

A Guide to the Prince George County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1853-1941

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Descriptive Summary

Barcode numbers

1202536, 0007307820

Language

English

Collector

Prince George County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

.8 cu. ft. (2 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 records from Prince George County.

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Prince George County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1853-1941. Local government records collection, Prince George County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA 23219.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Additional Prince George 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](#).

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

For more information and a listing of lost records localities see [Lost Records research note](#).

Historical Information

Prince George County was formed from Charles City County by a statute adopted on 28 August 1702 to take effect on 23 April 1703. The county was named for Prince George of Denmark, husband of Queen Anne of England.

Most court records were destroyed in 1782 by British troops during the Revolutionary War and again in 1864 by Union troops during the Civil War. A few volumes that record deeds, court orders, and wills exist.

The separate office of coroner appeared in Virginia about 1660. The judicial duty of the office is to hold inquisitions in cases when persons meet sudden, violent, unnatural or suspicious death, or death without medical attendance. The coroner would summon a jury to assist him in determining cause of death. Prior to November 1877, the jurors numbered twelve. Between November 1877 and March 1926, the jurors numbered six. The jury viewed the body of the deceased and heard the testimony of witnesses. The coroner was required to write down witness testimony. After seeing and hearing the evidence, the jury delivered in writing to the coroner their conclusion concerning cause of death referred to as the inquisition. After March 1926, only the coroner determined cause of death. He could require physicians to assist him with determining cause of death. If a criminal act was determined to be the cause of death, the coroner was to deliver the guilty person to the sheriff and the coroners' inquests would be used as evidence in the criminal trial.

Scope and Content

Prince George County (Va) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1853-1941, are investigations into the deaths of individuals who died by a sudden, violent, unnatural or suspicious manner, or died without medical attendance. Causes of death found in coroners' inquisitions include murder, infanticide, suicide, domestic violence, exposure to elements, drownings, train accidents, automobile accidents, and natural causes, or as commonly referred to in the 19th century, visitation by God. Documents commonly found in coroners' inquests include the inquisition, depositions, and summons. Criminal papers such as recognizance bonds can be found in coroner inquisitions. Information found in the inquisition include the name of the coroner, the names of the jurors, the name and age of the deceased if known, gender and race of the deceased, and when, how, and by what means the deceased came to his or her death. If the deceased was African American, the inquest would identify the deceased as a slave or free person if known. If the deceased was a slave, the inquest would include, if known, the name of the slaveowner and the slaveowner's residence. Information found in the depositions include the name of the deponent and his or her account of the circumstances that led to the death of the deceased. Slaves were deponents in coroner investigations.

Index Terms

Corporate Names:

Prince George County (Va.) Circuit Court

Subjects:

African Americans--History
Coroners--Virginia--Prince George County
Death--Causes--Virginia--Prince George County
Free African Americans--Virginia--Prince George County
Infanticide--Virginia--Prince George County
Murder--Investigation--Virginia--Prince George County
Murder victims--Virginia--Prince George County
Slaveholders--Virginia--Prince George County.
Slaves--Virginia--Prince George County.
Suicide--Virginia--Prince George County
Women--Virginia--Prince George County

Geographical Names:

Prince George County (Va.)--History

Genre and Form Terms:

Death records--Virginia--Prince George County
Local government records--Virginia--Prince George County
Reports--Virginia--Prince George County

Arrangement

Chronological by date coroner filed inquisition in the court.

Selected Coroners' Inquisitions of Interest

1869 January, Death of John Gros:

Scope and Content

Died from drinking three pints and a "gill" (quarter pint) of whiskey in five minutes.

1889 December 21, Death of Robert Bland:

Scope and Content

Bland was a prisoner in the county jail. He died when he was "forcibly taken" from the jail by a mob who proceeded to first hang him and then shoot him.

1907 August 20, Death of Pearl Patterson:

Scope and Content

Died after being tortured and poisoned by Charles Anderson and Lula Patterson. Charles and Lula whipped Pearl and beat her with sticks. They also burned her feet and hands by holding them on a hot stove. Finally, they forced her to ingest a "caustic" poison which killed her.

1912 November, Death of Guy Drake:

Scope and Content

Died from being "mashed to death" between a dust chain and sprocket wheel at the Virginia Lumber and Box Company.

1925 December, Death of an unknown black male:

Scope and Content

Died from the explosion of a still