

Press Release
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Virginia Museum of History & Culture Joins Library of Virginia In Merging Database of Names of Enslaved Virginians

Richmond, VA — The Virginia Museum of History & Culture (VMHC) is partnering with the Library of Virginia (LVA) to provide greater access to a database of names of enslaved Virginians. In early January of 2019, the unique content of the VMHC's *Unknown No Longer* database (more than 600 documents, and nearly 13,000 names) was merged with the LVA's *Virginia Untold* database (nearly 11,000 records), providing researchers with unprecedented access to an expanded collection of resources on the history of enslaved African Americans in Virginia.

"*Unknown No Longer* is one of our most important digital resources," said President and CEO Jamie O. Bosket. "Joining forces with our friends at the Library of Virginia will make work we've done even more accessible and useful. We are proud to contribute to the remembrance of so many people from our past whose names were forgotten for far too long."

The VMHC launched *Unknown No Longer* in 2011 to make biographical details of enslaved Virginians from unpublished historical records in its collections accessible to website visitors. The VMHC archives contain hundreds of thousands of unique private papers and business records. The LVA's similar database is formed from its remarkable archives, especially its ever-growing collection of government records.

Since the launch of *Unknown No Longer*, its documents were viewed digitally by website visitors from all over the world. Some of the most widely referenced items include the 1840 will of Peter Spain, a freedman who lived in Richmond. In the will, Spain emancipates a friend (unnamed) whom he considered his wife. The will also directs that his estate be divided between his sisters, Biddy and Hester, free women of color. A portion of the estate is bequeathed to John Finney, a free boy of color who lived with Peter Spain and his wife. Among other popular items are those found in the collection of Sarah Harriet Apphia Hunter (1822–1874) of Essex County, Virginia. She was the youngest of four sisters who lived at the Fonthill plantation. Her three-part diary, correspondence, account books, receipts, slave inventories, hiring records and lists illuminate areas of history that provide a glimpse into plantation society where a female presided. Many researchers have also referenced the account book of Richard Eppes, a plantation owner in Prince George County. His ledgers include the names of enslaved people and family relationships recorded both during and after the Civil War. Many of the enslaved people on his plantation had first and last names that today can be traced to families living in the area and beyond. Eppes's meticulous account records and financial transactions provide details of the transition from a plantation economy to a wage-earning one.

The VMHC will continue to update the database as new sources enter the catalog. Both *Unknown No Longer* and *Virginia Untold* are sponsored in part by a generous grant from Dominion Energy. *Virginia Untold* receives federal funding through the Library Services and Technology Act administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The LVA and the VMHC's combined database can be found at <http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/aan/search-the-narrative>.

The Virginia Museum of History & Culture is owned and operated by the Virginia Historical Society — a private, non-profit organization established in 1831. The historical society is the oldest cultural organization in Virginia, and one of the oldest and most distinguished history organizations in the nation. For use in its state history museum and its renowned research library, the historical society cares for a collection of nearly nine million items representing the ever-evolving story of Virginia.

The Virginia Museum of History & Culture is located at 428 North Boulevard in Richmond's Museum District. Hours are Monday – Sunday 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. for the galleries and museum shop, Monday – Saturday 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. for the research library. For more information call 804.340.1800, visit VirginiaHistory.org, or connect with the Virginia Museum of History & Culture on Facebook and Twitter.

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