

Day, John ^[1]

Day, John

by Charles R. Holloman, 1986; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, December 2022.

1797–1860

John Day, political leader, abolitionist, and jurist, was one of the American founders of the African republic of Liberia and for four years was chief justice of its supreme court. He was born in [Halifax County](#) ^[2], the son of free multiracial people. His putative grandfather on his father's side was Ephraim Knight, a white planter of modest means and considerable education. In 1789 Knight petitioned the North Carolina [General Assembly](#) ^[3] to emancipate his two young multiracial men called Alexander and Richard. The legislature granted the petition but ironically deleted the surname "Knight" and gave the young men the surname "Day." In his will, written 25 May 1789, Ephraim Knight had already provided for the emancipation of Alexander and Richard and their wives, Sabinah and Polly, "with their present and future increase."

Ephraim Knight died in Halifax County in 1800. Soon afterward, Richard Day migrated to a western county and Alexander Day moved to neighboring [Warren County](#) ^[4]. Richard had been taught the trade of a carpenter and Alexander, the trade of a miller. Each of them had a son named John Day. Richard's son John became noted as a talented designer and craftsman of household furniture.

John Day, the son of Alexander, acquired a good education. He became active in the movement for the [emancipation](#) ^[5] of enslaved people in the United States and for their repatriation to what is now Liberia. The African colony, which began under American auspices in 1820, became in 1847 the independent republic of Liberia with a constitution and governmental structure modeled after the United States. Day's political statesmanship and keen intelligence earned for him the highest respect, confidence, and trust not only of his compatriots in Liberia but also of influential American and British officials. He was a member of the convention in 1846 that declared independence, and he was a signer of the constitution. In 1856 he became the second chief justice and held that office until his death in the autumn of 1860.

References:

A Brief History of the Supreme Court of Liberia (1956).

Walter L. Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina*, vol. 25 (1906).

Legislative Papers, North Carolina General Assembly (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

Public manuscript records for Halifax and Warren counties (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

Nathaniel R. Richardson, *Liberia's Past and Present* (1959).

Wilson Ledger, 5 Feb. 1861.

Subjects:

[Biographies](#) ^[6]

[Judges](#) ^[7]

[Political leaders](#) ^[8]

Authors:

[Holloman, Charles R.](#) ^[9]

Origin - location:

[Halifax County](#) ^[10]

From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[11]

1 January 1986 | Holloman, Charles R.

Source URL: <https://ncpedia.org/biography/day-john>

Links

^[1] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/day-john> ^[2] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/halifax> ^[3] <https://ncpedia.org/general-assembly> ^[4] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/warren> ^[5] <https://ncpedia.org/emancipation> ^[6] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> ^[7] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/judges> ^[8] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/political-leaders> ^[9] <https://ncpedia.org/category/authors/holloman-charles-r> ^[10] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-30> ^[11] <https://ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>