

# A Guide to the New Kent County (Va.), Health and Medical Records, 1866-1912

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia 0007797010  
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## History

**Processed by:** T. Harter

## Title Statement

A Guide to the New Kent County (Va.), Health and Medical Records, 1866-1912

**Subtitle:** New Kent County (Va.), Health and Medical Records, 1866-1912

**Collection:** 0007797010

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## Publication Statement

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## Profile Description

**Creation:** Machine-readable finding aid created in EAD by Tracy S. Harter, 27 Apr 2021

**Language Usage:** Description is in English

## Descriptive Summary

### Collection Number

0007797010

### Language

English

### Creator

New Kent County (Va.) Circuit Court

### Extent

.225 cf; legal-sized half-hollinger box

### Repository

The Library of Virginia

## Administrative Information

### Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

### Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

## Acquisition Information

This collection came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from New Kent County Circuit Court.

## Preferred Citation

New Kent County (Va.) Health and Medical Records, 1866-1912. Local government records collection, New Kent County Court Records, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

# Adjunct Descriptive Data

## Related Material

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

For more information and a listing of lost records localities see [Lost Records research note](#).

Additional New Kent County court records can be found on microfilm and in the Chancery Records Index at the Library of Virginia. Consult ["A Guide to Virginia County and City Records on Microfilm"](#) and [The Chancery Records Index](#).

## Historical Information

Mental Health Records may consist of a variety of documents that historically were referred to as lunacy papers in the courthouses of Virginia localities and municipalities.

During its session begun in November 1769, the House of Burgesses passed an act establishing a hospital in Williamsburg for the mentally ill. The Eastern Lunatic Asylum (now Eastern State Hospital) was the first institution in America constructed as a mental hospital. The first patients were admitted in October 1773.

In January 1825 the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation providing for the construction of an asylum in the western part of the state. The institution, which became known as Western Lunatic Asylum, was constructed close to the town of Staunton, west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, was the second mental health facility built in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The buildings and surrounding gardens were designed to embrace the idea of "moral therapy" for mentally ill patients by providing an aesthetically pleasing and tranquil atmosphere in which patients lived comfortably, exercised and worked outdoors.

Western Lunatic Asylum opened in 1828, accepting both male and female patients suffering from a variety of mental disorders. It should be noted that the hospital underwent a short-lived name change between 1861 and 1865, when it was known as Central Lunatic Asylum. (It should not be confused with an asylum of the same name later built in Petersburg, Virginia to house African American patients). From 1865 to 1894 the name was again Western Lunatic Asylum. However, in 1894 the General Assembly passed legislation changing the name to Western State Hospital.

In 1868, the Freedman's Bureau acquired land known as Howard's Grove, (or Howard Grove), located one half mile east of the city of Richmond, on the Mechanicsville Turnpike, in Henrico County. Through a lease from Mr. Bacon Tait (or Tate), the Bureau renovated several barrack-type structures that had been used as a Confederate hospital during the Civil War. The new facility became known as Howard's Grove Freedman's Hospital.

The hospital was turned over to the state by way of General Order number 136 issued by Major General Canby, Military Governor of Virginia in December 1869. Beginning January 1, 1870 all African American patients at Eastern Lunatic Asylum in Williamsburg, (the only state institution at the time to accept black patients), as well as all blacks jailed for lunacy from across Virginia, were to be removed to Howard's Grove for treatment. The General Assembly passed legislation in June 1870 renaming the facility the Central Lunatic Asylum and designating it the official "reception and treatment facility for colored persons of unsound mind." This legislation was enacted with the stipulation that the Howard's Grove location was to be temporary.

In March 1882 a 300 acre tract of land was purchased by the City of Petersburg and given to the state for the purpose of constructing a permanent mental health facility for African Americans. Construction of the new facility near Petersburg was completed in early spring 1885. This later included a special building to house the criminally insane apart from the rest of the hospital population. An early institutional history notes that treatment at Central Lunatic Asylum during the 1890s was humane and emphasized the value of work and the benefits of recreation. However, practices at the facility also included seclusion, mechanical restraints, and the administering of hypnotics.

In 1894, Central Lunatic Asylum was officially renamed Central State Hospital. This piece of legislation also

altered the names of the other mental health facilities in Virginia in an attempt to inspire a more positive image of the institutions, and of mental health treatment in general. It is important to note that another state institution located in Staunton, Virginia went by the name Central Lunatic Asylum between the years of 1861 and 1865. Its name later was changed to Western Lunatic Asylum, and is a separate facility with no connection to the Richmond/Petersburg hospital for African Americans.

New Kent County may have been named either for the English county of Kent or for Kent Island, in the upper waters of the Chesapeake Bay. William Claiborne, a native of Kent who had been driven from Kent Island by Lord Baltimore, was a prominent resident of the New Kent area around 1654 when the county was formed from York County. Part of James City County was added in 1767.

Records were destroyed when John Posey set fire to the courthouse on 15 July 1787. Many records were lost when the courthouse was partially destroyed by fire during the Civil War hostilities in 1862. Additional records were burned in Richmond on 3 April 1865, where they had been moved for safekeeping during the Civil War.

## Scope and Content

New Kent County (Va.) Health and Medical Records 1866-1912, consist of .225cf of records, including four folders of Mental Health Records (prior to 1901; later Mental Health Records are restricted), two folders of Smallpox Epidemic Records, and one folder of Tuberculosis Records.

Mental Health Records, 1866-1900, may include warrants, orders, depositions, reports, invoices, etc. for or by justices of the peace and others regarding the mental condition of individuals who were released to the recognizance of a family member or who were recommended to be committed to a mental hospital. In many cases, however, the hospitals claimed to be full to capacity and not admitting new patients. Fiduciary records such as estate inventories of a person judged insane may also be present. Some persons referenced as "colored" are indicated as such. Cases of research interest include: Mary Jones (1877), identified as "colored" jailed for lunacy in July 1877, died in jail that August. Jesse Howard or Harwood (1882), ten years old, symptoms included incessant restlessness and mischief. George Williams (1888), identified as "colored", includes postcard from R. Barksdale, superintendent of Central Lunatic Asylum at Petersburg: "We cannot receive him at present. We are crowded." Robert Cary (1899), sheriff notes that he made repeated efforts to have Mr. Cary admitted at Central State Hospital at Petersburg but "such application was refused for want of room, and for no other cause," but that on Nov. 28 he died at the home of Lena Cary.

Smallpox Epidemic Records, 1895-1912, consist of vaccination reports, receipts, and one postcard. In January 1895, Dr. John D. Turner and Dr. James Gregory were responsible for personally vaccinating hundreds of individuals throughout the county. Together, the two doctors vaccinated 1,635 men, women and children. Also present is a January 1899 postcard from S.C. Waddell, in Roxbury, to New Kent County clerk John N. Harris regarding smallpox outbreaks, as well as lists of names and/or invoices regarding smallpox vaccinations for 31 people by Dr. H.U. Stephenson in April 1900, and for nearly 900 people in August 1912 by Dr. C.L. Bailey and Dr. T.P. Darracott.

Tuberculosis Records consists of one 1907 item related to a case of tuberculosis.

## Arrangement

Within series, collection is arranged chronologically by year, then alphabetically by last name of individual where applicable.