

A Guide to the Washington County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1849-1962

Washington County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1849-1962 (bulk 1874-1913)
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History

Processed by: Field Processed

Title Statement

A Guide to the Washington County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1849-1962

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Author: G. Crawford

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Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from MARC record, created by Greg Crawford, 18 March 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

Washington County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

95.58 cubic feet (211 boxes); Digital images; 308 Microfilm Reels.

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Washington County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1848-1913 digital images can be found on the [Chancery Records Index](#) available electronically at the website of the Library of Virginia. Please use digital images.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

These records came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from Washington County (Va.) in 2004 under the accession number 40995, and an additional item purchased from Historical Collectible Auctions in 2007 under accession number 43477.

Processing Information

Microfilm generated from original material processed in the field. Digital images were then created from the microfilm in 2019. Additional records were processed and interfiled into the collection during a cataloguing assessment project in 2024.

Encoded by G. Crawford: 2009; Updated by E. Swain: November 2024.

Preferred Citation

Washington County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1849-1913. (Cite style of suit and chancery index no.). Local government records collection, Washington County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, 23219.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

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

Washington County is one of Virginia's Lost Records Localities. Additional Washington County Court Records may be found in the Virginia Lost Records Localities Collection at the Library of Virginia. Search the [Lost Records Localities Database](#) found at the Library of Virginia web site.

See also: [Dickenson County \(Va.\) Chancery Causes.](#)

See also: [Lee County \(Va.\) Chancery Causes.](#)

See also: [Russell County \(Va.\) Chancery Causes.](#)

See also: [Scott County \(Va.\) Chancery Causes.](#)

See also: [Smyth County \(Va.\) Chancery Causes.](#)

See also: [Tazewell County \(Va.\) Chancery Causes.](#)

See also: [Wise County \(Va.\) Chancery Causes.](#)

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: Washington County was named for George Washington who had been commander in chief of the Continental army for little more than a year when the county was formed from Fincastle County in 1776. At the time of its founding, Washington County included all or parts of present-day Russell, Lee, Scott, Tazewell, Smyth, Wise, Buchanan, and Dickenson counties, but it lost the bulk of its territory in 1786 with the formation of Russell County. The county court first met on 28 January 1777. A part of Montgomery County was added in 1777. The county seat is Abingdon.

Lost Locality Notes: Minute books for the periods 1787-1819 and 1821-1837 and many loose papers were lost in a courthouse fire set by Union soldier James Wyatt on 15 December 1864 during the Civil War. Wyatt, who was raised in Washington County, sought revenge for what he claimed was a wrong done against him by

a county court judge before the war.

Scope and Content

Washington County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1849-1962, 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.

These records contain 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.

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.

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