

A Guide to the Rockbridge County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1781-1958 (bulk 1858-1912)

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia
Library of Virginia
2009

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History

Processed by: Library of Virginia staff

Title Statement

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Subtitle: Rockbridge County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1781-1958 (bulk 1858-1912)

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Publication Statement

Date: © 2009 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 G. Crawford, 08 January 2009

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

Rockbridge County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

Digital images; 0.45 cubic feet (1 box)

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Chancery Causes, 1781-1931 digital images can be found on the [Chancery Records Index](#) available electronically at the website of the Library of Virginia.

Chancery Causes 1932-1958 indexed but not digitized. Indexed information can be found on the [Chancery Records Index](#)

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

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

Processing Information

The majority of these records were processed in 2003. At this time, there are no plans to digitize the Chancery Causes, 1932-1958.

Encoded by G. Crawford: 2009; Updated by E. Swain: January 2025.

Preferred Citation

Rockbridge County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1781-1958. (Cite style of suit [and chancery index no. if available]). Local government records collection, Rockbridge County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, 23219.

Custodial History

Original Records were transferred to the Library of Virginia in 2001 under accession 38891. Records were later returned to the locality in 2008 by request of the clerk of the Rockbridge County Circuit Court.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

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

Location of Originals

Rockbridge County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1781-1958 are retained in the locality. Contact the clerk of the Circuit Court for access.

Historical Information

Context of 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: Rockbridge County was named for Natural Bridge, an exceptional rock formation located in the county. The county was formed from Augusta and Botetourt Counties in 1778, and another part of Botetourt was added in 1888. The county seat is the city of Lexington.

Scope and Content

Rockbridge County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1781-1958, 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.

This collection also contains one box of "Orphan Chancery." These records contain parts, often single items, of chancery causes which could not be further identified as belonging to a certain case. This box is currently held at the Library of Virginia and has not been digitally scanned nor been indexed.

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.

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.

1851-005: Exr. of Martha Porter vs. Daniel (enslaved) etc.:

Scope and Content

Martha Porter wanted the people she enslaved to be removed to Ohio following her death. The executor of her estate, Alexander Davis, was either unable or unwilling to carry out her request. Daniel was not therefore not emancipated. Daniel initiated a suit on the law side of the court (referring to himself as Daniel Porter) against Davis and won his freedom. See [Virginia Untold](#) for freedom suit.

1855-003: Alexander Patton, etc. vs. William A. Donald, etc.:

Scope and Content

A dispute between two sects of the Presbyterian church that met in the same building, Timber Ridge Presbyterian Church, built in 1756, making it the oldest Presbyterian church in Rockbridge County. The plaintiffs were members of the Associate Reformed Church, a sect of the Presbyterian church. They were also referred to as Seceders. The defendants were members of the "established" Presbyterian Church. Both sides presented their version of the history of the Presbyterian church going back to 1733. The established Presbyterians asserted that the ARC sect was not Presbyterian. Both sides presented their version of the founding of the Timber Ridge church in 1759 and how the ARC congregation attained use of the Timber Ridge church in 1814. Both sides presented their version of renovating Timber Ridge church (discussion of tearing down Timber Ridge) and building nearby Fairfield church.

1860-065: Executor of Hugh Adams vs. Legatees of Hugh Adams:

Scope and Content

The cause concerns the settlement of the estate of Hugh Adams and his wish for the emancipation of the people he enslaved, his estate sold, and the proceeds used to transport those emancipated to relocate to Liberia. Other smaller bequests in his will were for various family members. The majority of the suit is composed of estate accounts as the executor tried to settle the estate and encountered various difficulties in his attempt to carry out the intent of Adams' will. A letter to Adams from an individual Adams formerly enslaved, while living in Liberia used as an exhibit.