

A Guide to the Tazewell County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1822-1903

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Descriptive Summary

Barcode numbers

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Language

English

Collector

Tazewell County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

.35 cu. ft. (1 box)

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 Tazewell County.

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Historical Information

Tazewell County was named for Henry Tazewell, U.S. senator from Virginia from 1794 until his death in 1799. It was formed from Wythe and Russell Counties in 1799. Parts of Russell County were added in 1807 and 1835, parts of Washington and Wythe Counties were added in 1826, and part of Logan County (West Virginia) was added in 1834.

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

Tazewell County (Va) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1822-1903, 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:

Tazewell County (Va.) Circuit Court

Subjects:

African Americans--History

Coroners--Virginia--Tazewell County

Death--Causes--Virginia--Tazewell County

Free African Americans--Virginia--Tazewell County

Infanticide--Virginia--Tazewell County

Murder--Investigation--Virginia--Tazewell County
Murder victims--Virginia--Tazewell County
Slaveholders--Virginia--Tazewell County.
Slaves--Virginia--Tazewell County.
Suicide--Virginia--Tazewell County
Women--Virginia--Tazewell County

Geographical Names:

Tazewell County (Va.)--History

Genre and Form Terms:

Death records--Virginia--Tazewell County
Local government records--Virginia--Tazewell County
Reports--Virginia--Tazewell County

Arrangement

Chronological by date coroner filed inquisition in the court.

Selected Coroners' Inquisitions of Interest

1822 September, Death of Polly Scrivener:

Scope and Content

Suicide. Hanged herself by a rope around her neck and over the limb of a cherry tree.

1847 June, Death of Dandridge, a slave:

Scope and Content

Suicide. Drowned himself at Whitley's Mill Dam.

1886 September 9, Death of Patrick Kelley:

Scope and Content

Died by falling over a cliff. Kelley's left thigh was broken in the fall and his face and body were "terribly bruised.". His body was found six or seven days after he died.