

A Guide to the Accomack County (Va.) District Court Papers, 1789-1808

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia 1200389-1200397, 1207268-1207269, 1208488-1208490, 0007573136

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Descriptive Summary

Barcode numbers

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Language

English

Collector

Accomack County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

6.65 cu. ft. (15 boxes)

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

These items came to the Library of Virginia in shipments of court papers from Accomack County under the accession number 44262.

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Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Additional Accomack 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

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.

The District Court for Accomack and Northampton counties met in the county courthouse of Accomack County.

Scope and Content

Accomack County (Va.) District Court Papers, 1789-1808, consist of civil suits and commonwealth causes that were heard in the District Court of Accomack and Northampton Counties. The majority of cases in this record series relate to matters of debt. Documents commonly found in civil suits include declarations or narrations that explain the plaintiff's complaint, executions, affidavits, and depositions. Suits may include exhibits such as wills, plats, deeds, indentures, estate inventories, and business records. Names of slaves are commonly found in the District Court papers. Additional types of suits heard by the District Court include land ejectment suits and petitions for freedom made by slaves.

Additional records filed with the District Court papers include witness attendance payments, commonwealth claims, subpoenas, summons, judges' appointments, jury records, and copies of deeds, wills, and bonds recorded in the District Court. Also filed with the District Court papers was a copy of suit heard in the Admiralty Court held in Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1783 titled Berry Floyd and others versus Brigantine

Sampson and others.

Index Terms

Corporate Names:

Accomack County (Va.) Circuit Court

Subjects:

African Americans -- History

Civil procedure -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Crime -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Debt -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Estates (Law) -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Right of property -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Slaveholders -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Slaves -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Geographical Names:

Accomack County (Va.) -- History

Northampton County (Va.) -- History

Genre and Form Terms:

Affidavits -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Business records -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Deeds -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Decisions -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Depositions -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Judicial records -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Local government records -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Petitions -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Plats -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Wills -- Virginia -- Accomack County

Added Entry - Corporate Name:

Accomack County (Va.) District Court

Arrangement

Chronological and then alphabetical by surname of plaintiff within each month.

Selected Suits of Interest

1794 Oct., Commonwealth vs. James (free negro):

Scope and Content

Found guilty of assault and battery.

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, Commonwealth vs. Adah Beckett (free negro):

Scope and Content

Adah Beckett was found guilty of murder.

1802 May, Petition of Cyrus (slave):

Scope and Content

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

1802 May, Griffith's lesse vs. Freshwater's heirs:

Scope and Content

Ejectment suit that includes several plats. One is an oversize plat that is a survey of large amount of property found on the seaboard side of the Eastern Shore.

1803-1804, Commonwealth Causes vs. multiple slaveowners:

Scope and Content

Numerous criminal suits involving multiple slaveowners on the Eastern Shore who were indicted for allowing their slaves to go at large and hire themselves out as free people. The time frame for these suits occurred shortly after Gabriel's rebellion.

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. A deposition given by Mary Buck from a freedom suit titled Annis versus Caleb Bradford heard in the District Court of Williamsburg in 1802 was filed as an exhibit in the suit.

1805 May, Commonwealth vs. Esther Collins (free negro):

Scope and Content

Esther Collins was found guilty of assault and battery against a slave.

1805 Oct, Ibbby 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.