In 1853, the Commonwealth of Virginia began an annual registration of births and deaths. The Birth Index of Slaves, 1853-1865 was later transcribed by the Works Project Administration (WPA) and recorded on microfilm. While the information—name of informant, infant’s name, mother’s name, birth date, place of birth—is of immense value to genealogists, working with the microfilm can be problematic.

In 2003, staff and trained volunteers in Alexandria Library’s Special Collections Branch began to transcribe the WPA microfilm, enter data into spreadsheets, and sort the information by the informant’s surname and given name. Entries include single births, multiple births, and stillbirths. Occasionally, both parents of an infant are identified. In rare instances, the name of a freeborn infant appears. Independent city and county names are spelled out. The published index includes more than 130,000 entries.

The first five volumes of the Index are comprised of an alphabetical list of informants. The informant might be the parent, the slaveowner, the overseer, or a corporate body. Volume 6: Geographic Supplement is arranged by locality. The informant’s surname or company name appears once under each county or city.

What do I need to know about birth records in Virginia?
- Before 1853
- Since 1853

What was the Work Projects Administration (WPA)?
- Genealogical bonanza (nearly nationwide)
- Virginia

What was the publishing process?
- Project management
- Editorial decision-making
  (what to include, what to leave out, how to present what we have)
- Managing the data (storage, quality control)
- Working with a commercial publisher
How do I solve research questions with the Index?

- Birth registers
- Brickwall solutions

What’s new?

- Volume 6: Geographic Supplement

Where get I learn more?


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