



Record Group: Essex County
Subgroup: Clerk's Office
Series: Birth Certificates of Children of Slaves, 1804-1843
Accession #: 1989.040
Series #: CESCL002
Guide Date: 3/1994 (JK)
Volume: 0.1 c.f. [1 vol.]; 0.33 reel [35-mm]

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Legislative History

The filing of birth certificates for children of slaves was the direct result of "An act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery" passed by the New Jersey Legislature on 15 February 1804 (P.L. 1804, chap. CIV, p. 251). This law pronounced every child born to a slave mother after 4 July 1804 "free" at birth, but bound as a servant to the owner of the mother until the age of twenty-five for males and twenty-one for females. Any person entitled by the law to such bound service was required to file with the county clerk, within nine months of the birth of the child, a written certificate containing the name of the slave owner and the name, age and sex of the child. The clerk in turn was directed to record the information in a special book for this purpose. The penalty for neglecting to deliver such a certificate was \$5 plus an additional \$1 for each month of delinquency.

The law also allowed for the abandonment of such children by the owners of their mothers at the age of one year. In this case, the child would become a ward of the local overseers of the poor; the slave owner was required to file a notification of abandonment with the county clerk.

Content Note

The front cover of this volume bears the title "Certificate of Birth of Black Children." The book includes copies of birth records of children of slaves submitted to the Essex County Clerk during the period 1804-1843. While the 1804 law did not require that the mother's name be included on the certificate, it almost always was. The father's name was recorded only in a few cases. Unfortunately, there is no index included in the volume.

Reel Listing - ESSEX COUNTY (Clerk)

Reel	Contents	Explanatory Notes
1-911	Black Births (1804-1843) Manumissions (1805-1853)	Births of Children of Slaves (1804-1843) [typed transcript follows] Manumission Books A - C (1805-1853) [Indexes before Vol. A & B]

		Slave Receipts (1787-1805); #1305755
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Created July 2004

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