archives Month Zine: "Remember Me: Death and Memorial in the Archives." The list below includes resources that should be considered when researching Black Virginians in the 19th century.

RECORDS FROM ENSLAVEMENT

African American historical and genealogical research is shaped by the institution of slavery in which enslaved people were legally recorded as property before the Civil War. For enslavers, a death meant a direct financial loss, which could result in some form of historical documentation. However, there were no legal requirements for enslavers to record the deaths of enslaved people or even report such information to government officials. Instead, researchers can find evidence of these losses in business and personal records such as:

- **Business, Church or Plantation Account Books**
- **Ship Manifests or Ship Logs**
- **Family Bibles**
- **Estate Inventories or Fiduciary Records**

Additionally, researchers might try searching records from the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts, which include **public claims** that enslavers filed to obtain payment when the state sentenced their enslaved person(s) to execution.



RECORDS FROM POST-EMANCIPATION

In the post-Civil War era, African Americans built upon existing and established new communities centered around businesses such as Black-owned funeral homes and Black-owned newspapers. These institutions became the primary keepers of community history, making **funeral programs** and **obituaries** in Black newspapers important resources for researching death.

In March 1865, Congress established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands to aid formerly enslaved individuals' transition to freedom and citizenship. This "Freedmen's Bureau" also collected information on formerly enslaved people, generating documentation such as **death registers** and **burial records**.



Personal Record of Deaths.					9
	Names.	Age.	Yrs. Mos. Days	Remarks.	
1863	Dec. 28. John W. Lee	30		In Hospital, Cor. Wash. & Wolfe	
"	" Unknown			" " They funeral of these	
				two attended by B. Brown & T. Washington	
1864	Jan. 3. Lucy Loggans	5.			
"	4. James Buckner	4.		In Princess St. near the Jail	
"	6. Sylvia Burrell	9		At Grantville, opposite new Church.	
"	7. Josias Nelson	16		Died of injury while skating.	
"	12. Henrietta Burrell	6		At Grantville, opposite new church.	
"	13. Loyd Jordan Henry	4	7		
"	17. Charles Johnson	70		Cor. Wash. & Columbia St.	
"	20. Sarah Elizabeth Hall	6	6	On Fair St.	
"	" Ben Johnson	39		Hosp. Cor. Wash. & Wolfe	
"	21. George	16		Funeral att. by Owen, Warren & Washington	
"	" Frank Shaw	9	6	Cattle yard in New Town	
"	27. Joseph Harrison	40		In alley on 1st St. Hickman	
"	" Sina Ann Harrison	27		Bel. King & Cameron and wife	
"	28. Infant of Maria		3	Funeral att. by E. Owen	
"	28. Phil Holman	25		Buried Slave Pen	
"	29. Lizette Weir	20		on St. Anns side of RR. Died suddenly of	
				hemorrhage of lungs. Funeral att. by E. Owen	
Feb.	1. Mina Addison	14		Died of Consumption	
"	2. Simon Bezen	26		on Wash. St. nearly opposite M.E. Ch.	
"	3. Eliza Thompson	60		on Cameron & Henry	
"	" Sarah	17		Slave Pen.	
"	5. Bolsey Parry	31		Bro. Lehard preached at Barracks.	
"	" Thomas Berry, Jr.	3		Barracks.	
"	" Edward Dolman	11		Water Street	
"	" Infant of Lawson	1	3	Newtown, near Cattle Yard	
"	8. Susan Washington	21		Buried Slave Pen	
"	9. Spencer Carter	3	6	New Cattle Yard	
"	14. Mary Ellen Brown	23		Died near Soldiers Post	
"	15. Ada Butler	1		Funeral by E. Owen.	
"	16. Mary Peters	1	2	Hosp. Cor. Wash. & Wolfe	
"	23. Abraham Lincoln Piper	3		Funeral by Bro. Washington	
"	24. John Weedon	6		Hospital	
"	" Joe Level	65		Funeral by Owen & Washington	
"	26. Daniel Turner	75		Bel. Cameron & King	
"	27. Eliza Shelton	6		Funeral by Bro. Washington	
"	28. Jenny Maggs	3		Newtown	
"	" Fanny Coleman	47		Funeral by Island Warren	
				Grantville.	