

A Guide to the Lunenburg County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1752-1924

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Descriptive Summary

Barcode numbers

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Language

English

Collector

Lunenburg County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

.45 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 Lunenburg County.

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Historical Information

Lunenburg County was named for King George II, duke of Brunswick-Luneburg, a German possession of England's Hanoverian kings. It was formed from Brunswick County by an act that took effect on 1 May 1746. Part of Lunenburg County was added in 1777. The county seat is Lunenburg.

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

Lunenburg County (Va) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1752-1924, 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:

Lunenburg County (Va.) Circuit Court

Subjects:

African Americans--History

Coroners--Virginia--Lunenburg County

Death--Causes--Virginia--Lunenburg County

Free African Americans--Virginia--Lunenburg County

Infanticide--Virginia--Lunenburg County

Murder--Investigation--Virginia--Lunenburg County

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

Geographical Names:

Lunenburg County (Va.)--History

Genre and Form Terms:

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

Arrangement

Chronological by date coroner filed inquisition in the court.

Selected Coroners' Inquisitions of Interest

1805 April 11, Death of infant child:

Scope and Content

Infant was buried just under the ground with its face downwards; it appears to the jury that the infant was smothered to death with dirt, having been buried by its mother, a slave named Milley.

1817 June 25, Death of Andrew, a slave:

Scope and Content

Murdered by whipping and abuse committed by Pleasants Clarke begun and continued from the sixteenth to the seventeenth of June 1817. The whipping was witnessed and consented to by Robert Scott, Andrew's owner, on the sixteenth but he was not present at the whipping and abuse of said slave on the seventeenth.

1827 April 9, Death of John Hamlin:

Scope and Content

Hamlin was assaulted, choked, and suffocated to death by ten of his own slaves. The slaves further did burn the body of Hamlin to ashes with fire, scattered the bones and ashes and partially concealed the same by ploughing over the bones and ashes. The heart of Hamlin was found.

1902 January 13, Death of infant Smith:

Scope and Content

Died by the explosion of a thirty-two caliber cartridge which ignited from the fire before which her mother Rosa Smith was sitting with said child in her arms.