

A Guide to the Amelia County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1738-1939 (bulk 1747-1913)

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia
Library of Virginia
2010

Author: Greg Crawford

History

Processed by: L. Jones and C. Freed

Title Statement

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Subtitle: Amelia County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1738-1939 (bulk 1850-1913)

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Publication Statement

Date: © 2010 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 Greg Crawford, 18 March 2010

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

Amelia County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Physical Characteristics

Digital images; 77.35 cubic feet (164 boxes)

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Amelia County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1738-1939, use digital images found electronically on the [Chancery Records Index](#) available on the website of the Library of Virginia.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

The bulk of these materials came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from Amelia County in 2003 under accession number 40724. Additional records were transferred to the Library of Virginia in 2001 under accession number 37994, in 2004 under accession number 41507, in 2007 under accession number 43189, and as part of an undated accession.

Processing Information

Amelia County (Va.) Chancery Causes 1738-1939 were likely processed by L. Jones and C. Freed in 2003.

Digital images were generated from microfilm by OCLC through the Library of Virginia's Circuit Court Records Preservation Program in 2009.

Encoded by G. Crawford: 2010; updated by C. Collins: April 2023.

Preferred Citation

Amelia County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1738-1939 (bulk 1850-1913). (Cite style of suit and chancery index no.). Local government records collection, Amelia County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

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

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: Amelia County was named for Amelia Sophia Eleanora, daughter of King George II. It was formed from Prince George and Brunswick Counties by an act passed in 1734 to take effect on 25 March 1735. The county court first met on 9 May 1735. The county seat is Amelia.

Scope and Content

Amelia County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1738-1939, 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.

While there are several suits concerning the freedom of enslaved individuals, these cases largely represent the perspective of white enslavers and their disputes involving the sale, hiring, financial responsibilities, and legality of ownership of Black individuals. Under the system of chattel slavery, laws permitted enslavers to treat enslaved people as personal possessions in the same manner as livestock, farm equipment, or household items.

Commonly found surnames among the plaintiffs and defendants include Archer, Barden, Bass, Bevel (also

spelled Bevil, Bevill, and Beville), Blanton, Booker, Bottom, Burton, Cousins, Craddock, Deaton, Eggleston, Farley, Ford, Foster, Green, Hardaway, Holt, Jackson, Jeter, Leath, Mann, Mumford, Munford, Noble, Perkinson, Pollard, Pride, Randolph, Rowlett, Royall (also spelled Royal), Seay, Southall, Steger, Tabb, Thraves, Townes, Tucker, Vaughn, Walthall (also spelled Walthal), Webster, Willson, Wilson, Wingo, Worsham, and Wright.

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 generally 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.

1804-026: Suckey alias Suckey Jones vs. Admr. of Benjamin Crawley:

Scope and Content

Suckey, described as a "mulatto" woman, was purchased from John Jones of Dinwiddie County, her enslaver, by Benjamin Crawley, who later emancipated Suckey and her son, Jonathan. Crawley's will stipulated that Suckey be provided with several enslaved people and land throughout the remainder of her life, and she sued to the administrator of the estate to fulfill the provisions of the will.

1846-016: Jarret (enslaved) vs. Exr. of William A. Bragg, etc.:

Scope and Content

Jarrett claimed that the executors of his enslaver's will, despite the will including a provision freeing Jarrett, sold him to John B. Chaffin because of debts the estate owed to various creditors. He petitioned the court for his freedom, stating that he was being "illegally detained as a slave." The court ultimately determined that Jarrett was indeed free, assuming the estate of Jarrett's enslaver was sufficient to pay the debts.

1847-003: Billy (enslaved), etc. vs. Admr. of Thomas Blankenship, etc:

Scope and Content

Billy, along with Booker, John, and William Peyton, petitioned the court to free them based on a provision in Thomas Blankenship, their enslaver's, will. The administrator of the estate refused to emancipate them owing to "ambiguity in the will." The court granted them their freedom and ordered that Billy, Booker, John, and William Peyton each receive \$50 from the estate based on another provision in the will.

1857-010: Peggy (enslaved), etc. vs. Benjamin Watkins Bailey

Alfred (enslaved), etc. vs. Mary Bailey:

Scope and Content

Two freedom suits: Milly (enslaved), etc. vs. Jordan Anderson, Jr., and Betty (enslaved), etc. vs. Exr. of Jordan Anderson Sr [1856-032] originating in Chesterfield County, were used by Peggy and other enslaved individuals to petition the court for their freedom. These suits involve additional descendants of Rachel, a formerly enslaved woman and an ancestor all the enslaved complainants have in common, whose emancipation by the will of Jordan Anderson Sr., and a deed Anderson made in 1790, were the impetus for the various chancery causes.

