

Guide to  
African American Manuscripts  
in the collection of the  
Virginia Historical Society

Compiled by F. Holly Hodges  
Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged by  
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## Preface to the Second Edition

African American people have played a vital role in the history of Virginia. They have worked, fought, and participated in the commonwealth's growth; they have shared its successes and suffered its failures. And yet slavery, caste, and segregation also have forced them to live apart and to create for themselves a separate history. To understand the history of African Americans in Virginia, therefore, one must recognize that they have been both a part of and apart from the developments affecting the majority white population. African American history has been governed by interconnected but separate themes and given meaning by related but separate institutions.

No better examples of this relationship can be found than those that survive in the vast manuscript collections of the Virginia Historical Society. Throughout much of its history, the Society collected manuscripts with the intent of illuminating the lives of the leading families of the commonwealth. As these collections were processed, they were cataloged and described in a way that provided remarkable detail about white, mainly elite Virginians and their culture. Yet lying just beneath the surface was a wealth of information about African Americans. By looking at these collections in a different way, our staff realized that they could provide new perspectives into Virginia's past and give us a necessary and enriching addition to that history.

In 1995, through a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Historical Society published the first edition of our Guide to African-American Manuscripts in the Collection of the Virginia Historical Society. The volume found an immediate and appreciative audience among scholars, students, and family researchers. Users examining the guide recognized the depth and breadth of information, long hidden and obscure, that was now being made available. As we had hoped, the guide stimulated much new, superlative research into the African American experience in Virginia.

Over the intervening years, the Historical Society's staff have uncovered even more African American materials in our holdings. Through the re-examinations of collections in our holdings required by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Automation Project, combined with an exciting influx of collections new to the Society's Manuscripts Division, we realized that a new and greatly revised edition of the now out-of-print original guide was warranted. Assistant Director for Development and Public Relations Pamela R. Seay spearheaded the effort to fund a new edition, and again, grant monies from the National Endowment for the Humanities have proven crucial to enabling the compilation and publication. Additional support for publication was provided by a generous grant from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy as part of its African-American Heritage Program.

Building on the original efforts of compiler Frances Holly Hodges and the sound counsel of our two previous consultants—Susan A. Riggs of the Special Collections Department at Swem Library of the College of William and Mary and Ervin L. Jordan, Jr., of the Special Collections Department of the University of Virginia Library—Outreach Educator Harold M. Marsh, Jr., spent the summer of 2000 compiling a new set of entries for the guide. Assistant Director for Manuscripts and Archives E. Lee Shepard again served as project director. He revised the existing entries from the first edition, edited and compiled additional new entries, and prepared a new index to the volume. Johnnie S.

Taggart of the Manuscripts Division updated the list of African American Family Records found in the appendix to this volume. Assistant Director for Library Services Frances S. Pollard and Assistant Director for Museum Services James C. Kelly contributed to the Introduction. Ann C. de Witt of the Publications Department performed important service by locating and preparing illustrations, and by formatting the volume for publication. As always, Assistant Director for Publications and Scholarship Nelson D. Lankford carefully copyedited the full text.

Shortly after its publication, the first edition of the *Guide to African-American Manuscripts* in the Collection of the Virginia Historical Society garnered praise from the scholarly community and earned a first place finding aids award from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference. The real test of its success, however, has been its usefulness. And to that we have had testimony from innumerable users. We hope that this new edition of the guide, increased in size by 46 percent from the original, will continue to stimulate research and to bring users to some of the incredibly rich historical resources housed within the walls of this institution.

Charles F. Bryan, Jr.  
Director and CEO

## Introduction

As Great Britain's largest and wealthiest North American colony, and later as the state with the largest slave and free black population before the Civil War, Virginia long occupied center stage in America's turbulent history of bondage, freedom, and the quest for racial equality. For four centuries the lives and careers of African Americans in the Old Dominion have figured intimately in the shaping of state, regional, and national history. The full assessment and acknowledgment of that participation, however, have only recently begun to take place. Increased accessibility to various records of African American life that survive in archival repositories has proven essential in fostering this modern historical reevaluation.

The Virginia Historical Society began collecting manuscript records of the commonwealth's past at the institution's founding in 1831. Over the years, a major collection of documentary materials has been compiled, the great bulk of which is concentrated on the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The vast majority of the material acquired focuses on the lives and careers of Virginia's gentry families—especially the male principals of those families—with a collateral focus on businesses, institutions, and organizations in the Old Dominion. Within these records, however, much evidence of the lives and contributions of other groups of persons, including women, African Americans, and American Indians, may be found.

Not surprisingly, because of the nature of its past collecting policies, the Society's holdings of African American materials consist largely of the records of slaves and slavery in the Old Dominion. Other materials concern the African colonization movement, freedmen and women in the immediate post-Civil War era, black educators in the early and middle twentieth century, and desegregation in modern Virginia. Reference to the index to this volume will reveal the broad range and scope of materials that touch on many aspects of African American life in Virginia and in the United States over the past four centuries.

Although the Society's manuscripts catalogers recognized the importance of materials generated by or about groups of "others," the high priority placed by scholars and other researchers in past decades on political, military, and economic topics influenced the scope of identification and description in the cataloging process. Entries for "women" and "slavery" and "freedmen," for example, appeared with some regularity in the old card catalog, but emphasis (and consequently descriptive detail) was more consistently applied to traditional areas of subject interest. As the collection and the card catalog grew, significant materials of African American or gender interest became lost in a virtual sea of index cards, all with the same heading, that told researchers very little if anything about the specific nature of the materials they might find on those subjects. Any researcher entering the Society's reading room with an interest in the history of slavery or some specific subfield within that study area, for instance, would by the 1990s face the daunting task of working through thousands of catalog entries in the hope of finding perhaps a half dozen items that focused squarely on the issue in which he or she was interested.

The late Waverly K. Winfree (1933–1993), long the Society's curator of manuscripts, was the first among our staff to suggest a project to increase access to the rich body of African American materials he knew to be present within the Society's manuscript holdings. As a plan evolved, the

Society successfully approached the National Endowment for the Humanities for funding of what was entitled the “African-American Manuscripts Access Project.” NEH funding allowed the Society’s project staff to accomplish two major goals: creating MARC-formatted automated cataloging records for 250 collections in the Society’s manuscript holdings for inclusion in the OCLC database and the Society’s own online catalog, along with compiling the first edition of our *Guide to African-American Manuscripts* in the Collection of the Virginia Historical Society. The guide, published in 1995, provided enhanced access to specific materials by and about African Americans through narrative descriptions of the papers and indications of the exact physical locations within collections of such records. It likewise provided ready evidence of the great wealth of material and information on the lives and careers of African Americans in the commonwealth that the Society possesses and wishes to make available to an international audience of researchers.

With the inauguration of the Society’s collections management and online catalog automation project, some two years after the appearance of the guide, Manuscripts Division staff members began to locate even more African American materials in our existing holdings. Added to that was the tremendous, steady flow of new collections into the Society, some of them donated as a direct result of the emphasis the guide evinced of our commitment to preserving and telling African American history. By 2000, with the original guide out of print and a host of potential new entries crying for attention, the Society’s staff determined upon preparing a new and greatly revised edition of the guide. This resulting volume, which is increased by 46 percent over the previous edition, provides access to an even more diverse and significant set of records available for research into African American life in Virginia and the nation.

Manuscripts form only one portion of the Society’s study collections. The library also holds a comprehensive collection of published material documenting Virginia’s history and culture. Researchers from around the country come to examine books, pamphlets, periodicals, and broadsides that span all periods of Virginia’s past. The complex history of African Americans, however, has often been omitted from traditional texts. The library has an extensive collection of published state and local histories, directories, genealogies, and other studies that only occasionally include the contributions of African Americans. These sources may include information on slave-owning families and plantations. To this store has been added the small but rapidly developing collection of more recent publications pertaining to black family life. This would include published record sources such as registers of free Negroes, church histories, and special community and family studies. Standard reference works are supplemented by more specialized works relating to African Americans, such as works documenting black soldiers, fugitive slaves, and landmarks associated with black history and achievement. In addition, scholars in the field of African American studies have produced numerous books and journal articles examining various aspects of the black experience in the United States, ranging from the transatlantic slave trade to black women reformers.

The Society receives more than 300 periodicals, many of them with a genealogical or local history emphasis. Specific references in these journals to people, places, and events in Virginia are indexed by the staff and added to the online catalog. This additional indexing can lead a researcher to such diverse topics as slave women in King William Parish, early black schools in Cumberland County, or the Louisa County heritage of Langston Hughes. The detailed cataloging can likewise assist researchers in locating information on prominent Virginians, including Maggie Walker, Booker T. Washington, John Mercer Langston, Carter G. Woodson, and Arthur Ashe. The library also

collects information on African American authors, businesses, and educational and charitable organizations. Certain types of collections, such as broadsides and sheet music, have special finding aids to identify materials pertaining to African Americans.

The Society's museum collections contain a growing number of artifacts created by or concerning African Americans. Several paintings feature African Americans, including John W. Hill's 1847 landscape panorama of Richmond; *Slave Hunt in the Dismal Swamp* by Thomas Moran, 1864; *A Negro Funeral in Virginia* by A. B. Frost, engraved and published in *Harper's Weekly* in 1880; *The Scarecrow* by Allen C. Redwood, c. 1870s; two wash drawings by William L. Sheppard of chasing and catching a rabbit; an oil of *Slave Auction Virginia* done by English artist Lefevre Cranstone in 1860, and a watercolor by him, *Negro Shanty, Virginia*, also done at that time. Three pencil sketches of African Americans by David Hunter Strother ("Porte Crayon") date from the 1850s. The collection also contains many engravings from late nineteenth century publications, such as *Harper's Weekly* and *Leslie's Illustrated Magazine*.

The Society owns two plaster busts of Maggie Walker by P. Beneduce, executed in 1934, as well as a marble bust of John Young Mason, the only extant work of the expatriate African American sculptor Eugene Warburg of New Orleans, done in Paris in 1855. A cigarstore figure c. 1870 is dressed as an Indian but has strong African American features. The Society also owns the full-size plaster model for the statue of Arthur Ashe erected on Richmond's Monument Avenue in 1996.

The museum department maintains extensive files of photographic prints, organized alphabetically by subject, and these include many individual, family, and institutional group portraits of African Americans. Portraits of African Americans are frequently found among the Foster Studio Collection of glass plate negatives, which is indexed by name. The museum also has a file of miscellaneous photographs of African Americans engaged in various occupations. Among recent photographic accessions are stereograph slides of Hampton Institute in the 1870s and of Booker T. Washington, and cartes-de-visite of "A Colored Church in Petersburg," 1868, and "Virginia Slave Children Rescued by Colored Troops" in 1864. A number of images document the career of entertainer Bill "Bojangles" Robinson.

Among three-dimensional objects are the only surviving Virginia slave whipping post, taken from Portsmouth by a Union soldier; a doormat made by slaves of Robert E. Lee at Arlington; a rag doll c. 1810 dressed as a black man; a banjo from an African American family in Smyth County; a medal awarded by the Virginia State Agricultural Society for a carpet made by slaves to the design of their mistress; and a pewter pass for a slave woman near Warrenton, c. 1830.

The Society's ephemera collections, organized by type of material in more than one hundred boxes, include such items as a program for Booker T. Washington's speech in Richmond in 1915; a program from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference Mass Meeting in Petersburg in March 1962, autographed by Martin Luther King, Jr., and other civil rights leaders; programs for performances of the Tuskegee and Fisk Jubilee Singers; a publisher's circular for *Mongrel Virginians* (a polemic about miscegenation); funeral parlor and church fans with African American themes; a poster for "Negro History Week" in 1958; several games documenting rising black consciousness in the 1960s; and an original cartoon by Joe Cannaday for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* concerning Arthur Ashe's death. A large collection of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century advertisements, especially for tobacco, feature African Americans, usually portrayed stereotypically.

## How to Use this Guide

The majority of the entries in this guide cover major manuscript collections (that is, numbering fifty items or more). In many instances, entries begin with a very brief summary of the overall collection in order both to provide context and to suggest to researchers potentially useful groups of papers into which they might venture in the hope of discovering additional, related materials. Each entry heading contains the collection or item name, date range, item (or page) count, and the collection or item call number. In some instances, reference is made to the availability of microfilm, which generally means that the filmed version of the collection may be leased through interlibrary loan. In such instances, the researcher should contact the Society's reference department for additional information.

The body of each collection entry includes a narrative description of the African American materials we have found in the papers, with an indication of their physical location in the collection. In most cases, location is indicated by reference to section numbers ("sections" of a collection in the Society's archival parlance equate to series or sub-series levels), and in some rare cases, item numbers (such as item b133). Researchers may be required to go to the Society's online catalog, and even in some cases to the old card catalog, for additional supplementary identification of item numbers in order to request specific material.

Some collections contain so many African American materials that we have only provided samples of items to be found there. Specific entries will reflect such instances. In other cases, supplementary finding aids are available in the Society's reading room that provide much greater detail on specific collections than can be included in this publication. For the most part, we have not included in this guide secondary studies in the Society's holdings (such as theses, dissertations, essays, or speeches) or copies of materials in other repositories unless the content or rarity of the item seemed to dictate otherwise.

If a collection or portion thereof has been published, an attempt has been made to include that information in the guide entry. Virginia is assumed in the identification of all localities unless otherwise indicated. As often as possible, we have tried to identify individual African Americans by name, and those names also appear in the index. Some types of records (such as slave lists, wills, deeds, and deeds of trust) will list persons by name, but those names are not indexed in this guide. The index is primarily keyed to subject, but in some cases those subject references are further subdivided by geographic location. This is especially true for entries such as "Lists of Slaves," "Birth and Death Records," "Slaves—Purchase and Sale," and "Wills." Index references are to collection numbers, not page numbers.

Materials are constantly being identified in and added to the Society's African American manuscripts holdings. The best source for information on those items is now the online catalog, found at [www.vahistorical.org](http://www.vahistorical.org).

E. Lee Shepard  
Project Director