

506 PETER

Slave Pressman

Richmond

Enslaved pressman in Richmond office of Thomas Nicolson (315) in 1783.

Peter was one of many enslaved men who were employed by their masters to pull presses in Virginia's printing offices – a purely manual labor function. Yet this pressman is unusual in that a record exists of his name and age, though not of his fate.

The 1783 census of taxable individuals living in Richmond contains an enumeration of those residing in the household of Thomas Nicolson, the proprietor of the larger of the two press offices then in operation there. Seven individuals were recorded: four free white men and an enslaved family of three. The twenty-seven year-old Nicolson was listed as head of the household; he shared his home with his business partner, William Prentis (340), twenty-three; their apprentice, William Alexander Rind (359), then sixteen; and an African servant named Peter, age twenty-three, with his wife and son.

This alignment indicates that Peter's wife and son were domestic servants in a house full of bachelor tradesmen, while Peter provided the labor needed for press and storeroom work. But as none of Nicolson's business papers survive, and as these circumstances are not again chronicled in the city's records, it is fundamentally impossible to trace this pressman's life before or after 1783.

No Personal Data yet discovered.

Sources: Richmond Common Hall Records, Book I: Inhabitants & Titheables of the City of Richmond (1783).