

# A Guide to the Middlesex County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1754-1919

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## History

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## Title Statement

A Guide to the Middlesex County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1754-1919

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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

Middlesex County (Va.) Circuit Court

### Physical Characteristics

Digital images; 32.7 cubic feet (73 boxes).

### Location

Library of Virginia

### Repository

The Library of Virginia

## Administrative Information

## Access Restrictions

Chancery Causes 1754-1912, use digital images found on the [Chancery Records Index](#) available electronically at the website of the Library of Virginia.

Chancery Causes 1913-1919 are unprocessed. Contact Archives Research Services for availability.

## Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

## Acquisition Information

These materials came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from Middlesex County in 2011 under accession number 45454.

## Processing Information

Middlesex Chancery was processed in three batches. Library of Virginia staff processed Middlesex Chancery Causes found in Middlesex Judgements prior to 1999. Additional Middlesex Chancery was found in Judgements and processed in 2007. After a transfer of Middlesex county records in 2011, additional Chancery Causes were processed and completed in 2013. Each successive batch completed was indexed and added to the end of the collection rather than interfiled.

Digital images were generated in 2008 by Crowley Micrographics through the Library of Virginia's Circuit Court Records Preservation Program. Additional digital images were generated in 2013 by Backstage Library Works through the Library of Virginia's Circuit Court Records Preservation Program.

Post-1912 records were previously described separately under the title Middlesex County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1913-1919. Records are now described together.

Chancery Causes 1913-1919 are unprocessed. At this time, there are no plans to process these records.

Encoded by G. Crawford: 2008; Updated by J. Taylor: October 2023.

## Preferred Citation

Middlesex County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1754-1919. (Cite style of suit [and chancery index no. if known]). Local Government Records Collection, Middlesex County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

# Adjunct Descriptive Data

## Related Material

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

Middlesex County is one of Virginia's Lost Records Localities. Additional Middlesex County may be found in the Virginia Lost Records Localities Digital Collection at the Library of Virginia. Search the [Lost Records Localities Digital Collection](#) available at Virginia Memory.

Additional Middlesex County Chancery Causes can be found at the Middlesex County Courthouse.

## 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:** Middlesex County probably was named for the English county. It was formed from Lancaster County about 1669. The county seat is Saluda.

**Lost Locality Notes:** Created in 1669. Numerous loose records from the nineteenth century are missing, including chancery, judgments, and commonwealth causes. Most volumes (including deed books, will books, and order books) exist because court clerk Philemon T. Woodward removed them from the courthouse for safekeeping during the Civil War.

## Scope and Content

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Middlesex County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1754-1919, 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.

Middlesex County is located on the Middle Peninsula on the western shore of Chesapeake Bay. Due to its location, the county was involved in the oyster farming trade, a fact which appears across a number of chancery cases.

These records contain one box of "Orphan Chancery" which is processed but not indexed. These records contain parts, often single items, of chancery causes which could not be further identified as belonging to a certain case.

## 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.

Arrangement of documents within each folder are as follows: Bill, Answer, and Final Decree (if found.)

## Selected Suits of Interest

*Causes of Interest are identified by local records archivists during processing and indexing. These causes are generally selected based upon guiding principles of having historical, genealogical or sensational significance; however, determining what is "of interest" is subjective, and the individual perspective and experience of the describing archivist will affect the material identified.*

### **1773-005: Simon Laughlin vs. Jacob Valentine**

#### **Scope and Content**

Simon Laughlin sued for costs incurred while traveling to a prison in Snow Hill, Maryland a runaway enslaved person thought to belong to the estate of Samuel Batcheloer.

### **1792-007: George Bird vs. Isaac Williams**

#### **Scope and Content**

George Bird was hired to be the overseer of Isaac William's plantation; the suit detailed his work and wages.

### **1809-001: Exrs. of James Mills, etc. vs. James H. T. Lorimer, etc.**

#### **Scope and Content**

A debt suit which includes an estate settlement that contains an extensive list of slaves sold and a catalog of books.

### **1815-003: Agga etc. (enslaved) vs. Exr. of Randolph Segar etc.**

#### **Scope and Content**

Agga, Alice, Sophrina, Solomon, Phil, Lancaster, David, and Cesar were all enslaved by Randolph Segar. In his will, Segar emancipated all those he enslaved, however he died indebted to several people. Agga and the other plaintiffs sued for their freedom, so that they could not be sold to pay off Segar's debts.

### **1823-002: Gdn. of Ann Sutton vs. Lucy Gray**

#### **Scope and Content**

A contract dispute between Ann Sutton's guardian and Lucy Gray over Ann's tuition and board at a school operated by Lucy Gray.

## **1824-001: Hannah Watson vs. Exr. of Mary Watson**

### **Scope and Content**

Mary Watson emancipated Peter and Jenny, a married couple, and their child in her will. She also provided them with a plot of land for their support. Hannah Watson contested the will by claiming that Peter and Jenny had remained in Virginia for longer than a year, breaking a Virginia law that required freed African Americans to leave the state within a year of emancipation. Hannah claimed that because Peter and Jenny had remained in the state, they forfeited their freedom and the land they inherited.

## **1837-001: Beverley Daniel vs. Mordecai C. Booth etc.**

### **Scope and Content**

The suit included an 1821 will from John S. Stubbs of Gloucester County which stated: "I give and bequeath to my once wife Isabella C. Stubbs one cent on account of her abominable conduct in many instances toward me."

## **1840-004: Philip T. Montague vs. Jane E. Montague, infant**

### **Scope and Content**

An estate dispute over a bounty land warrant for 1333 1/3 acres granted to Lieutenant Richard Montague, grandfather of Jane E. Montague, for his services during the Revolutionary War.

## **1846-002: Betsy Hord etc. vs. Thomas Jones, shff. etc.**

### **Scope and Content**

Betsy Hord asks that the defendants be restrained from selling her and her two sons, Joshua and Moses, as payment for her late husband's debt. Hord claims that she was the property of her husband Benjamin Hord and that he emancipated her by deed on 16 July 1842.

## **1848-008: Judy Wood etc. (enslaved) vs. Admr. of Nancy Watts etc.**

### **Scope and Content**

Judy Wood, George Butler, Lucy Butler, William Butler, Mary Butler, Martha Wood, and Abram Wood were all enslaved by Nancy Watts. The plaintiffs sued for their freedom after Watt's 1828 will emancipated them, but the administrator of Watt's will continued to hold them in bondage.

## **1849-011: Thomas M. Stubblefield vs. John Beazley**

### **Scope and Content**

Contract dispute includes plat of land in contention that shows the prison boundaries and illustrations of buildings - jail, stables, court house, clerk's office, Dr. Spratt's shop, and John Bayton's house.

## **1852-003: Arthur Carlow vs. Maria Carlow**

### **Scope and Content**

Arthur Carlow filed a suit for divorce after catching Maria Carlow, his wife having an affair with John Winder, a free man of color. Included in the suit was a letter from Maria Carlow agreeing to the divorce proceedings.

## **1858-003: William P. Woodward vs. Robert Woodward**

### **Scope and Content**

William P. Woodward, the guardian for Robert Woodward, sought the court's permission to sell George, an man enslaved by Robert Woodward. William was unable to hire out George any longer due to his bad reputation and he also feared George would try to flee to a free state.

## **1858-012: Elizabeth Thornton vs. Margaret Thornton**

### **Scope and Content**

The suit was filed to ask permission for the right to sell, Lucy, an enslaved woman, who was described as worthless because of a "very bad disposition... she is a very bad girl, a notorious rought [sic] and cannot

be trusted - she is also very idle and cannot be made to attend her work."

### **1859-018: Elizabeth I. Thornton vs. Catharine Thornton etc.**

#### **Scope and Content**

Elizabeth Thornton sought the court's permission to sell seeks to Lucy, an enslaved woman aged 45, who "has become so unmanageable that she is wholly worthless" and had previously run away. SEE ALSO: 1858-012.

### **1860-013: John B. Jesse etc. vs. Turner Reavis & wife etc.**

#### **Scope and Content**

This estate dispute involves the distribution of slaves and other property and includes a 1793 Deed of Emancipation of Thomas Richie of Gloucester County which sets his slaves free once they reach the age of twenty-one.

### **1873-016: Joseph W. Statins for etc. vs. Henry L. Layton etc.**

#### **Scope and Content**

The case was a debt dispute which involved blockaded goods purchased but captured by Union forces before they were delivered. The answer and depositions identify Joseph W. Statins as a known blockade runner during the Civil War.

### **1884-014: Admr. of Elliott P. Jones vs. Laurence Bayne etc.**

#### **Scope and Content**

Estate dispute contains family correspondence between the Jones and Calef families. Topics included in the correspondence are: children's education, the coming war, and white perspectives on the people they enslaved.

### **1886-003: Michael Russell etc. vs. Admr. of Dormer Oaks**

#### **Scope and Content**

The suit contains correspondence to family in Scotland. John Russell immigrated to Baltimore from Scotland and wrote to his aunt, Mrs. Dormer Oaks about his arrival.

### **1886-004: W. C. Conrad vs. John Purcell etc. and 1886-005: William Fears vs. Pinkney Hodges etc.**

#### **Scope and Content**

Both of these suits involve disputes over the ownership of oyster planting grounds.

### **1887-004: Freeman Higgins vs. Robert Daniel etc.**

#### **Scope and Content**

Higgins, a schooner owner in the business of buying oysters in Virginia, sues the Middlesex County oyster inspector for making "threats of violence and force" and requiring him to pay a fee before he could buy oysters to take for sale at the Port of Orleans.

### **1887-005: John Bohannon etc. vs. James Rolley etc.**

#### **Scope and Content**

Schooner owners claim that county oyster inspectors and commandant of the Virginia Oyster Navy are hindering their rights to purchase oysters.

### **1889-008: John Jones vs. Mary Jane Jones**

#### **Scope and Content**

Divorce suit includes marriage certificate of Mary Jones's illegal second marriage to Edward Wood.

## **1889-009: Robert Henry Carter vs. Emily Carter**

### **Scope and Content**

Married 4 October 1885, Robert Henry Carter sought a divorce from his wife who was arrested for murdering his child from his first marriage, Lila Carter. Emily Carter was convicted 27 February 1886 and sentenced to ten years in the penitentiary.

## **1891-008: Oscar Holliday vs. Fannie Holliday**

### **Scope and Content**

Oscar Holliday filed a divorce suit on the grounds of adultery. He had caught Fannie Holliday, his wife, with another man and shot her paramour.

## **1892-007: Francis South vs. Mary W. South**

### **Scope and Content**

Divorce suit in which the husband and his witnesses accuse wife of having affairs with "colored men."

## **1892-010: Admr. of Manus Rowan vs. Admr. of Winnie Carey etc.**

### **Scope and Content**

Estate dispute includes a drawing of a family tree for the families McCarty/Tomlin/Rowan.

## **1892-027: Creds. of Robert L. Montague vs. Admr. of Robert L. Montage**

### **Scope and Content**

The suit contains a letter from 13 June 1873, which described C.B. Robb's destruction of his own letters and papers during the Civil War to protect them from falling into the hands of the Union Army.

## **1893-016: Trst. for Martha L. Taylor vs. Archibald Taylor & wife etc.**

### **Scope and Content**

Thomas Fauntleroy letter to Wallace Woodward, dated 11 February 1893, references economic depression of 1893, railroads, and the Sherman Silver Law.

## **1894-027: Lucy Ann Haile etc. vs. Byron Wake, infant etc.**

### **Scope and Content**

Suit includes family tree for descendants of Robert Mountain.

## **1895-006: Thomas Harris vs. Fannie Harris**

### **Scope and Content**

In this divorce suit of an African American couple, Thomas Harris went in front of the congregation of Grafton Baptist Church and accused his wife of having an affair with W. E. Thompson, a pastor in the church who stayed in the Harris home.

## **1898-006: John Laws vs. Alice Laws**

### **Scope and Content**

In his bill for divorce, John Laws claims he was forced to marry when a warrant was issued charging him with seducing Alice Bumpass under promise of marriage. Laws believed that the marriage was the easiest and cheapest way out of the trouble, and he left Alice immediately after the ceremony. After Alice gave birth to a "white girl child," John Laws believed that he should be absolved of any wrong doing since he was an African American.

## **1898-034: D. Morelli etc. vs. W. W. Moody etc.**

### **Scope and Content**

#### **Scope and Content**

A group of Italian immigrants sue a representative of the Gray Improvement Co. for nonpayment of contracted work.

### **1902-026: Annie B. Tolle vs. Admr. of Joel Cilley etc.**

#### **Scope and Content**

Annie B. Tolle, who claimed to be well-educated and an accomplished musician, left her own property in Baltimore to move to Middlesex Co. to stay with her aunt and uncle under the promise that she would inherit their property after their deaths. Annie claims that she worked for them unpaid - she was "their cook, their maid, their washerwoman, their nurse, their all" - and sued the estate of her uncle for control of his property.

### **1903-002: Charles W. Morris vs. Mary Morris**

#### **Scope and Content**

Charles Morris claimed that he was accused by Mary's father of impregnating his daughter. With a warrant out for his arrest and his life threatened, Charles went through with the marriage despite claiming his innocence. When Charles asked Mary why she accused him instead of the men she had actually been with, she replied "because I want you."

### **1903-018: Mary Daniel etc. vs. Admr. of William Walton etc.**

#### **Scope and Content**

The suit includes broadside for a baseball exhibition held at the Tappahannock fair between Warsaw, Bowling Green, and the Tappahannock Picked Team.

### **1906-005: Mary A. Smith vs. George Smith**

#### **Scope and Content**

In her bill for divorce, Mary Smith requested that her husband be restrained from interfering with her children and from demanding and collecting any wages earned by the children.

### **1907-033: Andrew Courtney vs. Mary Courtney**

#### **Scope and Content**

Divorce suit. Andrew Courtney accused Mary Courtney, his wife, of adultery and running off to Hartford, Connecticut with Beverly Smith, a married man. Mary Courtney claimed she went to Hartford for work and accused her husband of adultery, as well as abuse, and the operation of a speakeasy. Mary Courtney produced several letters written to her husband from various women, one of which included a lock of hair with her letter. (The alleged affair between Mary Courtney and Beverly Smith is referenced in the Middlesex County divorce suit Mary Ellen Smith vs. Beverly Smith, 1910-014.)

### **1910-008: James Williams vs. Lucy Williams**

#### **Scope and Content**

James Williams filed for divorce on the grounds of adultery. When confronted about her affair, Lucy Williams threatened to split her husband's head with an axe.

### **1911-007: Mary F. Morris by etc. vs. R. F. Ransom etc.**

#### **Scope and Content**

Mary F. Morris sued for compensation for the eleven months she spent nursing 20-year-old Mary I. Prince through an illness/death.

### **1911-011: George A. Marks vs. Russell A. Davis**

#### **Scope and Content**

Bill and depositions include a lot of information about operating a general mercantile business.

### **1912-005: James Grinells vs. George W. Daniel, Jr.**

**Scope and Content**

James Grinells filed suit for an injunction to halt construction of new buildings and to restrain the use of existing buildings located on the North End wharf, owned and operated first by the Weems Steamboat Co. then by the Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia Railroad Co. Said buildings were interfering with a breakwater and its privileges operated by James Grinells and negatively impacting his business operations.