



VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Story of Virginia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 4, 2011

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Virginia Historical Society Creating Searchable Online Slave Database Grant from Dominion will Fund the Path-Breaking African American History Project

Richmond, VA—The Virginia Historical Society (VHS) recently received a \$100,000 grant from Dominion Resources and The Dominion Foundation to fund the creation of *Unknown No Longer: A Database of Virginia Slave Names*. This free, online database will contain personal information about enslaved Virginians gleaned from some of the more than eight million processed manuscripts in VHS collections.

“The *Unknown No Longer* database is the first of its kind and will serve as a national model,” said VHS president and CEO Paul Levensood. “The database will be a valuable tool for academic researchers, family historians, and genealogists alike. A website visitor could enter as much or as little information as he or she knows about a particular African American to conduct a search. The results can lead to previously unknown connections between people, families, and places.”

“This project is an example of both the VHS and Dominion’s commitment to using technology to increase access to historical collections and our dedication to reaching out to a diverse constituency.”

The road from emancipation and Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movement and the election of Virginia’s first black governor is well documented in Virginia history. But early African American history (from the arrival of the first slaves through the Civil War) is often represented only through the words of white observers, freed persons who looked back on slavery many years later, or the records generated by others about African Americans who achieved recognition for their actions. For most enslaved Americans, the only physical record of their existence may be a name in a register kept by a slave owner.

Unknown No Longer will be searchable through the use of a variety of keywords, such as name, gender, location, occupation, and plantation. It will also include images of original source documents for easy reference.

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“We have witnessed a growing audience frequenting the VHS in search of information that our records might provide, such as names of enslaved people, plantation sites, occupation and family relations, values, and birth, death, or sale dates,” said VHS chief librarian Frances Pollard. “We want to provide the more than 2 million visitors to our website another, more detailed tool to access remotely specific information about potentially thousands of people.”

“We have researched other slave database websites and found *Unknown No Longer* to be unique in design and approach,” said VHS curator of African American history Dr. Laurant Lee, who will oversee the *Unknown No Longer* research. “Existing databases profile specific plantations and ship manifestos with African names of their human cargo or other forced migratory information. *Unknown No Longer* will be the first database of names that relate back to plantations or places of work across all of slaveholding Virginia.”

The VHS will be officially launching *Unknown No Longer* in September 2011 with 1,000 names in the searchable database. Information in the database will be updated as relevant material in the VHS manuscript collection is processed and new documents come into VHS possession.

“*Unknown No Longer* is a dynamic project,” said Levenoood. “With items entering the VHS collection annually, there will always be important new sources of information available. We hope that many researchers will take this opportunity to use the Virginia Historical Society’s documents and materials to discover a connection with the past.”

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For more than 182 years, the **Virginia Historical Society** (VHS) has been connecting people to America’s past through the unparalleled story of Virginia. The VHS—a history museum and research library—features award-winning exhibitions that are entertaining and educational for visitors of all ages. The Society is the only museum with all of Virginia’s history under one roof—all centuries, all regions, and all topics are covered. Although designated the Official State Historical Society, the VHS is a privately funded non-profit organization that relies on contributions from individuals, corporations, and foundations to sustain its operations. The VHS is located at 428 North Boulevard in Richmond’s Museum District. Admission is free. Museum hours are Monday–Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and Sunday 1 p.m.–5 p.m. Library hours are Monday–Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. For more information, call (804) 358-4901, visit www.vahistorical.org, or find the VHS on Facebook and Twitter.

