

A Guide to the Accomack County (Va.) District Court Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1790-1808

Accomack County (Va.) District Court Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1790-1808
1790-1808

A Collection in the Library of Virginia 0007573136
Library of Virginia
2015

Author: Greg Crawford

History

Processed by: LVA staff

Title Statement

A Guide to the Accomack County (Va.) District Court Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1790-1808

Subtitle: Accomack County (Va.) District Court Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1790-1808

Collection: 0007573136

Author: Greg Crawford

Publication Statement

Date: ©2015 By The Library of Virginia. All Rights Reserved.

Publisher: Library of Virginia

[Conditions of Use](#)

Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from being created directly into EAD, created by Greg Crawford, 13 April 2015

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Barcode number

0007573136

Language

English

Collector

Accomack County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

.35 cu. ft.

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

Patrons are to use digital images found at [Virginia Untold: the African American Narrative](#).

Acquisition Information

These items came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from Accomack County.

Preferred Citation

Accomack County (Va.) District Court Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1790-1808. Local government records collection, Accomack County (Va.) County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va. 23219.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Additional Accomack County court records can be found at the Library of Virginia.

Historical Information

Accomack County was named for the Accomac Indians, who lived on the Eastern Shore at the time of the first English settlement in Virginia. The word means "on-the-other-side-of-water place" or "across the water." It was one of the original eight shires, or counties, first enumerated in 1634 and spelled Accomac without the k. The county's name was changed to Northampton County in 1643. The present county was formed from Northampton about 1663. In October 1670, the General Assembly temporarily reunited Accomack and Northampton Counties as Northampton County. In November 1673, Accomack County was again separated from Northampton. In early records, the county's name was spelled many ways. In 1940 the General Assembly adopted the present spelling, Accomack. The county gained a small part of the southern end of Smith's Island from Somerset County, Maryland, in 1879, after the United States had approved boundary changes between Virginia and Maryland that had been agreed to in 1877. The county seat is Accomac.

The District Court was created in 1788. The purpose of the creation of the District Court was to alleviate congestion in the General Court which had caused unreasonable delays in the adjudication of common law cases. Virginia was divided into eighteen districts, each composed of several counties, plus the district of Kentucky. Courts were held in each district twice yearly and cases were heard from the several counties in that district. The District Court always met at the same place in each district, and its records were kept at that one location. The District Courts were abolished in 1808 and were replaced by the Superior Courts of Law.

Slaves could sue for emancipation if they were descendant(s) of a free female ancestor, typically a Native American (Hening Statutes, volume 2, p.170.)

Scope and Content

Accomack County (Va.) County District Court Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1790-1808, consist of suits initiated by slaves seeking to gain their freedom in the district court. Cases are identified by style of suit consisting of plaintiff and defendant names. Surnames of others involved in a suit, including secondary plaintiffs and defendants, witnesses, deponents and affiants, and family members with surnames different from the plaintiff or defendant are indexed. Also identified are names of slaves and slaveowners identified in suit as well as whether slave(s) won their freedom. Predominant documents found in freedom suits include petitions, records of suits, depositions, affidavits, wills, among other items. Information found in documents include slave's argument for freedom, acquisition of slaves by slaveowners, slave ancestry, and relationship between slaves and slaveowners.

Index Terms

Corporate Names:

Accomack County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Subjects:

African Americans -- History -- Virginia -- Accomack County.

Slaveholders -- Virginia -- Accomack County.

Slavery -- Virginia -- Accomack County.

Geographical Names:

Accomack County (Va.) -- History.

Genre and Form Terms:

Civil actions -- Virginia -- Accomack County.

Freedom suits -- Virginia -- Accomack County.

Judicial records -- Virginia -- Accomack County.

Local government records -- Virginia -- Accomack County.

Added Entry - Corporate Name:

Accomack County (Va.) District Court

Selected Suits of Interest

1794 Oct., Thomas (slave) vs. Edward Roberts:

Scope and Content

Thomas sued for damages claiming false imprisonment. He petitioned for his freedom claiming that he had been set free by Roberts' mother's last will and testament. She became a Quaker while living in Philadelphia, PA and her new religious convictions influenced her to free her slaves.

1795 May, Mary (slave) vs. Edward Roberts:

Scope and Content

Mary sued for damages claiming false imprisonment. He petitioned for his freedom claiming that he had been set free by Roberts' mother's last will and testament. She became a Quaker while living in Philadelphia, PA and her new religious convictions influenced her to free her slaves.

1796 May, George alias George Cook (slave) vs. John Walker, Jr:

Scope and Content

George sued for damages claiming false imprisonment. He petitioned for his freedom from slavery claiming he was a descendant of Native Americans.

1801 May, Major (slave) vs. Anna Maria Andrews:

Scope and Content

Major petitioned for freedom from slavery claiming he was a descendant of Native Americans.

1802 May, Petition of Cyrus (slave):

Scope and Content

Cyrus petitioned for freedom from slavery claiming he was a descendant of Native Americans.

1804 Oct, Mary (slave) vs. Robert Andrews:

Scope and Content

Mary sued for damages claiming false imprisonment. She petitioned for her freedom from slavery claiming she was a descendant of Native Americans.

1805 Oct, Iby alias Abby Harmon (slave) vs. William S. Roberts:

Scope and Content

Ibby sued for damages claiming false imprisonment. She petitioned for her freedom from slavery claiming she was a descendant of Native Americans. The suit includes a deposition that recounts Ibby's genealogy.

1806 May, Lydia (slave) vs. John Mears:

Scope and Content

Lydia sued for damages claiming false imprisonment. She petitioned for her freedom from slavery claiming she was a descendant of Native Americans. She successfully won her freedom.

1808 May, Joe (slave) vs. Exr. of Jacob Lilliston, etc.:

Scope and Content

Joe sued for damages claiming false imprisonment. He petitioned for his freedom from slavery claiming that he had been set free by Lilliston's last will and testament.