BASIC SEARCH – VIRGINIA UNTOLD: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN NARRATIVE (AAN)

To begin your search, go to http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/aan and select “Search the Narrative”:

VIRGINIA UNTOLD: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN NARRATIVE AT THE LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

The Library of Virginia’s collections are rich with records documenting the lives of African Americans in Virginia. However, access to those materials dating from before the American Civil War is limited at best. These limitations are the result of period perspectives on the identities of enslaved and disenfranchised populations, as well as sheer volume. Due to this, the individual stories form a narrative of a people that has not been fully told.

The Library’s African American Narrative project aims to provide greater accessibility to pre-1865 African American history and genealogy found in the rich primary sources in its holdings. Traditional description, indexing, transcription, and digitization are major parts of this effort. However, and perhaps more importantly, this project seeks to encourage conversation and engagement around the records, providing opportunities for a more grassroots and diverse narrative of the history of Virginia’s African American people.

Search the Narrative

This page contains documents to assist your search, access to the full indexes to records, and a search form.

Join the Narrative

This page lists upcoming staff presentations & talks, links to social media and blogs about the Narrative, and interesting articles.

About the Narrative

This page has project history and background, as well as LVA contact information.
The Search the Narrative page gives you access to the following:

1) Original spreadsheets used to index the records. Note: not all items in the spreadsheets have been digitized and made available online yet.
2) Tip Sheets (like this one) to help you search and understand the collection.
3) Links to related research resources.
4) A search form to help you get started.

The search form allows you to search using 1, 2 or all 3 of the following: Name or Keyword, Record Type, Locality.

**SEARCH THE NARRATIVE**

Access the original csv indexes (spreadsheets) created for this project at Collections Data @ LVA
Tip Sheet: African American Narrative Record Types (pdf)
Tip Sheet: Related Resources and Collections (pdf)

Search the collection:

- **Name or Keyword:**
  - Name or Keyword searches ALL fields in the database, including any indexes or transcriptions that are included.
- **Record Type:**
  - Record Type and Locality allow you to chose from record types and localities that have been included so far in the collection.
  - Please note: Not all Record Types are represented in each Locality. We will continue to add new localities and new records types, so check back!
- **Locality:**
  - All Localities

Browse the entire collection.

**Remember:** There are advantages and disadvantages both to searching broadly and narrowing in more specifically. Using the collection effectively will require persistence and some experimentation, as the records are indexed according to words and spelling used in their creation. Which can be especially tricky with names.

The next two screenshots show some useful detail about the page.
SEARCH THE NARRATIVE

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Tip Sheet: African American Narrative Record Types (pdf)
Tip Sheet: Related Resources and Collections (pdf)

Search the collection:

Name or Keyword: 

Record Type: All Record Types

Locality: All Localities

Search

Browse the entire collection

Related Content and Library of Virginia Resources

- Formation histories for Virginia counties & independent cities
- Library of Virginia digital collections
- Research Notes and Bibliographies
- Virginia Heritage guides to Virginia collections

Date of county or city formation, as well as a locality’s “parentage,” can have a big impact on research. Learn more about a locality’s history with our online guide.

Generally, Locality refers to the county or city in which a certain document or record originated, usually in the Circuit Court. Locality may also refer to county or city of residence or perhaps location from which a letter was written.

Have a question about a Record Type? Check out our Tip Sheet that explains why they are created and the kind of information they contain.

Using this search form, you may search only one Record Type at a time.
For our example, we’ll use all three search fields: Name or Keyword, Record Type, and Locality.

Once filled, mash the “Search” button to start your search.

**SEARCH THE NARRATIVE**

Access the original csv indexes (spreadsheets) created for this project at Collections Data @ LVA

*Tip Sheet: African American Narrative Record Types* (pdf)

*Tip Sheet: Related Resources and Collections* (pdf)

Search the collection:

- **Name or Keyword:** Lucy
- **Record Type:** Free Negro Registration
- **Locality:** Chesterfield County

In this search, we’re looking for the name “Lucy” found anywhere in Free Negro Registrations from Chesterfield County.

Once the fields are filled, click the “Search” button.

This will direct your search to our digital asset management system, which will open in another browser window like this:

Select that browser window to see your search results. **Hint:** if you don’t get any search results, go back the original tab and try another search.
If all goes well and there are results to view, you’ll see a screen like this in that 2nd tab. That big red circle below shows the specific terms searched for in the collection, that the search results are sorted alphabetically by Title/Creator, that the results are presented in a “Brief view” and that there are 16 results in total.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Record</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Abba, Lucy (48): Free Negro Register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Abba, Lucy (F, 32): Free Negro Register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Abby, Dina (Alias Dina Abba, F, 28): Free Negro Register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Barbour, James Thomas (M, 22): Free Negro Register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Johnathan, Louisiana (Alias Louisiana Pleasants, F, 28): Free Negro Register</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In some results, you can see that the search term “Lucy” is in the title.

But in other results, there isn’t a clear indication of the search term “Lucy.”
Once you’re done with a document, close the window with the digital image in order to go back and look through other items in the result set.

If you want to do another search, you can go back to the Search the Narrative page by selecting the correct tab in your browser: