

# A Guide to the Spotsylvania County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1812-1961 (bulk 1823-1913)

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## History

**Processed by:** C. Underwood and J. Porter

## Title Statement

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**Author:** Greg Crawford

## Publication Statement

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## Profile Description

**Creation:** Machine-readable finding aid derived from MARC record, created by Greg Crawford, 24 April 2015

**Language Usage:** Description is in English

## Descriptive Summary

### Language

English

### Collector

Spotsylvania County (Va.) Circuit Court

### Physical Characteristics

30.5 cubic feet (66 boxes); Digital images.

### Location

Library of Virginia

### Repository

The Library of Virginia

## Administrative Information

## Access Restrictions

Chancery Causes, 1812-1913 use digital images can be found on the [Chancery Records Index](#) available electronically at the website of the Library of Virginia.

Chancery Causes, 1914-1961 are unprocessed. Contact Archives Reference Services for availability.

## Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

## Acquisition Information

These records came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from Spotsylvania County (Va.) in 2008 under the accession number 43739.

## Processing Information

Processed by C. Underwood and J. Porter in 2014. There are no plans to process and index the 1914-1961 records at this time.

Encoded by G. Crawford: 2015; Updated by E. Swain: July 2024.

## Preferred Citation

Spotsylvania County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1812-1961. (Cite style of suit [and chancery index no. if available]). Local government records collection, Spotsylvania County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, 23219.

# Adjunct Descriptive Data

## Related Material

See also: [Virginia Superior Court of Chancery \(Richmond District\). Records, 1806-1850](#)

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

Spotsylvania County is one of Virginia's Lost Records Localities. Additional Spotsylvania County Records may be found in the Virginia Lost Records Localities Collection at the Library of Virginia. Search the [Lost Records Localities Digital Collection](#) available at Virginia Memory.

## Historical Information

**Context of Record type:** Chancery Causes are cases of equity. According to Black's Law Dictionary they are "administered according to fairness as contrasted with the strictly formulated rules of common law." A judge, not a jury, determines the outcome of the case; however, the judge is basing the decision on findings compiled and documented by Commissioners. Chancery causes are useful when researching local history, genealogical information, and land or estate divisions. They are a valuable source of local, state, social, and legal history and serve as a primary source for understanding a locality's history. Chancery causes document the lived experiences of free and enslaved individuals; women; children; people living with physical disabilities or mental health struggles; people living in poverty; defunct institutions and corporate entities; or those that may not have otherwise left traditional written histories.

**Locality History:** Spotsylvania County was named for Alexander Spotswood, lieutenant governor of Virginia from 1710 to 1722. It was formed from Essex, King William, and King and Queen Counties by a statute adopted in 1720 to take effect on 1 May 1721. The county seat is Spotsylvania.

**Lost Locality Notes:** Many loose county court papers prior to 1839, when the courthouse moved from Fredericksburg to Spotsylvania Courthouse, are missing. Volumes that record deeds, court orders, and wills exist. The district court, superior court, and circuit court records of Spotsylvania County from 1813 to 1889 are in Fredericksburg.

## Scope and Content

Spotsylvania County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1812-1961 (bulk 1904-1912), consists of cases concerning issues of equity brought largely by residents of the county and filed in the circuit court. These cases often involve the following actions: divisions of estates or land, disputes over wills, disputes regarding contracts, debt, divorce, and business disputes. Other less prevalent issues include freedom suits, permissions to sell property, and disputes concerning trespass. Predominant documents found in these chancery causes include bills (documents the plaintiff's complaint), answers (defendant's response to the plaintiff's complaint), decrees (court's decision), depositions, affidavits, correspondence, lists of heirs, deeds, plats, wills, records

involving enslaved individuals, business records or vital statistics.

## Arrangement

Organized by case, of which each is assigned a unique index number comprised of the latest year found in case and a sequentially increasing 3-digit number assigned by the processor as cases for that year are found. Arranged chronologically.

Arrangement of documents within each folder are as follows: Bill, Answer, and Final Decree (if found).

## Selected Suits of Interest

*Causes of Interest are identified by local records archivists during processing and indexing. These causes are generally selected based upon guiding principles of having historical, genealogical or sensational significance; however, determining what is "of interest" is subjective, and the individual perspective and experience of the describing archivist will affect the material identified.*

### **1847-010: Guardian of Edgar E. McKenney, etc. vs. Francis C McKenney:**

#### **Scope and Content**

Infant's guardian requests the sale of Henry, an enslaved man, currently in jail for assaulting a white person.

### **1900-016: Fortune Coleman, etc. vs. Guardian of Henry Coleman, etc.:**

#### **Scope and Content**

Sally and Henry Coleman, married couple and formerly enslaved, owned a tract of land. Following Henry's death, the family members sued to divide and sale the land. The parcel of land is called the Sally Ham tract (Ham the maiden name of Sally.) The property is located on the "mineral belt" adjacent to Mitchel Gold.

### **1904-004: Peter Allan vs. Virgin Mary Allan (alias Mary Jordan or Mary Stewart):**

#### **Scope and Content**

Divorce case of Peter Allan against Mary, his spouse, who deserted him before the marriage could be consummated. Mary married the Peter when she was 16 or 17 years old when he was 26 years old. Mary's mother stated that she named her daughter Virgin Mary. In the divorce case, the defendant is referred to as Virgin Mary or the alias of Virgin Mary Stewart or Virgin Mary Jordan. These names are what Mary later decided to call herself. Peter Allan made several attempts to get the defendant to move back home with him which she refused to do because he was "very mean" to her and she stated to her mother that she would never return to him.

### **1906-047: Petition of Thomas M. Henry:**

#### **Scope and Content**

The petitioner and other landowners in the county of Spotsylvania wanted permission to allow acces of an "Electric Tram Way" through their lands. The proposed route for the tram would be from Fredericksburg to Chancellorsville along the right of way of the turnpike from Chancellorsville to the Orange line near the Wilderness Store.