

A Guide to the Northumberland County (Va.) Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1799, 1816

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History

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Title Statement

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Summary

Barcode number

0007532873

Language

English

Collector

Northumberland County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

.10 cu. ft.

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 transfers of court papers from Northumberland County.

Preferred Citation

Northumberland County (Va.) Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1799, 1816. Local government records collection, Northumberland County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia 23219.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Additional Northumberland County Court Records are found at the Library of Virginia.

Additional Northumberland County Court Records can be found on microfilm at The Library of Virginia. Consult ["A Guide to Virginia County and City Records on Microfilm."](#)

Additional freedom suits may be found in the Northumberland County Chancery Causes. Search the [the Chancery Records Index](#) found on the Library of Virginia web site. Enter the tilde symbol in the plaintiff surname field.

Historical Information

Slaves sued for emancipation in freedom suits based on the following: they were descendant(s) of a free female ancestor, typically a Native American (Henings Statutes, volume 2, p.170); failure of slaveowner(s) to abide by the 1778 slave nonimportation act (Henings Statutes, volume 9, pp. 471-472); or claimed to have been freed by slaveowner(s) by deed of emancipation or last will and testament (Henings Statutes volume 11, pp. 39-40)

Northumberland County was named probably for the English county. It was formed about 1645 from the district of Chickacoan, the early-seventeenth-century name for the region between the Potomac and the Rappahannock Rivers. The date of the county's formation is conjectural because the act of assembly creating it is no longer extant, but internal evidence shows that the county was functioning in 1645. The county seat is Heathsville.

Scope and Content

Northumberland County (Va.) Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1799, 1816, consist of suits initiated by slaves seeking to gain their freedom on the law side of the court. Cases are identified by style of suit consisting of plaintiff and defendant names. Surnames of others involved in a suit, including secondary plaintiffs and defendants, witnesses, deponents and affiants, and family members with surnames different from the plaintiff or defendant are indexed. Also identified are names of slaves and slaveowners found in suit as well as whether slave(s) won their freedom. Predominant documents found in freedom suits include petitions, records of suits, depositions, affidavits, wills, among other items. Information found in documents include slave's argument for freedom, acquisition of slaves by slaveowners, slave ancestry, and relationship between slaves and slaveowners.

Judgments (Freedom Suits) are useful when researching local history and genealogical information, particularly for African Americans. They are a valuable source of local, state, social, and legal history and serve as a primary source for understanding a locality's history.

Index Terms

Corporate Names:

Northumberland County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Subjects:

African Americans -- Virginia.

Free African Americans -- Virginia -- Northumberland County.

Slaveholders -- Virginia -- Northumberland County.

Slavery -- Virginia -- Northumberland County.

Geographical Names:

Northumberland County (Va.) -- History.

Northumberland County (Va.) -- Genealogy

Genre and Form Terms:

Civil actions -- Virginia -- Northumberland County.

Freedom suits -- Virginia -- Northumberland County.

Judicial records -- Virginia -- Northumberland County.

Local government records -- Virginia -- Northumberland County.

Petitions -- Virginia -- Northumberland County.

Wills -- Virginia -- Northumberland County.

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically.

List of Freedom Suits

1799 May: Joseph~ vs. Henry Travers

1816 March: Sarah~ vs. Ewell Webb