

The Free Black Strother Family of Augusta County

The first Strother to immigrate to Virginia was William Strother, born 1630 in Northumberland, England. He arrived in 1650 and settled near the Rappahannock River where he obtained 500 acres. Here he built his manor house and ran his plantation with slaves. Eventually his land became part of Prince George County.

William Strother was the father of many children. They married into aristocratic families such as the Washingtons, the Madisons, and the Thortons. All became large land owners with slaves. Their plantations spread across Virginia, located mostly in Fauquier and Madison Counties.

The freed slaves that took the last name of Strother first registered in Augusta County on December 23, 1833. Nancy Strother was the oldest and most likely the mother of Isabella, born 1801, and John, born 1807. Two other Strothers, Albert and Calvin, registered also, but did not remain in the area, although the name Albert was passed down through the generations. The census records provide a snapshot of these Strother families, the ages changing erratically throughout the decades. They weren't certain when they were born and so sometimes aged greatly or didn't age at all from census to census.

These Strothers lived in the North River District of Augusta County near Mt. Solon and Sangersville. They were laborers, working the farms of neighboring white landowners. They did not read or write. As free blacks, they could not own property or vote. Multiple generations lived in the households, making it difficult to sort out children from grandchildren. No marriages were recorded until after 1866. There is a Strother Family cemetery that still exists today. There are a few modern stones, but most of the older Strothers must have been buried without markers.

The census records of 1820 recorded two Strothers, Isabella and Nancy. Isabella lived alone in Staunton, about 22 years old. She lived next to Nancy who had eight other people living in her household. In 1840, John Strother was old enough to have a separate household. John and his brother Andrew J. Strother lived in the Sangersville area, raising large families. They both married into the Burns family, another free black family of Augusta County. Also, accompanying the Strothers to Augusta County were David Hays and Jacob Curtis who also registered in 1833.