

A Guide to the Pittsylvania County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1788-1798

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Descriptive Summary

Barcode number

0007733092

Language

English

Collector

Pittsylvania County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

.15 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 shipments of court records from Pittsylvania County.

Preferred Citation

Pittsylvania County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1788-1798. Local government records collection, Pittsylvania County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA 23219.

Historical Information

Pittsylvania County was named in honor of William Pitt, first earl of Chatham, the English statesman. It was formed from Halifax County in 1766. The county court first met on 26 June 1767. The county seat is Chatham.

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

Pittsylvania County (Va) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1788-1798, 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:

Pittsylvania County (Va.) Circuit Court

Subjects:

African Americans--History

Coroners--Virginia--Pittsylvania County

Death--Causes--Virginia--Pittsylvania County

Murder--Investigation--Virginia--Pittsylvania County

Murder victims--Virginia--Pittsylvania County

Slaveholders--Virginia--Pittsylvania County.

Slaves--Virginia--Pittsylvania County.

Geographical Names:

Pittsylvania County (Va.)--History

Genre and Form Terms:

Death records--Virginia--Pittsylvania County

Local government records--Virginia--Pittsylvania County

Reports--Virginia--Pittsylvania County

Arrangement

Chronological by date coroner filed inquisition in the court.

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