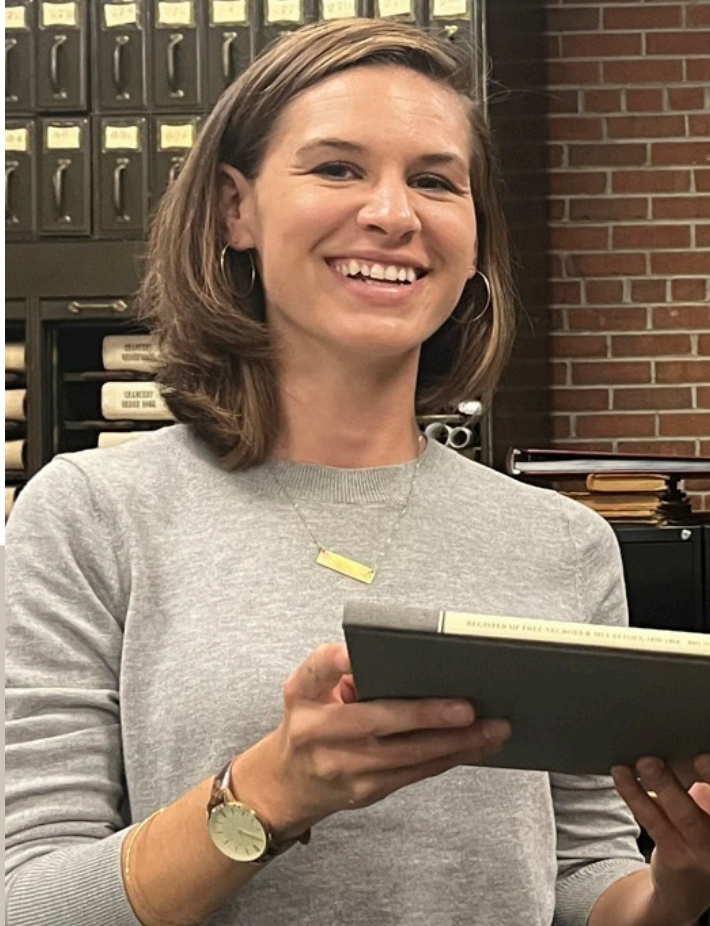


CNI Fall Meeting 2024

# “Each Row is a Person”

*Preserving History and Humanity in Archival Data*



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# Introduction to *Virginia* *Untold*

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Library of Virginia's project to digitize documents related to **enslaved and free Black Virginians** in our collections

Thorough indexing a part of pre-digitization

Indexing spreadsheets made available on the project website, then **Virginia Open Data Portal**

Metadata including names and localities accompany digital images in Rosetta repository

Crowdsourced transcriptions through **Making History** program add another layer of searchability

## Bills of Sales and Deeds of Enslaved Individuals

Followers

0

Organization



Library of Virginia

*There is no description for this organization*

Social

Twitter

Facebook

Linkedin

License

No License Provided

Dataset

Groups

Showcases

Activity Stream

### Bills of Sales and Deeds of Enslaved Individuals

Bills of sale are written agreements which convey title of property, including enslaved people, from seller to buyer. Under the system of chattel slavery, laws permitted enslavers to treat enslaved people as personal possessions in the same manner as livestock, farm equipment, or household items. Enslaved people could be bought or sold without regard to their personal relationships or free will. Bills of sale record the name of the seller, the names of enslaved people being sold and their price, and the name of the buyer. Given that they involved a property transaction, bills of sale were commonly recorded and filed with deeds in the local court. However, there was no official requirement that the transfer of an enslaved person be recorded unless necessary for legal purposes such as a court case or an estate settlement. Enslaved people could also be transferred through a deed of gift, there was no money transaction involved in this case, which distinguishes this record from a bill of sale. Enslavers and their family members often transferred enslaved people between themselves in this manner.

Deeds, likewise are written agreements which convey title of property, such as an enslaved person, from one individual to another. Deeds can involve the voluntary transfer of enslaved people between family members with no financial transaction involved. Deeds record name(s) of the grantor(s), grantee(s), and enslaved people. Deeds were proved and recorded in the local court.

The data in this collection is drawn directly from the historical documents and may contain language that is now deemed offensive.

### Data and Resources



Bills of Sales and Deeds of Enslaved Individuals (CSV)

Preview

DOWNLOAD

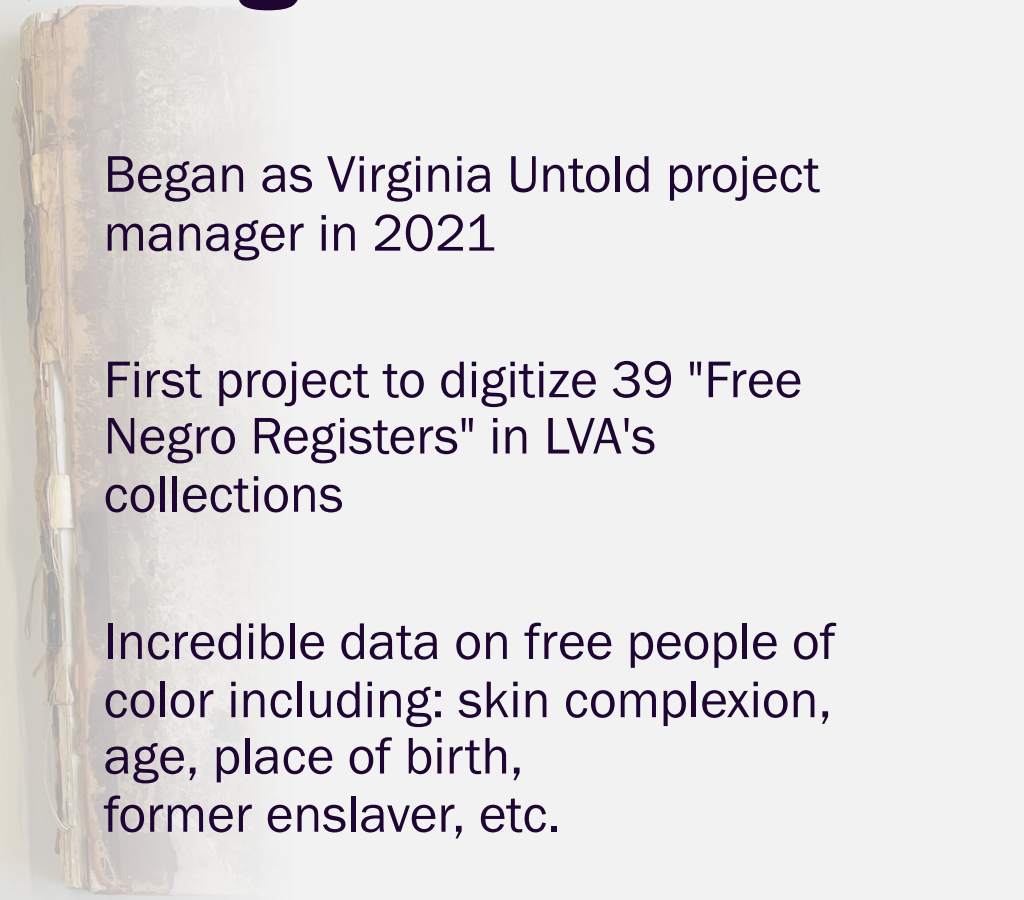
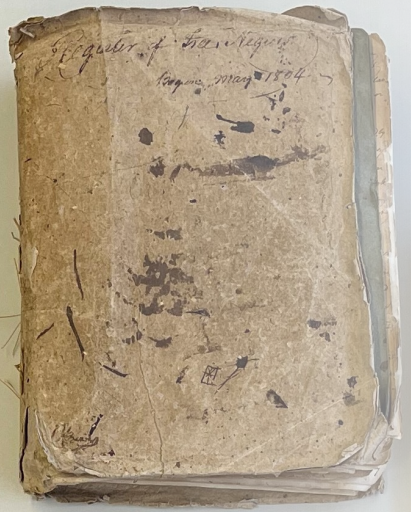
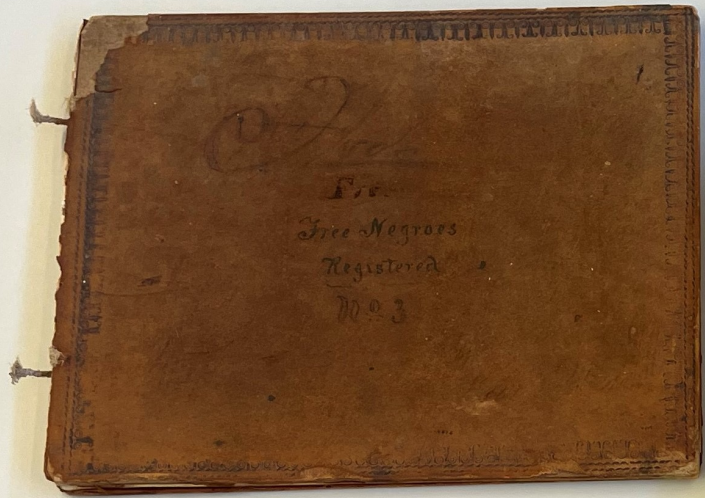
library of virginia...

virginia untold

### Additional Info

Field	Value
<b>Subdivision</b>	Library of Virginia
<b>Contact Name</b>	Jessi Bennett
<b>Contact Email</b>	jessica.bennett@lva.virginia.gov



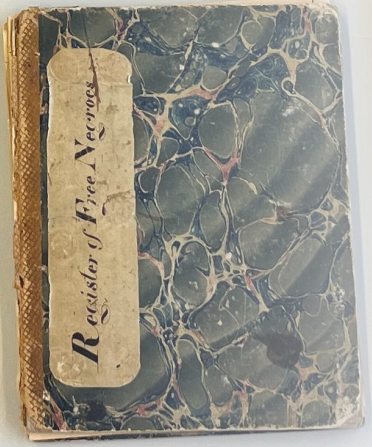
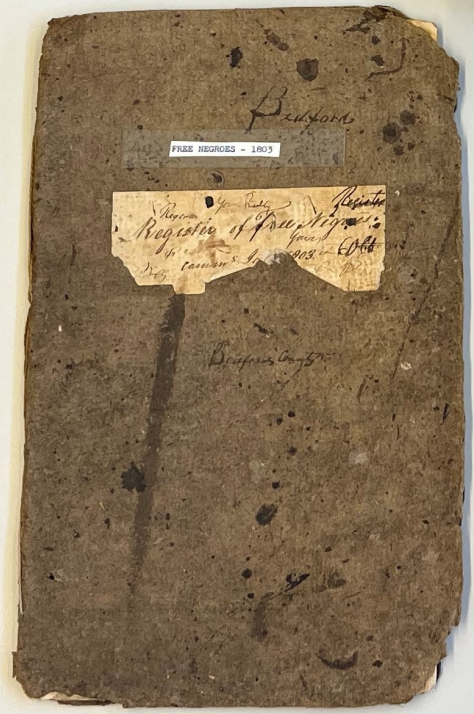
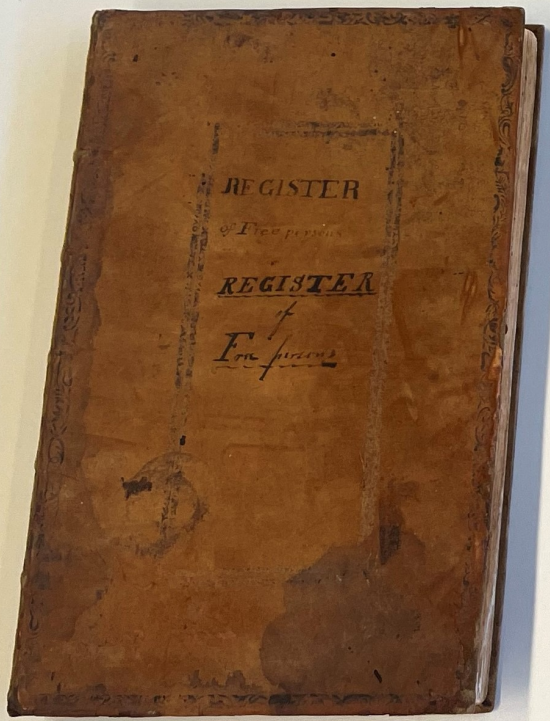


# "Free Negro Registers"

Began as Virginia Untold project manager in 2021

First project to digitize 39 "Free Negro Registers" in LVA's collections

Incredible data on free people of color including: skin complexion, age, place of birth, former enslaver, etc.





1839. Oct. 1	1331	1839 Oct. 1	Martin Banks	33	Black 5 ft. 7 1/4 in.
1837. Mar. 17	1332	1839 Oct. 8	Williamson Smith	23	Brown 5 ft. 10 1/4 in.
1836 Sep. 13 <sup>th</sup>	1333	1839 Oct. 9	Robert Carter	26	Bright mulatto 5 ft. 7 1/2 in.
1837 May 7	1334	1839 Oct. 30	David Jordan	34	Do. 5 ft. 9 in.
1839 Nov. 11	1335	1839 Nov. 11	Martha Anderson	14	yellow 5 ft. 7 1/2 in.
Do.	1336	Do.	John Anderson	12	Do. 5 ft. 1/8 in.
Do.	1337	Do.	Francis Anderson	28	Do. 5 ft. 6 3/4 in.
Do.	1338	Do.	Mancy Anderson	7	Bright } mulatto } 5 ft. 9 in.
Do.	1339	Do.	Joseph Anderson	4	Do. 2 ft. 10 in.
			Do. Thomas Anderson		Do. 2 ft. 4 in.

has a scar on the fore finger of the left hand  
and a natural mark on the left cheek near  
the mouth } born free.

has a scar on the right side of the forehead  
and one under the chin } born free.

two small scars on the out side of the right arm, one near  
the left elbow, one on the upper & inside of the left hand,  
three moles under the left eye & one under the left jaw } Do.

has a scar over the left eye brow } Do.

has a scar on the left temple, } Do.

has two scars on the forehead } Do.

has a small scar on the left wrist } Do.

no apparent mark or scar } Do.

Do. } Do. } Do.

Do. } Do. } Do.

has a mole on the left little finger } Do.

on the left arm } Do.

Do. } Do.

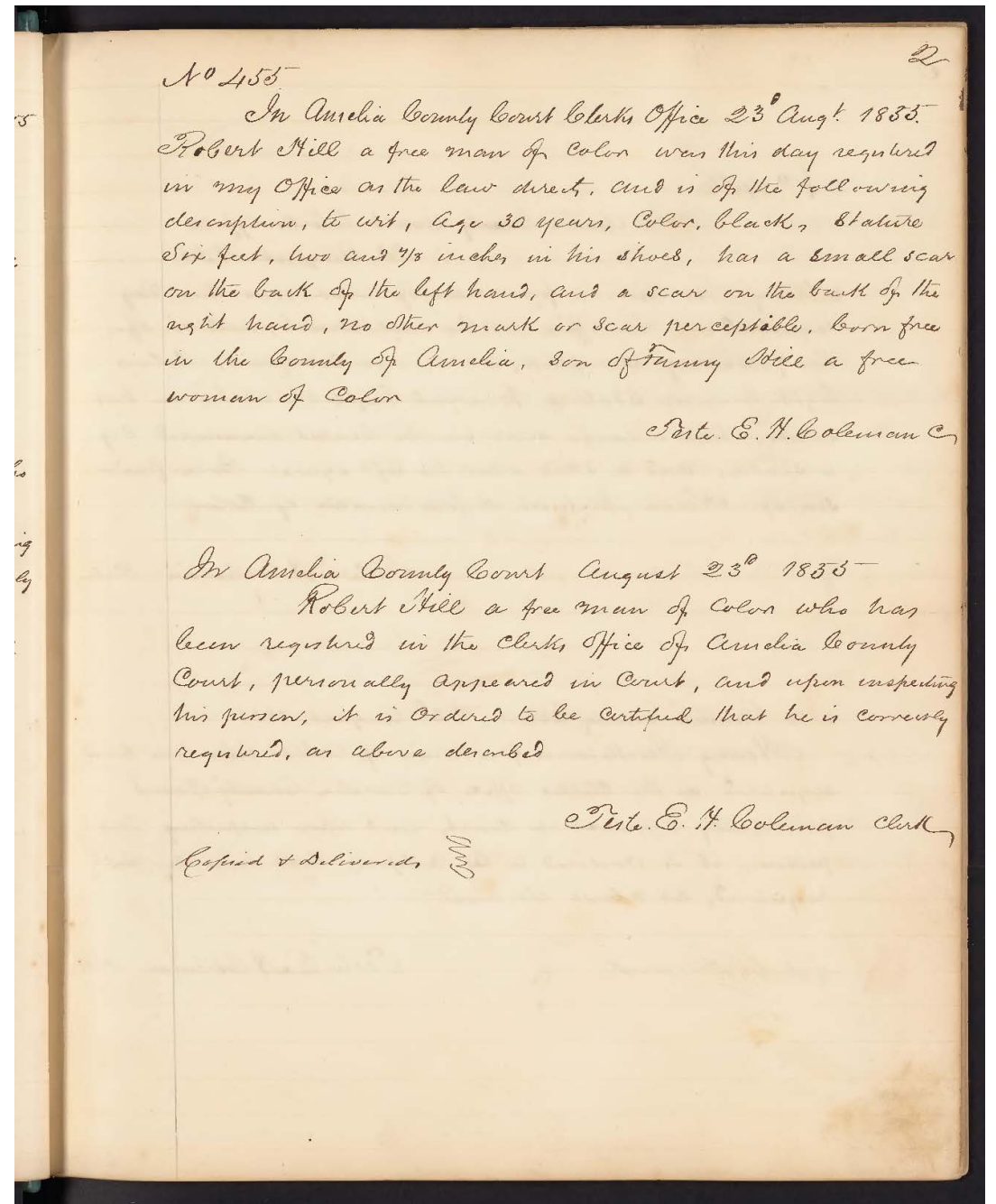
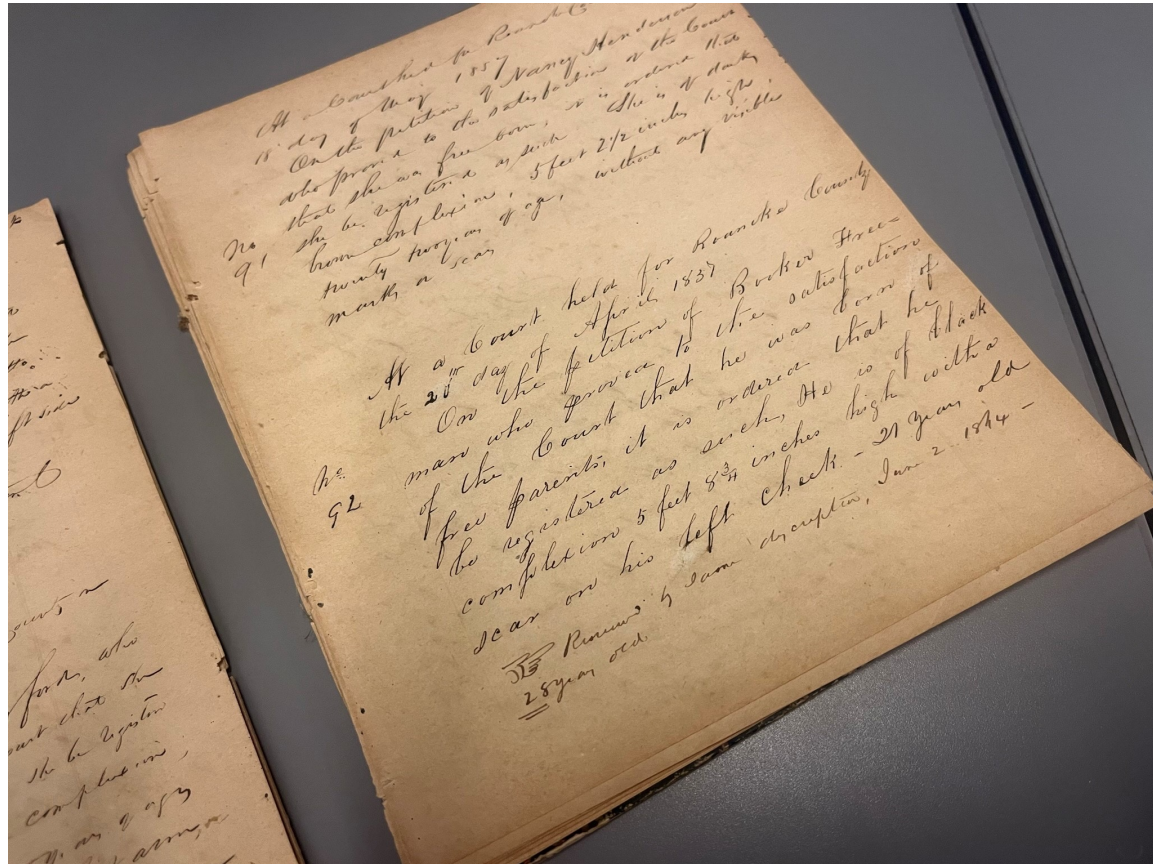
Do. } Do.

Chesterfield County, "Free Negro Register", 1830-1853



Roanoke County,  
"Free Negro Register",  
1838-1865

Amelia County, "Free Negro  
Register", 1835-1855





making

history

LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

Hustings  
The County Court of Petersburg  
of Master James Lewis humbly  
that she is illegally held in  
one Richard Beasley, who is  
of the Town of Petersburg  
is now determined - that  
of free parents, in the  
of the county and state  
about the year 1816 - the  
name was Henry July  
in the City of N. York  
all infants, and

UNDERTAKING  
IN ALL ITS BRANCHES  
—ALL SIZES OF—  
WOOD AND METALIC COFFINS.



CONSTANTLY ON HAND.

All Orders Promptly Filled  
by Day or Night.

Petersburg, Va., July 15<sup>th</sup> 1891  
Mr. Beasley, W. H. Beasley & Co.

BOUGHT

	Age
Mrs. Liza Barlow	72
Mrs. Eliza Hill	74
Mrs. Mary Edwards	72

COTT,

ST.





# FROM THE PAGE

Overview **Transcribe** Versions Help

Fullscreen Layout Mark as blank Preview Save

**Instructions**  
Find the information below in the register. Fill out one row per person. If the information is not given, leave the field blank.

	First Name	Middl Last Name	Alias	Regist Date of registration	Age	Gender	Color	Height	Height	Physical description	Free status	Wh
1	Nancy	Auter		757 1830-07-12	21	♀	brown	5	2	small mole on the right side of the nose	born free/free born	
2	Charles	Auter		758 1830-07-12	19	♂	dark brown	5	6	Two pitts near the outer corner of the right eye	born free/free born	
3	Milley	Logan		759 1830-07-12	39	♀	brown	5	3	a Mole over the right eye brow	born free/free born	
4	Polly	Trent		760 1830-07-12	21	♀	dark brown	5	1.75	a Mole on the front part of the neck	born free/free born	
5	Henrietta	Trent		761 1830-07-12	18	♀	brown	5	0.75	a Small scar on the back of the neck	born free/free born	
6	Hannah	Baker		762 1830-07-12	46	♀	brown	5	4.5	a scar on the left hand, a large one back of the left ear	emancipated	
7	Easter	Moss	Easter Burot	763 1830-07-20	45	♀	Mulatto	5	3.25	a scar on the left arm between the elbow and shoulder	emancipated	
8	Edward	Burot		764 1830-07-20	21	♂	bright Mulatto	5	9.25	a scar on the left elbow	born free/free born	



# Initial Responses to Indexing:

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- Data, if present, might be transformed
- Indexing requires many more judgement calls, which makes volunteers very uncomfortable
  - Additional training and empowering volunteers to make educated guesses

VIRGINIA  
UNTOLD

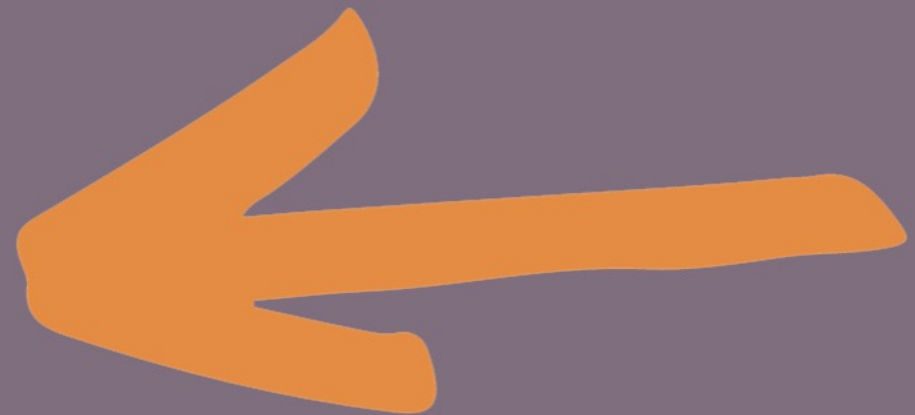
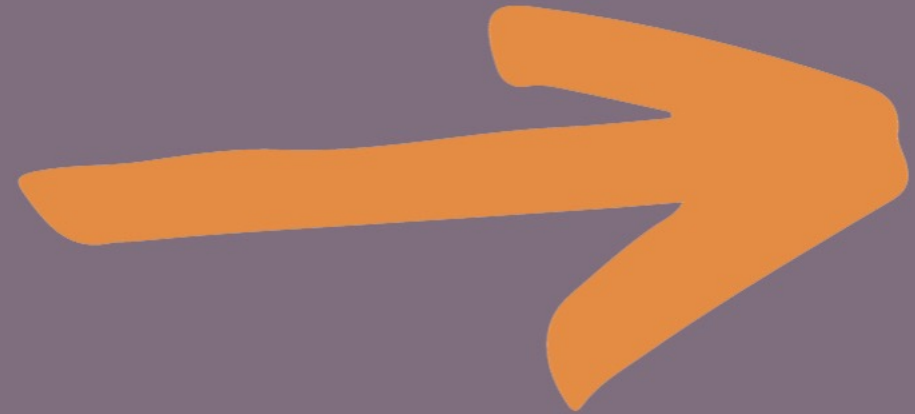
THE AFRICAN  
AMERICAN  
NARRATIVE

## VaUntold Goals:

- Context + Humanization
  - Empathy for People in the Past
  - Specificity of Stories
- 

## Indexing:

- Abstraction
- "Zoomed Out" History
- Stories become Data





# TRANSCRIBE- A-THONS

- Historical context for why these documents exist
- Understanding the different people and perspectives represented – what were their motivations? whose voice is missing?
- Active Q &A



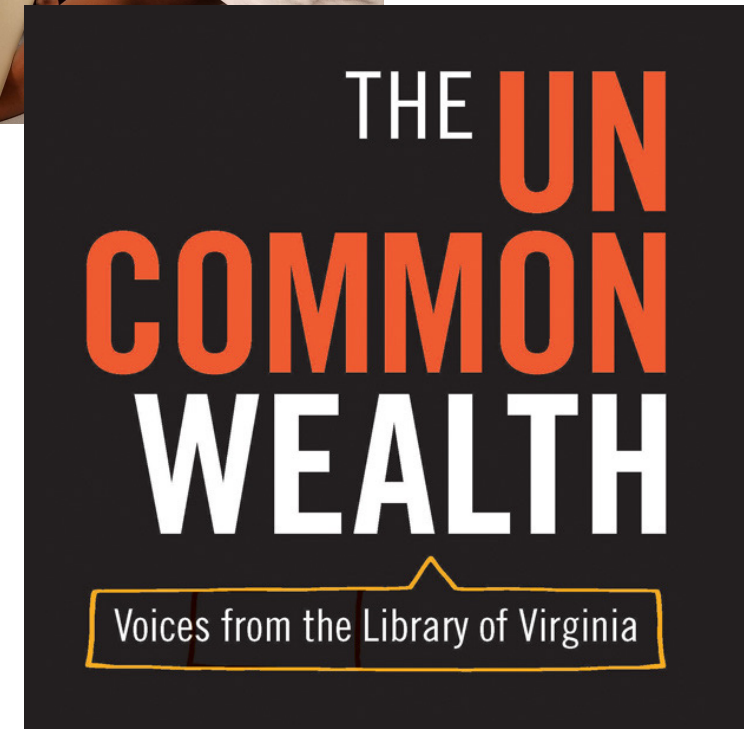
# STORYTELLING

- During transcribe-a-thons
  - Ongoing on the Library's blog - [Uncommonwealth.virginiamemory.com](http://Uncommonwealth.virginiamemory.com)
- 



# DISCUSSION

- Practice "Reading Against the Grain"
- Imagine other research uses and applications
- Give volunteers space to express emotional reactions to the Virginia Untold collection





When registered	No.	When certified	name	age	Color	Stature
1841 May 10	1393	1841 May 10	Polly Logan	15	mulatto	5 feet 1 1/2 inches
Do	1394	Do	Eliza Logan	19	Bright mulatto	5 feet —
Do	1395	Do	Elizabeth Logan	18	Brown	5 feet —
Do	1396	Do	William Logan	17	Brown	5 feet 4 inches
1841 Dec 14	1397	1841 Dec 14	Caroline Logan	3	Common	2 1/2
1841 May	1398	1841 May 10	Petsy Anderson	15	very bright mulatto	5 feet 3 3/4
1840 Dec 14	1399	1840 Dec 14	Judy Ann Bridgewater	2	Black	4 1/2
1841 July 9	1400	1841 July 9	Walter Logan	52	dark brown	5 feet 3 5/8
July 12	1401	July 12	Milly Hill	23	Do	5 feet 7 3/4
1838 June 11	1402	1841 July 30	Charles Booker	44	Do	5 ft. 3 1/2 in
1835 May 11	1403	1841 Aug: 9	Caty Cheatham	45	mulatto	5 feet 2 1/4
1840 Dec 28	1404	1841 Aug 10	Dick Shurt	28	Black	5 feet 4 1/2 in
1838 Oct 9	1405	1841 Aug 16	Francis Smith	34	dark brown	5 feet 7 1/2 in
1825 Oct 14	1406	1841 Aug: 19	Thomas Anderson	42	Mulatto	5 feet 5 inches

# Envisioning Ancestors with AI



natural marks or scars

has no marks or scars

has several small moles about the face

has no marks or scars

has no marks or scars

has tolerably straight hair, a few

has a scar on the left side of the face

has a large scar on the right leg, and the left wrist and ankle

a scar under and over the eye

has a large scar on Right leg

has a small mole near the right eye and the left shoulder & neck

has a Scar on the left Cheek, & one on the forehead

several scars on his forehead, one near the corner of his right eye, & a burn over the right thigh

has a scar over the left eye, & one on the throat & one on the left







# Jane Gentry Johnson

“AI provides a more personal human dimension to a long-lost ancestor. Genealogy is more than just data; it’s telling a story, working towards a concept of a 3-D human being. AI creates that 3-D concept in your mind. It’s a more holistic picture, and a sense of being and belonging.”

– Viola Baskerville, workshop participant

# ONLINE RESOURCES

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Virginia Untold website. It features the '200 LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA 1823 - 2023' logo on the left. Navigation links include 'VIRGINIA UNTOLD SEARCH', 'SEARCH BY RECORD TYPE', 'LVA MAIN CATALOG SEARCH', and 'HOW TO SEARCH VIRGINIA UNTOLD'. A search bar with the placeholder 'Search anything' and an 'ADVANCED SEARCH' link is present. Below the navigation is a large banner with the text 'VIRGINIA UNTOLD THE AFRICAN AMERICAN NARRATIVE' over a background of historical documents. A paragraph of text describes the project's goal to provide digital access to records and encourage conversation. At the bottom, there is a section titled 'Research with Virginia Untold' with a sub-header 'Research with Virginia Untold: Quick Tips' and the text 'We have digitized over 18,000 original documents that are'.

Collection Landing Page

The thumbnail features a dark purple background with the text 'Research with Virginia Untold: Using the Website' in white. The 'VIRGINIA UNTOLD THE AFRICAN AMERICAN NARRATIVE' logo is in the bottom right corner.

YouTube Tutorials

The screenshot shows a LibGuide page for 'Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative'. The breadcrumb trail is 'The Library of Virginia / Research Guides & Indexes / Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative / Search Tips'. A search bar with 'Search this Guide' and a 'Search' button is at the top right. The page title is 'Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative'. Below the title is the text 'Project overview and search strategies for accessing pre-1867 records of enslaved and free Black Virginians'. A vertical navigation menu on the left includes 'Home', 'Record Types', 'Search Tips' (highlighted in orange), 'Search Tips', 'Related Resources', 'Get Involved', and 'Project History'. The main content area is titled 'Search Tips' and contains the sub-header 'How to Choose Search Terms'. The text explains that many records are transcribed and full-text searchable, while others are indexed by name, date, locality, and record type. A bulleted list provides search tips: names include those of enslaved and free Black people as well as enslavers; spelling variations were common; and search terms may include occupations (blacksmith, bricklayer, seamstress, waterman, mate) and historical terms for skin color ('mulatto', 'yellow'); terms.

LibGuide

**FUGITIVE**

**DATA**

**PORTRAITS**

**SELF-EMANCIPATION**

**IN**

**VIRGINIA**

is an archival research project by [Tev'n Powers](#) that incorporates data from the Library of Virginia's manuscript and [digital collections](#) to create an entry point through which we learn about the lived experiences of enslaved Black people and their escapes from enslavement. This work brings together data visualizations and primary source narratives to craft a multidimensional view of the ways enslaved people resisted their oppression, while providing a glimpse into the identities of Virginia's earliest freedom fighters who often become footnotes in or altogether omitted from the historical record.

Fugitive Data Portraits is supported by the [Virginia Humanities Fellowship](#) program and the [Library of Virginia](#).



# Questions to Ponder

- Where does our role (as information professionals) of interpretation or humanization end?
- How can we empower users to engage in this work? What support can we give them, in addition to access?
- What is the value of exercises like Envisioning Ancestors? Can AI be used to humanize records, or is that inherently contradictory?
- What are the strengths or weaknesses of AI in archival work?

# Contact Information

- Lydia Neuroth - Project Manager, Virginia Untold  
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- Sonya Coleman - Digital Engagement Coordinator  
[sonya.coleman@lva.virginia.gov](mailto:sonya.coleman@lva.virginia.gov)

Special Thanks to Jessi Bennett, Kathy Jordan, Greg Crawford, Susan Gray Page, Jessica Burgess, Ed Jordan, Mary Ann Mason, Viola Baskerville, our Making History: Transcribe Volunteers and the Descendants Council of Greater Richmond.

