

COPY

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Bureau of Vital Statistics
State Board of Health

Richmond March 24, 1925.

Mr. George L. Nelson,
Indian Neck, Va.

Dear Sir:

I have your letter of March 23rd, saying that your group of people expect to have a meeting on Saturday, March 28th, to discuss the racial standing of the group, and you say that they "pledge themselves that they will not be termed negro." You ask how they are listed in our office.

We have some old birth and death records covering the period 1853 to 1896. These were made by the Commissioners of the Revenue, sworn officers who visited the homes of the people to assess them for taxes. They then asked if there had been any births or deaths in the families during the year. Those records were forwarded to the Auditor each year and in 1898 were turned over to our office for preservation. This information was given by men who had been born and raised amongst the people and who themselves together with their parents and grandparents had known the people for years back. The classification was made in the presence of the family. These officers never called upon true Indians nor assessed them for taxes.

Our grounds upon which we returned your registration cards were that we are unable to find in any historical references, in the writings of the Bureau of Ethnology, or in any of our records any intimation that there were any Rappahannock Indians or that any of those whose names we now have are descended from Indian ancestors. Howe's History of Virginia, written in 1845, mentioned three tribes of Indians who were much mixed with negroes but said nothing of the "Rappahannocks" which were probably unknown to him.

We do not find your name recorded in these old records but find others we take to be your brothers and sisters, all listed as colored.

You give your mother's maiden name as Virginia Alis Fortune but we do not find her name nor her marriage to your father. Our marriage records also extend back to 1853.

We find a William Nelson, born in 1862 as a slave, and we find the marriage of Nathaniel Nelson and Lucy Nelson in Essex County in 1854, who are said by the Clerk on the marriage records to be "Free Negroes." We take it that these are your grandparents. We have a long list of Fortune names in Essex and King and Queen Counties, all of whom are listed as colored. We understand that there are several other families who are now calling themselves Indians. We have been

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given no names or data, however, upon which we can trace them in our records but suppose with a little effort we can obtain the information.

With the records of our office before us we cannot classify any of these who are recorded as colored and "Free Negroes" as Indians.

I am sending you a copy from our records of some of the Nelsons and Fortunes. These are the only two families that we have studied.

Yours very truly,

W. A. PLECKER,

State Registrar.

WAP:W

Incoming Correspondence. Apr. 1925. MS The Indian Rights Association, 1882-1986: Series 1, Correspondence, 1864–1989 Box 91, Folder 1. Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Indigenous Peoples of North America, link.gale.com/apps/doc/ACNIPP030488177/INDP?u=virginia_main&sid=bookmark-INDP&pg=131. Accessed 24 June 2024.