

A Guide to the York County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1776-1868

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia 0007313057
Library of Virginia
2012

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History

Processed by: Ed Jordan

Title Statement

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Subtitle: York County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1776-1868 0007313057

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Publication Statement

Date: © 2012 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 Laura Travis, 18 January 2012

Language Usage: Description is in English

Revision Description

2013-11-21 Converted to schema conforming EAD by dtd2schema.vh.xsl.

Descriptive Summary

Barcode numbers

0007313057

Language

English

Collector

York 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 York County.

Preferred Citation

York County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1776-1868. Local government records collection, York County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA 23219.

Historical Information

York County was originally named Charles River County, for Charles I, and was one of the eight shires formed in 1634. The present name was given in 1643, probably in honor of James, duke of York, the second son of Charles I

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

York County (Va) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1776-1868, 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:

York County (Va.) Circuit Court

Subjects:

African Americans--History

Coroners--Virginia--York County

Death--Causes--Virginia--York County

Free African Americans--Virginia--York County

Infanticide--Virginia--York County

Murder--Investigation--Virginia--York County

Murder victims--Virginia--York County
Slaveholders--Virginia--York County.
Slaves--Virginia--York County.
Suicide--Virginia--York County
Women--Virginia--York County

Geographical Names:

York County (Va.)--History

Genre and Form Terms:

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

Arrangement

Chronological by date coroner filed inquisition in the court.

Selected Coroners' Inquisitions of Interest

1845 September 15, Death of Mercer M. Burt:

Scope and Content

Died from drowning in Chisman's Creek when he either fell out of or climbed overboard from his small canoe while in a state of intoxication.

1856 May 26, Death of an unknown infant:

Scope and Content

Died from the "cruel and brutal treatment" of Mary Lee, who was a slave and the mother of the infant.

1856 September 30, Death of Thomas Davis:

Scope and Content

Died from a blow or blows on the top of his head and right jaw inflicted by Daniel McHenry Carmines with a slung-shot (which is a weight tied to the end of a piece of string) or some other instrument.