

A Guide to the Richmond (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1824-1946 (bulk 1916-1946)

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia

Library of Virginia

2013

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History

Processed by: Mary Dean Carter

Title Statement

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Subtitle: Richmond (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1824-1946 (bulk 1916-1946)

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Publication Statement

Date: © 2013 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 Greg Crawford, 11 July 2013

Language Usage: Description is in English

Revision Description

2013-12-19 Converted to schema conforming EAD by dtd2schema.vh.xsl.

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Collector

Richmond (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

13.06 cubic feet (30 boxes)

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions. A portion of the collection is unprocessed.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

These items came to the Library of Virginia in shipments of court records from the city of Richmond.

Preferred Citation

Richmond (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1865-1946 (bulk 1916-1946). Local government records collection, Richmond (City) Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA 23219.

Historical Information

The city of Richmond, located between Henrico and Chesterfield Counties, was named by William Byrd (1674-1744), who envisioned the development of a city at the falls of the James River and with the help of William Mayo laid out the town in 1737. The name probably came from the English borough of Richmond upon Thames, which Byrd visited on several occasions. Richmond was established in 1742 and in 1779 was designated the capital of Virginia effective 30 April 1780. It was incorporated as a town, although "stiled the city of Richmond," in 1782 and was incorporated as a city in 1842. It served as the capital of the Confederacy from mid-1861 to April 1865. Richmond was enlarged by the annexation of Manchester (or South Richmond) in 1910, and by the addition of Barton Heights, Fairmount, and Highland Park in 1914. Further annexations from Chesterfield County occurred in 1942 and 1970.

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

Richmond (Va) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1865-1946 (bulk 1916-1946), 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. 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.

Selected Coroners' Inquisitions of Interest

1870 December 3, Death of Mollie Cummings:

Cummings came to her death from narcotic poisoning, administered by herself. Dora Rose testified that Cummings had said to her "I want to die; I don't want to live anymore. (T)he person I love does not care for me."

1872 May 18, Jenny Young King:

Young came to her death by medicines administered by N.A.H. Goddin to produce abortion, through the instigation of Wesley M. Brock. King had claimed to have been poisoned.

1873 September 30, George J. Derbyshire:

Derbyshire came to his death by accidentally shooting himself with a shotgun. Detailed testimony, some conflicting, given by ten witnesses. The shooting took place in or near Hollywood Cemetery. Wirt Turner testified that he and some other boys, including George Derbyshire, were bathing in the canal and calling one another nicknames. "I called George a Negro and he replied that he knew some there who had more

black blood than he had. Afterwards, he called me 'clubfoot'. There was no blow passed between Derbyshire and myself while at the Canal, or at anytime before we reached the Hill, where the killing occurred. He then struck me first, and I struck him back; not more than four blows passed." Turner then gave an account of how George "drew the gun toward him [self] and it exploded. I did not shoot George Derbyshire ... (I) had heard some Negroes were accusing me of having shot Derbyshire. I know of no reason for their doing so."

1874 February 16, Maurice Shehan:

The coroners' jury was unable to agree upon cause of death. All agreed that Shehan came to his death by a pistol shot from William Owens, but some thought it was self-defense, and others "a moment of fun." According to testimony, Owens and Shehan were in Sullivan's bar on Main Street. They got into an argument about the "Cuban question." In the course of the dispute, Shehan said "let's fight it out." Shehan hit Owens and Owens shot him. One witness said both men were drunk. Another said "Shehan was about two-thirds drunk and that Mr. Owens appeared to be sober."

1875 March 4, Henry Sickels:

Sickels came to his death by delirium tremens while confined to the City Jail. The coroners' jury was of the opinion that the cell in which he died is an unfit place for the confinement of even a well person and that Sergeant Briggs failed to do as much for the relief of his prisoner as he should and could have done.

1885 March 27, Fannie Lillian Madison:

Madison came to her death by drowning in the Old Reservoir. The coroners' jury was of the opinion that Thomas Judson Cluverius was directly or indirectly the cause of it.

Arrangement

Series I: Coroners' Inquisitions, 1824-1946, organized chronologically by date coroner filed inquisition in the court.

Contents List

Series I: Coroners' Inquisitions, 1824-1946

Extent

13.06 cubic feet (30 boxes)

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Arrangement

organized chronologically by date coroner filed inquisition in the court.

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Barcode number 1011692: Coroners' Inquisitions [Hustings Court], 1908, 1915, 1957

Barcode number 1011691: Commonwealth Cases; Coroner's Inquests; Condemnation Proceeding [Hustings Court], 1915-1930

Barcode number 1011650: Coroner's Inquisitions [Hustings Court], 1932-1935

Barcode number 1011645: Coroner's Reports [Hustings Court], 1944-1946

Barcode number 7761887: Coroners' Inquisitions, 1850-1857

Barcode number 7442215: Coroners' Inquisitions, 1865, 1870-1872

Barcode number 7442216: Coroners' Inquisitions, 1873-1874

Barcode number 7442218: Coroners' Inquisitions, 1874-1876

Barcode number 7442219: Coroners' Inquisitions, 1877-1878

Barcode number 7442220: Coroners' Inquisitions, 1879-1880

Barcode number 7442222: Coroners' Inquisitions, 1881-1882

Barcode number 7442223: Coroners' Inquisitions, 1883-1885

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Barcode number 7554608: Coroners' Inquisitions, 1943