

A Guide to the Russell County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1883-1905

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Descriptive Summary

Barcode number

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Language

English

Collector

Russell County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

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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 a transfer of court records from Russell County.

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Historical Information

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.

Russell County was named for William Russell, a Clinch Valley pioneer and the member of the House of Delegates who introduced the legislation forming the county from Washington County in 1786.

Scope and Content

Russell County (Va) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1883-1905, 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, these particular inquests identify the person as colored. 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.

Index Terms

Corporate Names:

Russell County (Va.) Circuit Court

Subjects:

African Americans--Virginia--Russell County

Coroners--Virginia--Russell County

Death--Causes--Virginia--Russell County

Infanticide--Virginia--Russell County

Lynching--Virginia--Russell County

Murder--Investigation--Virginia--Russell County

Murder victims--Virginia--Russell County
Suicide--Virginia--Russell County
Women--Virginia--Russell County

Geographical Names:

Russell County (Va.)--History--20th century

Genre and Form Terms:

Death records--Virginia--Russell County
Local government records--Virginia--Russell County
Health and medical records--Virginia--Russell County

Arrangement

Chronological by date coroner filed inquisition in the court.

Selected Coroners' Inquisitions of Interest

1889 Mar. 15, Perry Combs:

Scope and Content

Was struck on the head with a stick by Martin Roland (Martin Rollins). Although the context of the disagreement was unclear, Rollins, an African-American, was soon thereafter was arrested and placed in jail, then was lynched by a mob before a trial was conducted.

1889 Apr. 3, Martin Rollins (African American):

Scope and Content

Rollins (aka Martin Roland) died at the hands of a mob of men who took him from jail by force, conveyed him to Little Cedar Creek one mile East of Lebanon and there hung him and shot him until he was dead. Depositions from eyewitnesses describe events as they unfolded, often in graphic detail, although no persons are identified by deponents.

1890 Jun. 23, (infant) Mead:

Scope and Content

The infant died by violence left unexplained in the inquisition, although it resulted in the arrest of a young woman named Mollie Mead (Meade). Depositions provide details regarding infant's body and Mollie Mead's possible concealing of pregnancy. Infant's body was found by a neighbor's dogs; a cloth or dress had been wrapped around the infant's head and arms; a small strip of clothing also was wrapped around the paperwork filed with the inquest.

1905 Apr 15, Trabrig Fuller (African American):

Scope and Content

Died by intentionally drowning herself with apparent suicidal intent. Depositions reference access to laudanum and the deceased having threatened suicide.

1889 Jan 11, Cynthia Samples:

Scope and Content

Died by blows, licks, and other abuse from "Sife Gint" by unmercifully beating her with sticks, boards, or some other instrument. Age was not given, but depositions reference her having been a child. Although she appeared to have suffered with measles during the month prior to her death, most deponents believe her death was a result of having been beaten.

