

## Bedford County Register of Free Negroes, 1803–1820\*

Transcribed by  
**Dorothy A. Boyd-Bragg, Ph.D.\*\***

*On 10 December 1793, the Virginia legislature passed “An Act . . . to restrain the practice of Negroes going at large.” The provisions of the act included the stipulation that “every free negro or mulatto, who resides in, or is employed to labour within the limits of any city, borough or town, shall be registered and numbered in a book to be kept for that purpose by the clerk of the said city, borough or town, which register shall specify his or her age, name, colour and stature, by whom and in what court the said negro or mulatto was emancipated; or that such negro or mulatto was born free. . . .” A copy of the register entry was to be given to each individual who registered. This was necessary as “no free negro or mulatto . . . [was] to go at large or hire himself or herself to labour in any county, without having his or her certificate registered in the clerk’s office of the county wherein he or she resides.”<sup>1</sup>*

*The pages of the Register of Free Negroes and Mulattoes for Bedford County, Virginia, indicate some or all of the following information: age, name, colour, stature, marks or scars, whether born free or emancipated and in what county or jurisdiction. While the format varies with the passing years, it is usually rendered in columns. A blank in the text is indicated by an underscore, e.g., \_\_\_\_\_. Entries*

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\* Bedford County records, Reel 120a., Library of Virginia. Bedford County was created from Albemarle and Lunenburg Counties in 1752. The sixteen numbered pages of the stained, leather-bound register measure approximately 11 inches by 19 inches. The entries require two pages and the second page for each entry is not numbered. The Library of Virginia microfilmed this register for Bedford County, Virginia, in November of 1997: The microfilm indicates that the material was filmed because of the generosity of “The Friends of the Moneta/Smith Mountain Lake Branch Library, In Honor of Ruth Dugan and Marjorie Cooper, Bedford Public Library, November 1997.”

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Shepherd, *The Statutes at Large of Virginia, from October Session 1792 to December Session 1806 Inclusive*, vol. 1 (1835, reprinted New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1970), 238.

*which cannot be deciphered are indicated by a bracket with a question mark inside, e.g., [?]. Letters underlined in the text indicate that the word was misspelled in the original document and that the misspelling has been retained, e.g., “cheak.”*

*There is a second register covering the years 1820–1860. It is available on the same reel of microfilm from the Library of Virginia. The format and the description of the second register are similar to the first. It is, however, considerably longer and will be transcribed as a separate entity.<sup>2</sup>*

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Bedford County Register of Free Negroes Commencing July 1803

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At a Court held for Bedford County the 26<sup>th</sup> Day of July 1803

Godfrey a Black Man – Sixty years of Age – Five feet seven Inches high – No Scar or Mark on his Head, Face or Hands – Emancipated in the County Court of Bedford – Certified ~~in~~ by the Court that the above register is truly made  
A Copy  
Teste Ja: Steptoe Cl. B. Coun.  
Teste Just. Peace

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Sixty – Godfrey – Black – Five feet seven Inches – None Apparent – Emancipated Bedford

Fifty – Billy Merchant – Black – Five feet six Inches & an half – Moderate Scar on the back of the left Hand – Emancipated Bedford

Fifty five – Pompey – Black – Five feet seven Inches – None Apparent – Emancipated Bedford

Forty – Joe Tanner – Olive – Five feet one Inch & an half – Two small Scars in the forehead – Emancipated Bedford

Thirty five – George – Black – Five feet Ten Inches – A large Scar over the right Eye – Emancipated Bedford

Twenty one – Jacob Dabney – Dark Mulatto – Five feet nine Inches & a quarter – None Apparent – Born free

Twenty two – Jacob Selden – Mulatto – Five feet three Inches – A small Scar over the right Eye – one under the right Eye, one on the right Cheek & one on the Chin – Born free

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<sup>2</sup> The register for 1820–1860, Bedford County, Reel 120a, has sixty-four pages.

Forty – William Jackson – Black – Five feet eight Inches – A Scar on the end of his Nose & one on the fourth finger of the left Hand – Born free

Forty five – John Jackson – Mulatto – Four feet nine Inches – A Scar over his right Eye & one on his right Cheek – Born free

Twenty two – John Gowing – Light Mulatto – Five feet six Inches & an half – None Apparent – Born free

Forty four Molly Selden – Light Mulatto – Five feet & a quarter of an Inch – A small Scar on the Forehead – Born free

Twenty – Sally Selden – dark Mulatto – Five feet & a quarter of an Inch – A small Scar on the second finger of the left Hand – Born free

Twenty two – Asy Ruff – Black – Five feet three Inches & an half – A small Scar over the right Eye & one on the Temple – Born free

Twenty six – John Ward – Black – Five feet four & three quarter In. – None Apparent – Emancipated Maryland State

Thirty six – Nancy Jackson – Light Mulatto – Five feet two Inches – None Apparent – Born free

At a Court held for Bedford County the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1803. The Courth doth certify that the above register is truly made  
M. Graham

Twenty – Billy Merchant Jr. – Black – Five feet three Inches and an half – A small scar on the back of the left Hand – Emancipated Bedford

Seventeen – Yarmer Merchant – Black – Five feet one Inch – None Apparent – Emancipated Bedford

Forty nine – Nanny Merchant – Black – Five feet & half an Inch – None Apparent – Emancipated Bedford

Twenty two – Cecila Merchant – Black – Four feet eleven Inches & an half – None Apparent – Emancipated Bedford

Twenty five – Flora Merchant – Black – Five feet two Inches & an half – None Apparent – Emancipated Bedford

Twenty five – Amey Merchant – Black – Five feet two Inches – None Apparent – Emancipated Bedford



The Court doth Certify the above register to be truly made Sam<sup>l</sup> Hancock

At a Court held for Bedford County at the courthouse the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1805

20 Lucy Lockett – Bright Mulatto – five foot 3 inches – no Scars or marks  
perceivable – [*Emancipated*] Bedford County Court<sup>4</sup>

At a Court held for Bedford County at the Court House 24<sup>th</sup> February 1806

Forty five – Samuel – Black – five feet seven Inches and an half – None  
apparent – [*Emancipated*] Bedford County Court

Twenty five – Peter – Black – five feet four Inches – None apparent –  
[*Emancipated*] Bedford County Court

Twenty two – Ned – Black – five feet seven Inches – None apparent –  
[*Emancipated*] Bedford County Court

Twenty – George – Black – five feet eight Inches & three quarters – None  
apparent – [*Emancipated*] Bedford County Court

Fifty – Sarah – Black – four feet ten Inches and an half – None apparent –  
[*Emancipated*] Bedford County Court

Thirty five – Rachael – Mulatto – four feet ten Inches and three quarters –  
[*Emancipated*] Bedford County Court

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At a Court continued and held for Bedford County at Bedford Court House  
February 24<sup>th</sup> 1806

Sixteen – Milly – Light Mulatto – five feet two Inches – None apparent –  
[*Emancipated*] Bedford County Court

Eleven – Daniel – Black – four feet five Inches & three quarters – None apparent  
– Ditto

Eight – Pleasant – Black – four feet two Inches and a quarter – A small Scar in  
the forehead – Ditto

Seven – Caleb – Dark Mulatto – three feet eleven Inches & an half – None  
apparent – Ditto

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<sup>4</sup> This entry was not formally certified to be true.

Six – Ann – Black – three feet six Inches – None apparent – Ditto

Three – Braxton – Black – two feet nine Inches and a quarter – None apparent – Ditto

Four months – Sophy – Mulatto – Two feet – None apparent – Ditto

Thirty three – Isabell – Black – four feet eleven Inches and an half – None apparent – Ditto

Twelve – James – Black – four feet seven Inches and a quarter – Scar in the forehead – Ditto

Eleven – Hannah – Black – four feet seven Inches and an half – None apparent – Ditto

Thirty two – Dinah – Black – five feet three Inches and an half – None apparent – Ditto

Eight – Washington – Black – four feet – None apparent – Ditto

Twenty eight – Harry – Black – five feet five Inches and an half – None apparent – Ditto

Twelve – Flanders – Dark Mulatto – four feet six Inches and an half – None apparent – Ditto

At a Court held for Bedford County the 26 March 1806 M. Graham

21 years – Jerry Jones – Black – five feet Eight inches & one eig[h]th – A Scar under the left eye – Emancipated in the County Court of Bedford  
Signed David Saunders

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At a Court held for Bedford County the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of June 1806

20 years – Peter Earley – Black – five feet 11 inches & 2/8<sup>ths</sup> – A Large Scar on the inside of the right knee – [Emancipated] Bedford County  
Signed David Saunders

At a Court held for Bedford County the 27<sup>th</sup> of July 1807

16 ys – Matt<sup>w</sup> Merchant<sup>5</sup> – Black – five feet four Inches – no Scars or marks perceivable – [Emancipated] Bedford Cty

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<sup>5</sup> A marginal note indicates that the registration was “Renewed April 1832.”

18 ys Betsy Merchant – Black – five feet – Ditto – d<sup>o</sup>

20 – Iris Merchant – Black – five feet – Ditto – d<sup>o</sup>                      Signed David Saunders

At a Court held for Bedford County at the court house the 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb<sup>y</sup> 1808

22 ys – Lucey – Black – 4 feet 11 Inches – one Scar on Left hand –  
[*Emancipated*] Bedford County    Signed David Saunders

At a Court held for Bedford County at the Court House the 24<sup>th</sup> day of May 1808

33 – Adam – Black – five feet Eight – ~~No Scars or marks perceivable~~ 4 large  
Scars in the breast [&] Some on the left thumb – [*Emancipated*] Bedford County  
Signed W<sup>m</sup> Quarles

At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of Jan<sup>y</sup> 1809

19 – Lucinda Jones – Black – five feet & ½ inch – The Scar of a burn on right  
thumb – Born free

20 – Diana Jones – Black – five feet three inches – A Scar on the back of her  
right hand & on the end of the middle finger of the left – Born free      Signed \_\_\_\_\_

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At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 29<sup>th</sup> May 1820

\_\_\_\_\_ – Tension Green – Bright Mulatto – 5 feet 4 Inches & ¾ – a Scar over the  
right Temple & one on the back of the right hand between the thumb and  
forefinger – Emancipated in the County Court of Amherst

The Court doth certify the above register as truly made      Signed Joseph Slaughter

At a Court held for Bedford County at the courthouse the 25<sup>th</sup> February 1811

21 years – Jack Fields – Bright Mulatto – five feet 4 I. ¾ - a wart on the left  
point of his nose [&] a smal[l] Scar over his left eye & one over his right – Born  
free

The Court doth certify the above register as truly made      Sign<sup>d</sup> Thomas Logwood

At a Court held at Bedford Courthouse for said County the 28<sup>th</sup> day of March 1811

36 – W<sup>m</sup> Jackson – Black – 5 feet 4 Inches & ¾ high – The left thumb partly cut  
off, the under part of the right ear & up[p]er part of the left bitten off – Born free

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The Court doth certify the above register to be truly made.

James Otey

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At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 28<sup>th</sup> day of March 1811

31 – Jerry – Black – five feet 10 ½ Inches high – Wooden leg – Emancipated in the County Court of Bedford

33 – Sam – D<sup>o</sup> – 5 feet 7 ½ Inches – Scar on the left side of the head & a Scar over the left eye – D<sup>o</sup>

32 – Dick – D<sup>o</sup> – 5 feet 3 Inches high – No Scar or mark perceivable – D<sup>o</sup>

27 – Lucy – Mulatto – 5 feet 1 Inch – 2 or 3 toes burnt off the left foot – D<sup>o</sup>

52 – Betty the mother of the above – Black – Same – a Scar on her right arm – d<sup>o</sup>

8 – Lydia daughter of Lucy – Mulatto – \_\_\_\_\_ – The Scar of a Burn on her breast – d<sup>o</sup>

The Court doth certify the above register to be truly made

James Otey

At a Court held for Bedford County at the courthouse the 27<sup>th</sup> day of May 1811

23 – William – Black – 5 feet 11 ½ Inches high – The Scar of a burn upon the inner part of his left thigh – Emancipated in the County of Bedford

The Court doth certify the above register to be truly made

John C. Taylor

At a court held for Bedford County at the courthouse the 24 day of June 1811

23 – Frank Pleasant – Black – 5 feet five ½ Inches – No Scars or marks perceiv<sup>le</sup> – Emancipated within County Court of Bedford

The Court doth certify the above register to be truly made

John C. Taylor

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33 years old – Daniel – Black – 5 feet 7 ¾ Inches high – no marks or scars on his face or hand Right knee crooked – [*Emancipated*] Bedford County

26 d<sup>o</sup> – Andrew – Black – five feet 6 Inches high – No marks or Scars perceivable – Same

Certified by the Court that the above register is truly made

James Otey



19 Rebecca – Mulatto – 5 feet 1 ½ Inches high – No Scars or marks perceivable  
– [*Emancipated*] Bedford County

Certified by the Court that the above register is truly made James Otey

At a Court held for Bedford County October 29<sup>th</sup> 1811

16 – Adam – Black – 4 feet 10 ½ Inches – a faint white mark about the size of a  
dollar on the right Cheek – [*Emancipated*] Bedford County

Certified by the Court to be correctly made

At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 25<sup>th</sup> day of Nov 1811

21 – Thomas Henry – Black – 5 feet 5 & ¾ inches high – no marks perceivable –  
[*Emancipated*] Bedford County

~~Certified by the Court to be correctly made Sam<sup>l</sup> Mitchel~~

17 – Dinah – Black – 5 feet 4 ¼ Inches high – no Scar or marks perceivable –  
[*Emancipated*] Bedford County

Certified by the Court that the above register is truly made Jost Leftwich

15 – Jacob – Black – Four feet 10 Inches – With a Scar on his left arm –  
[*Emancipated*] Bedford County Dan<sup>l</sup> Legram [?]

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At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of March 1812

45 years of age – Rebecca Chavers – Black – 5 feet 6 ¾ Inches high – no scars  
or marks perceivable – ~~Bedford County~~ Born free

19 D<sup>o</sup> – Minia Chavers – Black – 5 feet 2 Inches high – No Scar or mark  
perceivable – D<sup>o</sup>

At a Court held for Bedford County the 24<sup>th</sup> day of March 1812

26 – George – Black – 5 feet 10 Inches high – with a Scar over his right eye –  
[*Emancipated*] Bedford County P.M. Goggin

At a Court held for Bedford County at the courthouse the 25<sup>th</sup> day of Aug<sup>t</sup> 1812

45 years old – Mirna Hill – Dark Mulatto – 5 feet 2 Inches high – several large  
Scars under her left Jaw & one on the left arm – Born free

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18 years d<sup>o</sup> – Stepney Merchant – Same – 5 feet 3 Inches high – one Scar on the back part of her hand – emancipated in Bedford County

19 d<sup>o</sup> – Rich<sup>d</sup> Merchant – Black – 5 feet 11 Inches high – none perceivable – d<sup>o</sup>

16 d<sup>o</sup> – Nancy Merchant – d<sup>o</sup> – 5 feet 2 Inches – Same – d<sup>o</sup>

The Court doth Certify the above register to be truly made                      Stephen Preston

At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 25 Jan<sup>y</sup> 1813

42 Years – Bernard Tyre – a Mulatto – 5 feet 8 Inches high – a few small scars on the forehead – [*Emancipated*] Caroline County

24 d<sup>o</sup> – York Earley – Black – Six feet high – no Scars or marks perc<sup>le</sup> – [*Emancipated*] Bedford County

The Court doth certify the above register truly made                      David Saunders

At a Court held for Bedford County the 26<sup>th</sup> July 1813

33 Years old – Luke Stuart – Black – five feet 8 Inches & 7/8<sup>ths</sup> high – 2 Scars on his left thumb & a small one across the upper part of his nose – Born free  
John H. Otey

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At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 28<sup>th</sup> day of March 1814

30 Years – Benj<sup>n</sup> Day – Dark Mulatto – five feet 6 ¼ Inches – a small scar on the lip one on the left Cheak one on the first [k]nuckle of fore finger of the right hand & one on the little finger of the left hand – Born free

Certified by the Court the above register is truly made                      David Saunders

At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of August 1814

19 Years – Margaret Jackson – Bright Mulatto – 5 feet 2 ½ Inches high – a moule on the up[p]er part of her nose – Born free

Certified by the Court that the above register is truly made                      Sam<sup>l</sup> Mitchel

At a Court held for Bedford County at the courthouse the 26 Sep<sup>l</sup> 1814

22 – Emanuel Tanner – Dark man – 5 feet 3 Inches high – no scars or marks perceivable – Born free

24 – Caleb Tanner – D<sup>o</sup> – Same – Same – Same

26 – John Melton – Dark Mulatto – 5 feet 7 Inches high – Same – Emancipated  
in Bedford Court

Certified by the Court that the above register is truly made

Sam<sup>l</sup> Hancock  
W.J. Walters

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At a Court held for Bedford County the 24<sup>th</sup> day of Oct 1814

20 years – Iris Merchant – Black – 5 feet 3 Inches high – a burn on her left arm –  
Emancipated in Bedford County C<sup>t</sup>

18 D<sup>o</sup> – Sisley Merchant – Black – 4 feet 10 Inches high – none perceivable –  
Born free

19 D<sup>o</sup> – Nancy Merchant – D<sup>o</sup> – D<sup>o</sup> – D<sup>o</sup> – D<sup>o</sup>

26 D<sup>o</sup> – Rool Earley – D<sup>o</sup> – 5 feet 4 Inches – D<sup>o</sup> – Emancipated in Bedford  
County Court

Cert<sup>d</sup> by the Court that the above register is truly made

Thomas Logwood

At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 29<sup>th</sup> day of August 1815

20 – Violet Grimes – Black 5 feet & ½ Inch high – a scar on the back of the  
lower part of the right arm – Emancipated in the County of Bedford

24 – Rachel Grimes – Black – 5 feet 3 Inches high – a Scar on the in[n]er part of  
the right [w]rist – Same

Certified by the court that the above register is truly made

Stephen Preston

At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1816

21 – Adam Grimes – Black – 5 feet 3 ½ Inches – a large white scar on his right  
Cheek – Emancipated in Bedford

Certified by the Court the above register is truly made

Signed Sam<sup>l</sup> Hancock

At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 26<sup>th</sup> day of July 1816

21 – Thomas Parker – Mulatto – 5 feet 6 ¾ Inches – Letter T on back of left  
hand & small black mole on the left hand – Born free

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Certified by the Court that the above register is truly made Sam<sup>l</sup> Mitchel

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17 – Jacob Merchant – Black – 5 feet 5 ½ inches – No marks or scars – Born free

16 – Levi Merchant – Dark Mulatto – 5 feet 5 inches – D<sup>o</sup> – Born free

At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 28 Oct 1816

Certified by the Court that the above register is truly made David Saunders

At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 1817

55 – George – Black – six feet high – three small scars in his forehead –  
Emancipated by the County Court of Bedford

50 – Betty – Light complexion – 4 feet 1 ¾ Inches high – No Scars or marks  
perceivable – Same

Certified by the Court that the above register is truly made David Saunders

At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 24<sup>th</sup> day of March 1817

45 – Ignatius Carter – Black – 5 ½ feet high – No scar or mark perceivable –\_\_

At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of March 1818

21 – Jacob Grimes – Black man – 5 feet 6 ¾ Inches high – Scar below the elbow  
of left arm a small scar on his nose, scar on left foot – Born free

Certified by the Court that the above register is truly made M. Ewing

At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 21<sup>st</sup> of August 1818

22 – Fleming Henry – Black man – 5 feet nine and a fourth inches high – a scar  
on his right [w]rist – [Emancipated] Bedford County

Certified by the Court that the above register is truly made M. Ewing

35 – Stephen Day – Mulatto – Five feet nine inches and a fourth high – a scar on  
the instep of the right foot a small mark on the right corner of his mouth – Born  
free

Certified by the Court that the above register is truly made          David Saunders

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At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 26<sup>th</sup> day of July 1819

Cate Darby – Black – 5 feet 7 Inches high – 24 years old – The third finger on the left hand crooked at the first joint – Born free

Fanny Mason – Bright Mulatto – 5 feet & 5/8<sup>ths</sup> Inch high – No Scar – 28 years old – D<sup>o</sup>

Keziah Green – Black – 5 feet 5 Inches high – 69 years old – a small scar on her right foot – Emancipated in Bedford Court

Certified by the Court that the above register is truly made          John H. Otey

At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 24<sup>th</sup> day of August 1819

21 – James Jackson – Black – 5 feet 7 Inches high – No Scars or marks perceivable – Born free

Certified by the Court that the above register is truly made          P.M. Goggins

At a Court held for Bedford County at the Courthouse the 25 August 1820

23 years – John Wesley Clark – Black – 5 feet 8 7/8<sup>th</sup> Inches high – A small scar on his forehead & his 2 last fingers on the left hand off near the first joint – Emancipated in Bedford County

Certified by the Court that the above register be truly made          John H. Otey

April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1820 – This day John Roe produced a certificate from the Clerk of Notoway of his having been duly registered in that Court as a free negro – Dated 5<sup>th</sup> Nov 1818  
J.C. Steptoe D.C.

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James C. Steptoe November 1803<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Steptoe's signature and the date appear twice.