

Manumission, Willed, or Buying Their Freedom

From the May 6, 1782, to December 18, 1865

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Manumissions By Year

Abstract and/or Background

On May 6, 1782, an act of the Virginia General Assembly enabled the voluntary manumission (freeing) of thousands of slaves in the 80 years prior to the Emancipation Proclamation and 83 years prior to the 13th Amendment. The Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (which abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, except as punishment for a crime) is declared ratified by three-quarters of the states of the United States. The motivation of each slave holder to free their slaves varied from individual to individual and many of the "freedom documents" give some indication as to their thoughts, beliefs, and intentions. Though it is an unfortunate historical reality that slaves were treated as chattel property, this led to a documentation process in the court system that preserved these documents for future study.

In 2022, Stephen Andrew Langland of the Helm School of Government completed his dissertation on five counties directly around Lynchburg, Virginia. After his dissertation, the Helm School expanded the project to include the entire state of Virginia. As an intern to the Helm School, and representing the History Department, there are now sixteen counties completed with about forty others in various stages of completion.

Introduction and/or Research Question

With the documentation and cataloging of sixteen counties around and near Lynchburg, Virginia, a comparison of the manumitted, willed, or paid to free themselves and things going on in history at that time. The information, once compiled, will tell us the ratios of slaves freed based on the categories and a ratio between each type of release. With this paper the questions now to be asked are:

- Will there be a concentration of freedoms by year and a correlation to things going on in history at that time?
- Were slaves given their freedom more through wills, by manumission by the owner of the slave(s), or by purchases of freedom?

Methods

Through the continuation of data collection and compilation of raw data into the Manumission Database, the data will be taken and formatted to address the questions raised above. To collect the data, the continuing use of multiple sources such as the "Free Negro Registry," usually compiled by county, will be used. The collection of raw data continues to lead us to new sources of raw data that will also be used in an attempt to have a more complete database for future generations.

Results and/or Conclusions

With a compilation of the data of the completed counties the hope is to understand the ratio of manumissions, wills, or of the ones that bought their freedom. Also, there will be a comparison of dates to understand which years were the years of the most manumissions, wills, or buying of freedom.

It is this project's belief that there will be a correlation between freedoms and the events of history between 1782 and the civil war. With the ratio of slaves that were freed by the passing of a slave owner compared to slaves given their freedom during the life of the slave owner, or by the purchase of their freedom the data will be able to give the answers to the raised questions.

With a continuation of the project there is the hope that the completion of the state of Virginia will bring about a better understanding of the mindset of the individuals that owned slaves. Further questions can also then be looked at such as "was there a religious, political, personal, or maybe even a moral motivation or obligation with each release."

Conclusions

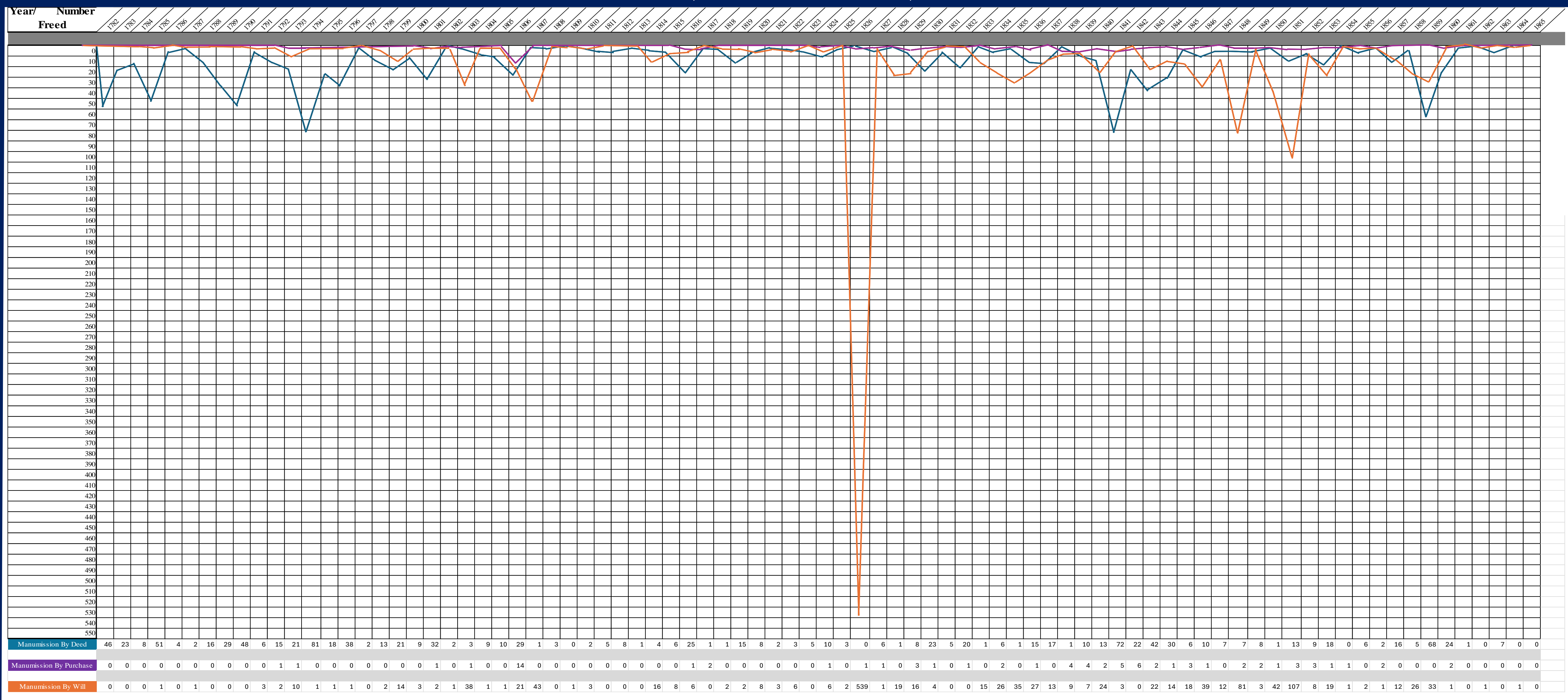
After a tabulation and comparison of the numbers available the following conclusions were made:

- There ultimately was no found correlation between Manumissions and historical events.
- The two largest Manumissions within these years were both from wills.
- The number of freedoms from Manumissions verses the number from Wills was close to even. (Only 216 more freedoms from Wills were registered then from regular Manumissions)
- Total Purchase of Their Freedom was 78, which was expected to be lower. While some Purchase of Freedoms were small amounts i.e., \$1, \$5, there were also a range from \$100 to \$1200, with the largest being \$4000 in Lynchburg City, as it was called then.

[illegible]

Manumission By Type

Deed, Purchase Freedom, Will



Key Moments in History Between 1782 and 1865

- 1782 **May 6, 1782** General Assembly of Virginia enacted a law that allowed slaveholders to manumit their slaves at will, without government approval. (Virginia 182)
- October 3, 1782 The House of Burgesses in Virginia granted British soldiers officially under the Revolutionary War the right of citizenship in exchange for their service to the British in the Revolutionary War.
- January 14, 1784 The Continental Congress called the Treaty of Paris officially ended the United States as an independent nation.
- February 1, 1787 Delegates began the Constitutional Convention for a Constitutional Convention intended to revise the Articles of Confederation. However, new Constitution for the United States is eventually produced.
- September 17, 1787 "The United States Constitution" was signed by the Constitutional Convention.
- February 4, 1789 George Washington is unanimously elected the first president of the United States.
- September 26, 1789 "Bill of Rights of the United States Bill of Rights" are submitted for President George Washington's signature. The Bill of Rights in the United States is the constitution for President George Washington and approved by Congress.
- August 21, 1799 The first United States Census is taken.
- December 15, 1799 Ratification by the states of the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution is completed, now the United States Bill of Rights.

- 1818**
 - July 11, 1818 – The Bank of the United States reverses its policy of expanding credit and sends note nationwide demanding immediate repayment of balances due; the defaults during it will trigger the Panic of 1819. (Niles 1824)
- 1819**
 - January 2, 1819 – The Panic of 1819, the first major financial crisis in the United States, begins.

Manumission Law of Virginia

[illegible]

Key Moments in History Between 1782 and 1865

[illegible]

Key Moments in History Between 1782 and 1865

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Future Work

The Manumission project is an ongoing project that is many years from completion. Using students looking for CSER hours, internships through Helm School of Government and the History Department her at Liberty University, and all volunteer work that come in freely will help bring this project to its conclusion.

It is also the hope of the project that the information gathered can help us understand the thinking and desires of the individuals during this timeframe.

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