

A Guide to the Alexandria (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1859-1925 (bulk 1890-1914)

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia
Library of Virginia
2008

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History

Processed by: Field Processors

Title Statement

A Guide to the Alexandria (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1859-1925 (bulk 1890-1914)

Subtitle: Alexandria (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1859-1925 (bulk 1878-1914)

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Publication Statement

Date: © 2008 By The Library of Virginia. All Rights Reserved.

Publisher: Library of Virginia

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Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from MARC record, created by Greg Crawford, 14 May 2008

Language Usage: Description is in English

Revision Description

2013-11-21 Converted to schema conforming EAD by dtd2schema.vh.xsl.

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Collector

Alexandria (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

Digital images; 48.6 cubic feet (105 boxes)

Location

State Records Center - Archives Annex, Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Alexandria (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1859-1925, use digital images found on the [Chancery Records Index](#) available electronically at the website of the Library of Virginia.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

The bulk of these materials came to the Library of Virginia in transfer of court papers from Alexandria (Va.) in 2007 under accession number 43384. Additional records were transferred to the Library of as part of an undated accession.

Processing Information

Alexandria (Va.) Chancery Causes 1859-1925 were processed by field processors at an unknown date.

Digital images were generated by PTFS through the Library of Virginia's Circuit Court Records Preservation Program in 2007.

Encoded by G. Crawford: 2008; updated by C. Collins: May 2023.

Preferred Citation

Alexandria (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1859-1925 (bulk 1890-1914). (Cite style of suit and chancery index no.). Local government records collection, Alexandria (Va.) Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Additional Alexandria Court Records can be found on microfilm at The Library of Virginia web site. Consult [A Guide to Virginia County and City Records on Microfilm](#).

Historical Information

Context for Record Type: Chancery Causes are cases of equity. According to Black's Law Dictionary they are "administered according to fairness as contrasted with the strictly formulated rules of common law." A judge, not a jury, determines the outcome of the case; however, the judge is basing the decision on findings compiled and documented by Commissioners. Chancery causes are useful when researching local history, genealogical information, and land or estate divisions. They are a valuable source of local, state, social, and legal history and serve as a primary source for understanding a locality's history. Chancery causes document the lived experiences of free and enslaved individuals; women; children; people living with physical disabilities or mental health struggles; people living in poverty; defunct institutions and corporate entities; or those that may not have otherwise left traditional written histories.

Locality History: Alexandria, in Fairfax and Arlington Counties, was named for John Alexander, an early owner of the tract in Fairfax County on which the town was located. The act to establish Alexandria was passed in 1749. Its site had previously been known as Hunting Creek Warehouse and as Belhaven. Alexandria was incorporated as a town in 1779 and was ceded to the federal government in 1789 for use as part of the site of the new national capital. It officially became part of the District of Columbia in 1801 and was renamed Alexandria County by Congress. By an act of 9 July 1846, Alexandria County, including the town of Alexandria, was retroceded to Virginia, which took jurisdiction over the area on 20 March 1847. The town was incorporated as a city in 1852.

Scope and Content

Alexandria (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1859-1925, consists of cases concerning issues of equity brought largely by residents of the county and filed in the circuit court. These cases often involve the following actions: divisions of estates or land, disputes over wills, disputes regarding contracts, debt, divorce, and business disputes. Other less prevalent issues include freedom suits, permissions to sell property, and disputes concerning trespass. Predominant documents found in these chancery causes include bills (documents the plaintiff's complaint), answers (defendant's response to the plaintiff's complaint), decrees (court's decision), depositions, affidavits, correspondence, lists of heirs, deeds, plats, wills, records involving enslaved individuals, business records or vital statistics.

The City Council of Alexandria was the primary plaintiff in 50 suits between 1895 and 1911, with the bulk of the suits ending between 1904 and 1905. A fair number of suits were initiated against both local and non-

local businesses.

Commonly found surnames among the plaintiffs and defendants include Allen, Barker, Beach, Brown, Butts, Cook (also spelled Cooke), Davis, Elliott, Gray, Green, Hall, Henderson, Jackson, Johnson, Johnston, Lee, Miller, Robinson, Seaton, Simpson, Smith, Smoot, Stewart, Taylor, Thomas, Violet, Webb, Wheatley, and Williams.

Arrangement

Organized by case, of which each is assigned a unique index number comprised of the latest year found in case and a sequentially increasing 3-digit number assigned by the processor as cases for that year are found. Arranged chronologically.

These materials were scanned with the bills, answers, and decrees at the end of the case file.