

A Guide to the Mathews County (Va.) Criminal Records, 1848-1904, 1948, undated

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia
Library of Virginia
2011
Author: Sam Walters

History

Processed by: Library of Virginia staff

Title Statement

A Guide to the Mathews County (Va.) Criminal Records, 1848-1904, 1948, undated

Subtitle: Mathews County (Va.) Criminal Records, 1857-1904, 1948, undated

Author: Sam Walters

Publication Statement

Date: © 2011 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 being created directly into EAD, created by Sam Walters, 04 March 2011

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

Mathews County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

4 cu. ft. (9 boxes)

Location

Library of Virginia; State Records Center- Archives Annex

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

These records came to the Library of Virginia in 2024 under accession 54190 and undated shipments of court papers from Mathews County.

Processing Information

Criminal Records, 1857-1898, were transferred in accession 54190 under the title Mathews County Common Law Dead Papers and were processed using minimal processing standards: Locality records were organized by broad record category (election records, fiduciary records, etc.) with minimal other arrangement. These records have not been flattened, foldered, mended, or separated by individual record type (like summons, appraisements, etc.).

Commonwealth Causes, 1866-1948, undated were processed by S. Walters 2012.

Encoded by S. Walters: April 2012; updated by V. Brooks, September 2025

Preferred Citation

Mathews County (Va.) Criminal Records, 1857-1904, 1948, undated. Local government records collection, Mathews County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va. 23219.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Additional court records for Mathews County can be found on microfilm at the Library of Virginia. Consult ["A Guide to Virginia County and City Records on Microfilm."](#)

Mathews County is one of Virginia's Lost Records Localities. Additional Mathews 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.

Historical Information

Context for Records: Commonwealth causes are criminal court cases filed by the state government that consist primarily of warrants, summons, subpoenas, indictments, recognizances, and verdicts handed down by juries and other legal authorities in order to prosecute individuals who violated the penal code.

The commonwealth causes reveal an inconsistency in forms of conviction and punishment for white versus Black and multiracial individuals. Throughout the early nineteenth century, Virginia legislators revised the laws in ways that reduced the legal status of free Black and multiracial people to that of enslaved, thereby creating a legal system based on race. White Virginians and legislators feared insurrection and passed laws restricting the number of Black and multiracial people allowed to gather in groups. Enslavers could be fined for permitting their enslaved people to hire themselves out for work and enslaved people were jailed on these occasions. While public whipping originated as a form of punishment for all those convicted, in Virginia, it was retained for those who were Black, free or enslaved, and officially outlawed as a punishment for white criminals in 1848. Often, Black individuals served much longer penitentiary sentences while the cases of white men, who had committed the same or similar crimes, were dismissed.

The documents that frequently appear in criminal records include warrants that 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. They also contain summonses, used to call a suspected person, witness, or victim(s) to appear in court, and indictments (sometimes called presentments) are 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. Criminal record additionally include 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.

Locality History: Mathews County was named for Thomas Mathews, of Norfolk, the Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates when it was formed from Gloucester County by a statute passed on 16 December 1790 to take effect on 1 May 1791.

Lost Locality Note: Most Mathews County records were burned in Richmond on 3 April 1865, where they had been moved for safekeeping during the Civil War.

Scope and Content

Mathews County (Va.) Criminal Records, 1857-1904, 1948, undated, are criminal court cases and consist primarily of Commonwealth causes, presentments, recognizances warrants, summons, and indictments 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 assault and battery to homicide.

The 1948 record is a transcript of the criminal case of the Commonwealth of Virginia v. Rainer.

Of note in Series II: Minimally Processed Criminal Records, 1854-1898, are several indictments of "persons unknown," circa 1860-1861, for absconding with enslaved persons by boat.

Arrangement

For descriptive purposes, the collection has been divided into two series:

- Series I: Processed Criminal Records, 1866-1904, 1948, undated
- Series II: Unprocessed Criminal Records, 1857-1898

Box List

Series I: Processed Criminal Records, 1866-1904, 1948, undated

Extent

3.6 cubic feet (8 boxes)

Physical Location Library of Virginia; State Records Center- Archives Annex

Arrangement

Chronological.

Barcode 1208333: Criminal Records, 1866-1871

Barcode 1208334: Criminal Records, 1872-1878

Barcode 1208335: Criminal Records, 1879-1887

Barcode 1208336: Criminal Records, 1887-1892

Barcode 1208337: Criminal Records, 1892-1895

Barcode 1208338: Criminal Records, 1895-1889

Barcode 1208339: Criminal Records, 1899-1904, undated

Barcode 1006184: Transcript, Commonwealth v. Ranier, 1948 April

Series II: Minimally Processed Criminal Records, 1854-1898

Extent

.1 cubic feet

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Arrangement

Unarranged.

Barcode 0007915419: Criminal Records, 1857-1898

