

A Guide to the Newport News (Va.) and Warwick County (Va.) Commonwealth Causes, 1865-1919

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1865-1919

A Collection in the Library of Virginia 1209028-1209047, 1209050-1209068, 1209076-1209077

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Descriptive Summary

Barcode numbers:

1209028-1209047, 1209050-1209068, 1209076-1209077

Language

English

Collector

Newport News (Va.) Circuit Court.

Physical Characteristics

19 cu. ft. (42 boxes)

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

These items came to the Library of Virginia in transfers of court papers from the city of Newport News.

Preferred Citation

Newport News (Va.) and Warwick County (Va.) Commonwealth Causes, 1865-1919. Local government records collection, Newport News (City) Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia 23219.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

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

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

For more information and a listing of lost records localities see [Lost Records research note](#).

Historical Information

Newport News was located in Warwick County, which is now extinct. The origin of the name is uncertain but the phrase "Newportes News" appeared in documents as early as 1619 and probably commemorated Christopher Newport, who made five voyages to Virginia between 1607 and 1619. Newport News was a small settlement until late in the nineteenth century, when it became the eastern terminus of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway. It was established in 1880 and incorporated as a city by act of the General Assembly in 1896 without ever having been incorporated as a town. Newport News was enlarged by consolidation with the city of Warwick in 1858.

Warwick County (extinct) was named either for Robert Rich, earl of Warwick, a prominent member of the London Company, or for the county of Warwick in England. The county was originally called Warwick River and was one of the original shires, or counties, first enumerated in 1634. The shorter name was adopted in 1643. Warwick County became extinct in 1952, when it became the city of Warwick. The new city was consolidated with the city of Newport News in 1958 and took the latter's name. Denbigh was the county seat.

County court records were destroyed at several times with most destruction occurring during the Civil War. The clerk's office was burned on 15 December 1864. County court minute books and loose records from 1787 to 1819 were destroyed by the fire. Additional records were burned in Richmond on 3 April 1865, where they had been moved for safekeeping during the Civil War.

Scope and Content

Newport News (Va.) and Warwick County (Va.) Commonwealth Causes, 1865-1919, are criminal court cases that consist primarily of warrants, summons, subpoenas, indictments, recognizances, and verdicts handed down by grand juries and other legal authorities in order to prosecute individuals who violated the penal code. These offenses ranged in severity from murder, rape, assault and battery, and larceny to anti-trust issues, vagrancy, slander, liquor law violations, prostitution, and contempt of court.

Newport News corporation court causes contain mugshot photographs and physical descriptions for convicted felons dating from circa 1909 September to 1912. If a photograph is in a case, the folder is marked "photo" in upper right corner. If a physical description exists but the photograph was missing at the time of processing, this is also noted.

Warrants were issued by grand juries, judges, and justices of the peace directing law enforcement officials to

either arrest and imprison a person suspected of having committed a crime or to cause an individual to appear in court to answer accusations made against them. Peace warrants directing an offender to "keep the peace of the Commonwealth" or to restrain from any violent acts are commonly found in assault and battery cases.

Summonses were used to call a suspected person to appear in court. A summons could also be issued to direct witnesses or victims to come before the court in order to provide evidence or information deemed pertinent to a case. Subpoenas were also used to order witnesses to court to give evidence.

An indictment is the official, written description of the crime that an accused individual is suspected of committing, which is approved by a grand jury and presented to a court in order to begin legal proceedings. Due to this process, indictments are often referred to as "presentments."

Verdicts are the formal pronouncements made by juries on issues submitted to them by a judge or other law enforcement official. In the case of a guilty verdict, a judge will sentence the offender. Sentences may include a fine, corporal punishment, and/or imprisonment.

Recognizances were bonds or obligations made in court by which a person promised to do a certain thing such as keep the peace or to appear when called. They are common in assault and battery cases. Often they functioned as a bail bond that guaranteed an unjailed criminal defendant's return for a court date.

Index Terms

Corporate Names:

Newport News (Va.) Circuit Court.

Subjects:

African Americans -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Antitrust law -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Assault and battery -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Contempt of court -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Crime -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Criminals -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Forgery -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Larceny -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Liquor laws -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Murder -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Prostitution -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Rape -- Virginia -- Newport News.

Geographical Names:

Newport News (Va.) -- History.

Genre and Form Terms:

Identification photographs -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Indictments -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Local government records -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Subpoenas -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Summons -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Verdicts -- Virginia -- Newport News.
Warrants -- Virginia -- Newport News.

Added Entry - Corporate Name:

Newport News (Va.) Corporation Court.
Warwick County (Va.) Circuit Court.
Warwick County (Va.) County Court.

Arrangement

Arranged by locality then court then ended court date and then alphabetically by defendant surname.

Selected Commonwealth Causes of Interest

Newport News Corporation Court: 1900 Feb, Commonwealth vs. Walter Wood.

Scope and Content

Murder. Includes photos of murdered man. See also coroner's inquisition of John Gloven for depositions.

Newport News Corporation Court: 1907 June, Commonwealth vs. Willie Adkins.

Scope and Content

Vagrant and incorrigible youth. Willie was 8 years old and send to the Negro reform school.

Newport News Corporation Court: 1909 Mar, Commonwealth vs. Z. T. Jones.

Scope and Content

Attempted rape of crippled child by a city policeman. Includes extensive depositions and the child's underpants as an exhibit.

Newport News Corporation Court: 1910 Dec, Commonwealth vs. Richard Hardy Biggs.

Scope and Content

Murder of his girlfriend by shooting her in the city street. Biggs was convicted and executed at state penitentiary 1911. Suit papers include a mug shot photo and various legal wrangling about legal technicalities involving the execution.

Newport News Corporation Court: 1911 Apr, Commonwealth vs. A. H. Harris, etc.

Scope and Content

Anti-trust suit where fire insurance agents were accused of colluding to set fire insurance rates in the city. Fairly large suit with lots of exhibits including maps of the city and an annotated Sanborn book.

Newport News Corporation Court: 1912 Apr, Commonwealth vs. Mildred Abbott, etc.

Scope and Content

Immoral scandalous infamous obscene etc song and dance involving Irving Berlin's song "Everybody's Doin' It Now" and the dance the Turkey Trot. Suit papers include sheet music.

Newport News Corporation Court: 1912 Apr, Commonwealth vs. Lucy May Barnes.

Scope and Content

Murder. Includes a diagram of house where took place and gunshot tests to prove or disprove witness statements.

Warwick County County Court: 1882 July, Commonwealth vs. C. L. Logan.

Scope and Content

Fined \$2.50 for having an illegal lemonade stand.

Warwick County County Court: 1884 May, Commonwealth vs. Henry Harris.

Scope and Content

Fined \$5.00 for shooting a pistol in public on Sunday after it was established that he had borrowed the pistol to kill a rat.

Warwick County County Court: 1887 Feb, Commonwealth vs. O. Bagley, George~, and R. Woodward.

Scope and Content

Riot. Were trying to prevent employees at docks of Newport News and Mississippi Valley Co. at Old Dominion Steamship Co. from working. See also Warwick County Circuit Court appeal dated 1888 Mar Commonwealth vs. Oliver Bagley for good testimony.

Warwick County County Court: 1887 Nov, Commonwealth vs. James C Withers.

Scope and Content

Bigamy. Good depositions and elaborate arguments on appeal.

Warwick County County Court: 1893 Mar, Commonwealth vs. Hardy B. Seay, etc.

Scope and Content

Riot, assault, assault on sheriff (6 counts). See also Warwick County Circuit Court appeal dated 1893 June Commonwealth vs. Hardy B. Seay, especially testimony about election-related riot and racial issues.

Warwick County County Court: 1894 Nov, Commonwealth vs Fed Lewis.

Scope and Content

Larceny of bunch of bananas worth \$1.00. Guilty and sentenced to 3 months jail.

Warwick County County Court: 1897 July, Commonwealth vs. the sloop Jesse James.

Scope and Content

Boat forfeit to the state because used to dredge oysters, a crime.

Warwick County County Court: 1900 Jan, Commonwealth vs. Charles H. Robinson.

Scope and Content

Embezzlement of public funds; grand larceny. Robinson was a justice of the peace and was indicted and tried repeatedly for stealing fees and fines, extortion, and not following law or procedure. Cases against him began in 1893 Oct. in the circuit court for embezzlement when he was a lawyer and agent for the firm of Dabney and Co. Numerous cases throughout the county and circuit courts. Was almost never convicted.

Warwick County Circuit Court: 1904 Nov, Commonwealth vs. James Thomas Outlaw.

Scope and Content

Housebreaking. Was ever a man more suitably named to be a criminal?

Warwick County Circuit Court: 1906 May, Commonwealth vs. Walter Champion.

Scope and Content

Give liquor (1/2 pint whiskey) to child with the intent to injure or kill.

Warwick County Circuit Court: 1907 May, Commonwealth vs. Willetta Mossom alias Willetta Hughes.

Scope and Content

Bigamy. Suit contains both marriage licenses as exhibits.

Warwick County Circuit Court: 1910 Jan, Commonwealth vs. C. J. Carpenter and C. L. Hunter.

Scope and Content

Lift coupling pin of train causing cars to part between stations endangering lives. Each fined \$100 and received 10 days in jail.

Warwick County Circuit Court: 1911 July, Commonwealth vs. Eliza Bryant.

Scope and Content

Drunk in a church.

Warwick County Circuit Court: 1911 July, Commonwealth vs. Florence Yarbrough.

Scope and Content

Larceny. Suit contains samples of the fabric she was alleged to have stolen from a store.

Warwick County Circuit Court: 1912 Jan, Commonwealth vs. Minnie Wynne.

Scope and Content

Poisoned chickens.