

About the Mid Atlantic Region

The Mid Atlantic Region encourages educators and students to visit, research our microfilm and archival records, attend our public programs, and take advantage of our services.

The Mid Atlantic Region offers an array of cultural programming, including events for the public such as family history workshops; research in archives; teaching history using archival documents; facility tours; exhibits; and lectures.

The archives facility can accommodate groups and educators and students by special arrangement. The Mid Atlantic Region features an exhibit space with rotating exhibits.

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Researching Slavery & Freedom

In the National Archives
Mid Atlantic Region



Our Records:

The National Archives Mid-Atlantic Region is the repository for official U.S. government historical records for the states of Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. The Mid-Atlantic collections date from the founding of the national government in 1789 and contain details on the actions and decisions of government officials and the public in confronting the issue of slavery and the status of blacks in America.

This facility holds an array of archives that document the Atlantic slave trade, as well as the domestic trade between southern ports such as Charleston, New Orleans, and Savannah, and the Port of Philadelphia.

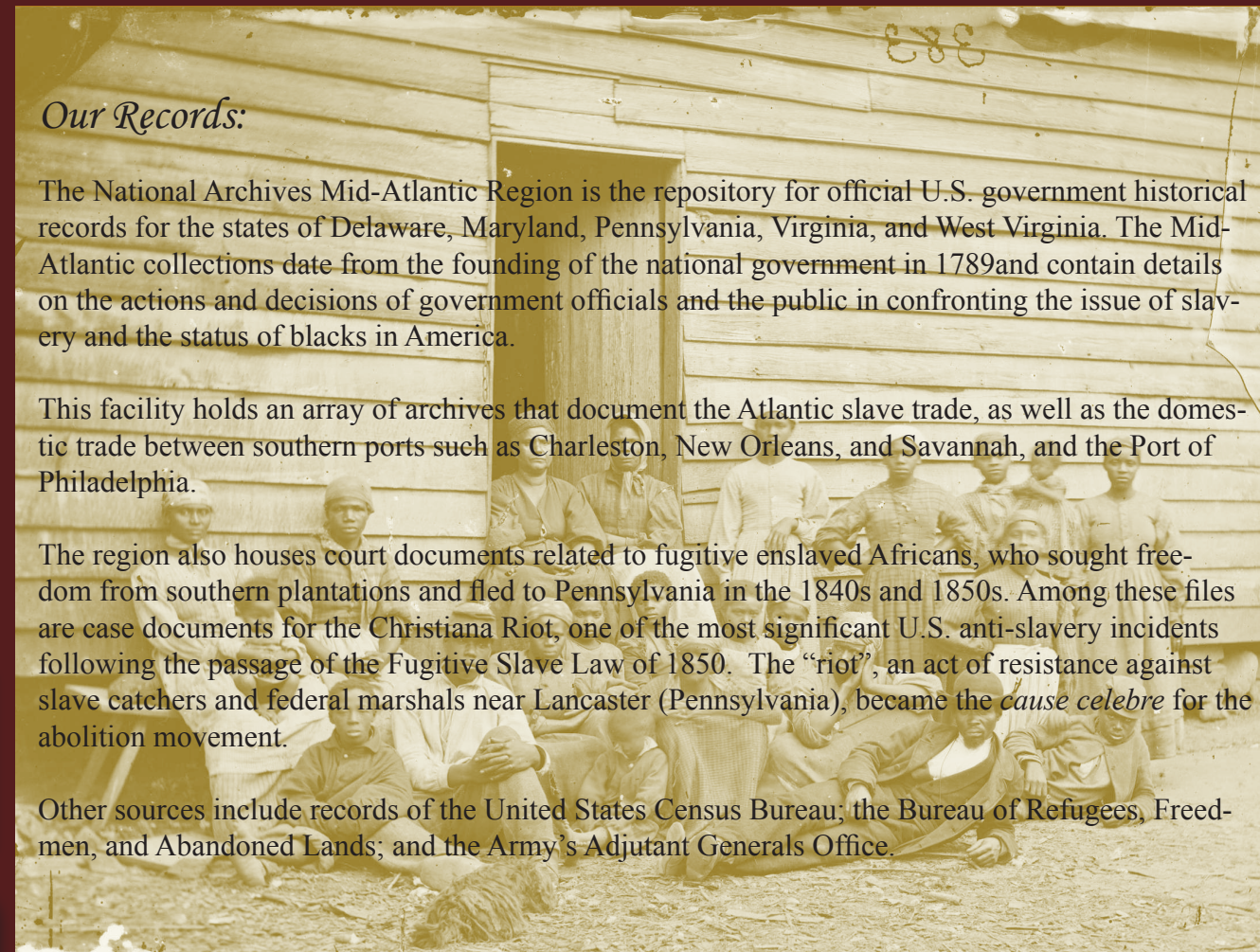
The region also houses court documents related to fugitive enslaved Africans, who sought freedom from southern plantations and fled to Pennsylvania in the 1840s and 1850s. Among these files are case documents for the Christiana Riot, one of the most significant U.S. anti-slavery incidents following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. The “riot”, an act of resistance against slave catchers and federal marshals near Lancaster (Pennsylvania), became the *cause celebre* for the abolition movement.

Other sources include records of the United States Census Bureau; the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands; and the Army's Adjutant Generals Office.

The Slave Trade

At the Constitutional Convention in 1787, delegates fiercely debated the issue of slavery, but ultimately agreed that the United States would cease its engagement in the transatlantic slave trade in 1808. While American vessels would no longer travel to Africa in search of human merchandise, a domestic or “coastwise” trade in slaves persisted within the United States.

Among the Mid Atlantic Region's holdings that tell this story are Slave Manifests. The manifests, which date from 1800 through 1861, detail the transportation of enslaved men, women, and children between Philadelphia and southern ports. Of particular interest are the manifests of *Schooner Phoebe* and *Schooner Prudence* that show the arrival of 135 Africans whose descendants can still be identified by the surname Ganges.



Reconstruction

In the aftermath of the Civil War, African Americans adapted to life as free people with the help of Black church leaders as well as a federal initiative known as the Freedmen's Bureau. The Bureau helped freedmen establish schools, purchase land, and legal-

Fugitive Slaves

In response to a disagreement between Pennsylvania and Virginia over the extradition of a fugitive slave named John Davis, George Washington signed into law the Fugitive Slave Law 1793. Charging the individual states with the responsibility of returning fugitive slaves, this law proved ineffective because it failed to address the fundamental interstate nature of this issue.

After decades of state-to-state conflicts, the federal government issued a more stringent fugitive slave law as part of the larger Compromise of 1850. This new law made the federal government – not the individual states – responsible for apprehending fugitive slaves.



ize their marriages; however, funding limitations and deeply held racist attitudes forced the Bureau to close in 1872. African Americans were largely abandoned to contend on their own with persistent racial attitudes and discrimination. Many continued to work for their former masters as sharecroppers or tenant farmers in a vicious cycle of debt peonage.

Racism also took the form of new laws, called Black Codes, which curtailed African American rights on a daily basis. One law, on the books in Virginia until 1967, made it illegal for whites and blacks to marry. Within the records of the federal district courts is the story of Mary and Edmund Kinney. Mary Kinney, a white woman, and her husband Edmund Kinney, a black man, who were arrested in Virginia after they married in Washington, D. C. on October 8, 1878. The couple was imprisoned and sentenced to five years of hard labor.

The Courts

The Mid Atlantic Region holds records from United States District and Circuit courts in Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia beginning in 1789. These records tell the story of slavery and freedom through suits involving admiralty and bankruptcy, seizures of goods under Federal law,

The Christiana Riot

In the antebellum period, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania was a haven for fugitive slaves, and often harbored runaways from the south. The Parker household, for example, harbored Nelson Ford and other slaves from Maryland after they fled their master, Edward Gorsuch, in 1849.

With the power of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, Gorsuch had the federal courts behind him when he left his home in Baltimore to apprehend Ford and the others in Pennsylvania in 1851. Residents of Christiana, however, violently resisted Gorsuch's party, and Edward Gorsuch was killed. For disobeying federal law, many residents were indicted for treason.

matters of equity, and violations of Federal criminal law.

In an 1847 equity suit, Lloyd Logan of Virginia demanded James McMasters of Pennsylvania either return his escaped slave, Daniel, or pay him \$500 compensation. The case papers contain several days of testimony that detail the circumstances of Daniel's enslavement and trek to freedom. In the end, the jury sided with McMasters and Daniel was free to continue his journey north.

The story of over a dozen African-American men who signed up to work mining guano on

And to fulfil and bring to effect the said traitorous intention of him, the said *Nelson Ford* he, the said *Nelson Ford* afterwards, to wit, on the day and year aforesaid, in the State District and County aforesaid, and within the jurisdiction of this Court, with a great multitude of persons, whose names to this Inquest are as yet unknown, to a great number, to wit, to the number of one hundred persons and upwards, armed and arrayed in a warlike manner, that is to say, with guns, swords, and other warlike weapons, as well offensive as defensive, being then and there unlawfully and traitorously assembled, did traitorously assemble and combine against the said United States, and then and there, with force and arms, wickedly and traitorously, and with the wicked and traitorous intention to oppose and prevent, by means of intimidation and violence, the execution of the said laws of the United States within the same, did array and dispose themselves in a warlike and hostile manner against the said United States, and then and there, with force and arms, in pursuance of such their traitorous intention, he, the said *Nelson Ford* with the said persons so as aforesaid, wickedly and traitorously did levy war against the United States. And further to fulfil and bring to effect the said traitorous intention of him the said *Nelson Ford* and in pursuance and in execution of the said wicked and traitorous combination to oppose, resist and prevent the said laws of the United States from being carried into execution, he, the said *Nelson Ford*

the Caribbean Island of Navassa and lived on the island in virtual enslavement is told in an 1889 criminal case from Baltimore, MD.

The case begins with the passage of the Guano Islands Act, which allowed American citizens to claim islands as temporary U.S. possessions. The suit alleges that eighteen African-American laborers revolted at Navassa Island and murdered five white overseers. The laborers were found guilty and sentenced to death. However, President Benjamin Harrison commuted their death sentences to life in prison.