

A Guide to the Albemarle County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1768-1969 (bulk 1880-1920)

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History

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Title Statement

A Guide to the Albemarle County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1768-1969 (bulk 1880-1920)

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Profile Description

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Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Collector

Albemarle County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

Digital images; 270.6 cubic feet (592 boxes).

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Chancery Causes 1768-1871, use digital images found on the [Chancery Records Index](#) available electronically at the website of the Library of Virginia.

Chancery Causes 1872-1969, processed and indexed information is available on the Chancery Records Index, but digital images are not available at this time. Contact Archives Reference Services for availability.

There remain 7 boxes of unprocessed Chancery Records, 1885-1912. Contact Archives Reference Services for availability.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

Most of these records came to the Library of Virginia in various transfers of court papers from Albemarle County (Va.) under undated accessions.

Additional Albemarle Chancery Records came to the Library of Virginia in 2016 under 51834.

Processing Information

Digital images of Chancery Causes 1768-1850 were generated by Backstage Library Works through the Library of Virginia's Circuit Court Records Preservation Program 2021-2022.

Digital images of Chancery Causes 1851-1871 were generated by Backstage Library Works through the Library of Virginia's Circuit Court Records Preservation Program 2024-2025.

Albemarle County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1768-1969, were processed by field processors as well as various Local Records Staff and completed from early 2000s- 2010s

Chancery Causes, 1768-1840, were reprocessed and brought up to current processing and indexing standards by G. Crawford in 2018-2020.

Chancery Causes, 1840-1850, were reprocessed and brought up to current processing and indexing standards by M. Long and M. Mason, 2020-2021.

Chancery Causes, 1851-1871, were reprocessed and brought up to current processing and indexing standards by C. Collins and E. Swain, 2022-2023.

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Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

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

Albemarle County is one of Virginia's Lost Records Localities. Additional Albemarle County records may be found in the Virginia Lost Records Localities Digital Collection at the Library of Virginia. Search the available at Virginia Memory.

Historical Information

Context for 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: Albemarle County was named for William Anne Keppel, second earl of Albemarle, and governor of Virginia from 1737 to 1754. It was created by a statute of 1744 and formed from Goochland County; part of Louisa County was added in 1761 and islands in the Fluvanna (now the James) River in 1770.

The court met for the first time on 8 February 1745.

Lost Records Locality Note: All order books except the first and many loose papers between 1748 and 1781 were destroyed by British general Banastre Tarleton's raid on Charlottesville in 1781 during the Revolutionary War.

Scope and Content

Albemarle County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1768-1969, 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.

Chancery causes before 1870 contain a substantial amount of information concerning enslaved Black men, women, and children. While there are several suits concerning the freedom of enslaved individuals, these cases largely represent the perspective of white enslavers and their disputes involving the sale, hiring, financial responsibilities, and legality of ownership of Black individuals.

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.

1807-007: James Geekie vs. Phil (enslaved), etc.

Scope and Content

James Geekie immigrated from Scotland at the request of a wealthy relative named John White a resident of Albemarle County. White offered to leave his estate to Geekie to encourage him to immigrate. Soon after Geekie's arrival, Geekie claims White began to mistreat him. Upon his death, White refused to live up to his promise made to Geekie except for a small amount of land in Kentucky. In his will, James White emancipated the individuals he enslaved and gave them all of his estate. Geekie made claim to a portion of the estate the enslaved people inherited. Rather than file suit for the property for concern it would delay, perhaps permanently, their emancipation, both parties went to arbitration where an agreement was reached in which Geekie received one-third of the estate. Geekie still had to file suit against the enslaved people because the court had to ensure the interest of the enslaved infants were ensured.

1812-012: William G. Garner vs. James Leitch

Scope and Content

Cause involves sell of enslaved family [unnamed]. Plaintiff purchased an enslaved mother and her children. The husband of the enslaved woman asked the plaintiff to purchase him as well so he would not be separated from his family.

1812-018: John M. Perry vs. David Higginbotham, surv. partner

Scope and Content

Plaintiff accused defendant of selling him Prudence, unhealthy enslaved woman who suffered from a sexually transmitted disease. Cause includes deposition of physician who examined the Prudence while she was held by Higginbotham. The physician testified that he found the Prudence being kept in a damp cellar

during intense cold weather, and that she was salivating due to medication given to her by Higginbotham. The physician diagnosed her with a severe lung infection and some form of a pox spreading over her body. He told Higginbotham to remove Prudence from the cellar because the poor conditions made her health condition worse. He also told him that "his mismanagement of the case endangered the life of the woman" and that the combination of the lung infection and pox "rendered her situation critical and dangerous." The physician was unable to examine Prudence for the STD due to her poor health. The physician was asked to examine the Prudence again while she was in the possession of the plaintiff. The pox had returned. While examining her, the physician discovered that Prudence had an abortion which was "hastened by the circumstances of the woman concealing her state of pregnancy and the medicine administered for the pox." "That a state of pox generally but not always produces abortion - and the disease is hereditary and most generally afflicts the offspring of a mother who is thus afflicted."

1816-032: Archibald Lingo vs. Lewis Nevell

Scope and Content

Cause concerns Hagar, a man enslaved by Lewis Nevell. Nevell names Hagar head man of a boat giving him authority to make contracts with others including Archibald Lingo. Lingo refused to conduct business with Hagar as an enslaved man, claiming the last time he conducted business with an enslaved man, a man named Jim, Jim then ran away with the money received and believed to have self- emancipated.

1821-008: David Hays vs. Matthias Weaver

Scope and Content

Cause concerns the fraudulent sale of enslaved persons. Harriot, Harry, Sarah, and Shadrick claimed to have been emancipated by deed recorded in Lancaster County. [[ChOriginal deed](#) as well as [Filed freedom suit in common law](#). available through Virginia Untold site. See also: Augusta County Chancery Cause 1823-034.]

1826-002: John Irvin vs. Robert Slaughter

Scope and Content

Plaintiff agreed to serve as substitute on behalf of defendant for a tour of duty during the War of 1812.

1831-017: John Smith, etc. vs. Thomas Smit and wife

Scope and Content

Cause involved questions over the categorization of enslaved people as either real property or personal property.

1831-025: John Wallace vs. Nicholas Burgher

Scope and Content

Cause involves Simon, an enslaved man, being given permission by his enslaver to return to Albemarle County from Estill County, Kentucky. "Slave pass" filed as exhibit.

1831-166: Willis Smith vs. Alice Smith, etc.

Scope and Content

The cause involved a dispute over the estate of William Smith who died at age 96. Multiple depositions center on Smith's mental health before his death. One deponent recalled Smith claiming to be a French and Indian War veteran. He learned that Congress passed a law giving additional pension to Revolutionary War veterans. Smith believed he should get additional pension for his French and Indian War service. He was told he could not because the pension was only for Revolutionary War veterans. Another deponent was asked how Smith's enslaved people were treated. He recalled seeing one enslaved person at the home of Smith's son Willis Smith. He was chained, wore an iron collar, and had been physically abused. He was punished for being a runaway and stealing meal and bacon from the home of Willis' mother.

1833-017: Exx. Of Jacob Morris vs. Admr. of Robert Lewis

Scope and Content

Robert Lewis convicted of the murder of Thomas Noel in 1821 and then Fled Virginia. Lewis' estate was managed by coroner of Albemarle after he left the state, with Morris is seeking payment of debt from

Lewis' estate. [See also: Albemarle County - Thompson Noel: Coroners' Inquisitions, 1821 September]

1836-010: William Cox vs. B.F. Hall, etc.

Scope and Content

Defendant claimed to be a dentist. Contracted by plaintiff to learn dentistry. Advertisement of Hall's dentist practice filed as exhibit.

1836-011 and 1836-037: Uriah P. Levy vs. James T. Barclay

Scope and Content

Cause involves disagreement over purchase of Monticello by plaintiff from defendant.

1841-002: Benjamin Dawson etc. vs Exrs of Martin Dawson etc.

Scope and Content

Estate dispute that centers around the question of whether or not Martin Dawson, the testator, had the right to free all of the enslaved people included in his estate in his will. Ultimately, a third of the enslaved individuals in question were manumitted. Their names, ages, and family relationships were described in the case's records. Also included in the case is a discussion of the African Colonization Society, and a report on the lives of the people who had been manumitted after they migrated to Illinois. The case also discusses the Literary Fund of Virginia, the establishment of public schools, and the University of Virginia.

1841-016: William Leitch vs Admr of Thomas Leitch

Scope and Content

Estate dispute. A recent Irish immigrant, William Leitch, moved to Virginia in order to investigate the estate of his father, who had died in the state many years earlier. Leitch claimed that he had discovered that his uncle had defrauded him of most of his father's estate. He further claimed that his uncle also owed additional money to the estate, due to debts that accrued after Leitch's father had to cut off a business partnership due to the uncle's drunken behavior. The case included depositions by other Irish immigrants and travel papers from France and the United States consul in London.

1842-012: Caroline Brand (Free) vs Admr of Joseph Brand etc. AND 1843-037 Alexander Wilson (Free) and wife vs Exrs of Joseph Brand Sr. Etc

Scope and Content

Estate disputes concerning Caroline Brand, a woman who had previously been enslaved. She and her children were manumitted by the will of their enslaver, Joseph Brand, and were also left his estate. In the 1842 suit, she argued that the administrator had failed to grant her and her children their full inheritance after her family moved to Pennsylvania. The case includes records of their lives as free Black residents of Pennsylvania, and of medical care given to other individuals who were enslaved by Joseph Brand. In the 1843 suit, she and her new husband Alexander Wilson sued for the rights to Joseph Brand's portion of his father's estate.

1843-024: Ann Eliza Sandridge vs Charles D. Maupin etc.

Scope and Content

Ann Eliza Sandridge was a feme sole suing for property rights after Charles D. Maupin had suddenly broken off their engagement by moving out of state. Maupin argued that he had attempted to break off the engagement multiple times previously and that she had burned all of the relevant letters. The other defendants argued that Maupin never had rights to the property in question to begin with. Case includes love letters between Sandridge and Maupin.

1843-041: Reuben Lee (Free) vs Exr of Martha F Walker etc.

Scope and Content

Estate dispute. Martha Walker's will had manumitted all enslaved people belonging to her estate. She also left money so that these people could also free their family members and move together to a free state. Reuben Lee, one of the formerly enslaved individuals, entered suit against Walker's estate on the grounds that he had not been given the amount required to free his wife and child and move with them to Ohio.

1844-012: Miletus Harris vs Staples Tyler and Co]

Scope and Content

Debt suit that centers around Mary, a teenage girl who was enslaved. Miletus Harris claimed that Staples Tyler & Co had fraudulently taken ownership of Mary as part of a judgment against Samuel D. Venable, when Mary had actually been transferred to Harris as the result of a previous judgment against Venable. Harris claimed in the suit that part of the issue was that Mary's family members were enslaved by relatives of Harris, and Staples Tyler & Co's claim would cause her to be separated from them.

1845-044 Austin M. Appling vs Admr of Abram Eades etc.

Scope and Content

Estate dispute, wherein Austin M. Appling claimed that Abram Eades had made a will before his death, which had later been destroyed by an enslaved woman. Includes a long, angry note by the defendants' counsel. In it, he decried the fact that Appling's evidence was based on the claims of an enslaved woman and an illiterate day laborer, when the defendants' evidence was based on the testimony of white witnesses "of great respectability."

1846-007: William C. Burton, etc. v Daniel E. McCoy, Etc. Daniel E. McCoy, Etc. v. William C. Burton

Scope and Content

Contract Dispute between several parties largely concerning the title to property used for the tanbark industry. Lengthy discussion of the local tanbark industry in Albemarle County.

1846-019: Benjamin F. Hoomes, etc. vs Samuel Stout, etc.

Scope and Content

An estate dispute concerning the children of Mary Eleanor Hoomes Stout's estate, first marriage to Benjamin Hoomes, who claim rights to Washington, an enslaved man, as part of their mother's dower interest. Wish to reclaim Washington who is in the possession of Thornton Stout, James Crewdson, and Isaiah Stout, after the men took Washington from Mary Eleanor's second husband, Samuel Stout, for security of his debts.

1846-021: Steven Bias vs George W. Trueheart

Scope and Content

Steven Bias, a "free man of color", claims that he has been unlawfully seized of property to pay debts owed to George Trueheart for legal representation in judgement involving Bias's, and his wife's, ability to remaining in the commonwealth. Bias asserts that he never secured Trueheart for any legal services and is unaware of any judgment regarding his status as a freeman.

1846-039: Timberlake and Flannagan vs Edwin Conway, etc.

Scope and Content

Concerns the debts of Edwin Conway and his wife, operating a hotel on the campus of the University of Virginia, taking issue with Mrs. Conway, as a married woman, operating the business in her own right. Large argument regarding whether Mr. or Mrs. Conway is actually in charge of the operations, who the debts belong to, possible sale of individuals enslaved by Mrs. Conway to pay debts, and the unlawful nature of Mrs. Conway's business dealings.

1846-048: 1) James Tompkins and Wife vs Admr. of Dabney Minor, etc. 2) Admr. of Dabney Minor, etc. vs James Tompkins, etc.

Scope and Content

Estate dispute concerning property of late Dabney Minor and various plantations "Gilmerton", "Carr's Brook", and "Bremo" with much discussion about enslaved persons, and the pricing and hiring of enslaved persons to neighboring landowners. [see: EXR OF Dabney Minor v Catharine H Reinheart ETC 1874-010]

1847-013: 1847 Ann D. Chick, By vs Littleton Chick, Etc.

Scope and Content

Ann Chick seeks a divorce from Littleton Chick due to cruelty and abuse suffered by her for over ten years. Ann claims Littleton is violent when intoxicated which is almost constant. Describes his abuse towards her, her five children, and enslaved persons. Ann wants custody of her children and possession of the 5 enslaved persons as her father gave them to her and believes Littleton will simply sell them if left in his care.

1848-008: Boswell P. Yates vs George W Kinsolving

Scope and Content

Yates claims he should not have to pay Kinsolving the remaining balance for an enslaved woman named Elvira as he was assured that Elvira was of sound mind, but several days after the purchase it was revealed that Elvira suffered from violent "fits."

1848-051: Thomas C. Johnson, by etc vs Gdn. of Thomas C. Johnson

Scope and Content

Thomas requests the court ability to sell Nealy, an enslaved person, in order to pay for college education at Randolph Macon

1849-002: Robert C. Noel vs William Tompkins

Scope and Content

Cause covers the settling of accounts for Tompkins and Noel, company acting as owner and editors of the Virginia Advocate newspapers. The accounts shown in the division of assets provides a long list of the paper's subscribers.

1849-020: Joseph Twyman vs Alfred Twyman

Scope and Content

Joseph Twyman claims he was defrauded into purchasing Harriet who proved to be "unsound" due to a condition described as an "enlarged womb" and therefore will not pay the remaining bonds to Alfred Twyma and would like a refund and Harriet returned.

1850-009: James W. Widderfield v William B. Philips

Scope and Content

Concerns the construction of the Augusta County Court House in 1836, and requests settlement of accounts from the partnership entered into during the construction.

1850-020: James M. Garland ETC v Thomas Garland ETC

Scope and Content

Concerns property in Fluvanna County, Buckingham County, and Candle & Soap Factory near Richmond, Va., as well as the Dismal Swamp, New Orleans, and Kentucky, The Will of Richard Morriss emancipates Fanny and her children while providing the children with property and enslaved persons. The Will of Mary M. Garland emancipates John, Nancy, and Nancy's husband Lewis Brooks, providing funds to remove them to Liberia or to a free state.

1852-009: Lucian Minor, trst. vs. John O. Trueheart and wife, etc.

Scope and Content

Trueheart family invested money from land sold to purchase enslaved people to work on their property in Galveston, Texas. Enslaved people purchased in Richmond and transported to Galveston. Exhibits include bills of sale, contracts with ship captains to transport enslaved people and insurance policy for enslaved man Arthur Anderson.

1854-022: Nancy L. Parrish. vs. Admr. Of Willis Liggan, etc.

Scope and Content

Scope and Content

Plaintiff describes abduction of enslaved persons. Also references execution of enslaved man Andrew.

1855-010, William Donoho, etc. v James Oldham, Etc.

Scope and Content

This suit concerns the use of William Donoho's securities of property and enslaved individuals to settle debts. The funds were used, among other things, for the erection of buildings contracted for the Virginia School for the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind (Staunton, Va.).

1855-022: Robert C. Noel vs. James C. Halsall, etc.; William J. Shelton vs. Robert C. Noel, etc.; James C. Halsall vs. Robert C. Noel, etc.:

Scope and Content

These suits involve the dissolution of a business partnership between Robert C. Noel and James C. Halsall, co-owners and publishers of the Virginia Advocate for a few years during the 1840s.

1856-010: Andrew J. Farish vs. George L. Peyton:

Scope and Content

This suit involves the sale of the Eagle Hotel (also known as the Eagle Tavern), the Jefferson House adjoining the hotel, and the "Brick-Stable" attached to the hotel, all of which were located in Charlottesville, Virginia. Enslaved individuals were auctioned in front of the Eagle Hotel through the end of the Civil War. It was sold by Andrew J. Farish to George L. Peyton in 1853, though whether Farish regained ownership of the properties following Peyton's inability to adhere to the payment schedule outlined in the sale contract is unknown.

1856-012: Susan A. Gully vs. William Gully:

Scope and Content

In filing for a divorce from William Gully, her husband, Susan A. Gully claimed that he committed adultery with, and later abandoned her for, an unnamed free woman of color. According to the suit, he removed with the free woman of color to Rockbridge County, Virginia, in either 1849 or 1850.

1856-033: Asgn(s) of William Moon vs. Stapleton C. Sneed:

Scope and Content

Indebted to several creditors, William Moon sold at auction several enslaved persons, namely Cary Ann, Everett, and Overton, to Stapleton C. Sneed. However, Moon "felt the deepest solicitude that [Cary Ann, Everett, and Overton] should pass forever and hopelessly beyond his control," owing to what Moon described as "the peculiar relation existing between [Moon] and his slaves." As such, Moon and Sneed entered into a contract wherein Moon was allowed to redeem Cary Ann, Everett, and Overton within ten years so long as he did so to free them. Moon, however, was unable to come up with the capital to redeem them in time. A deposition in 1856-033 confirms that Cary Ann and her children were related by blood to William Moon. The question "Were any of the other Negroes besides Cary Ann and her children related by blood to Moon?" was posed to Fontaine Wells, a deponent, who answered, "I believe all were - except the old woman of all - the others were her's [sic] & his descendants."

1857-033: Pauline Clarkson by etc. Vs. Henry H. Bell & wife, etc.:

Scope and Content

This suit contains limited genealogical and biographical information about persons who were enslaved in Albemarle, Virginia. The information shows familial relationships between enslaved persons, though only highlighting parent-child relationships, and mentions some of their responsibilities (e.g., blacksmith).

1859-008: David Michie for etc. Vs. Admr. of John Augustus Michie, etc.:

Scope and Content

Suite features Michie Tavern. The original location of the tavern is depicted on a plat included in the suit.

Suite features a fine tavern. The original location of the tavern is depicted on a plat included in the suit.

1859-012: Admr. of David Isaacs vs. Thomas Isaacs (free), etc.:

Scope and Content

This suit involves several free Black and multiracial people who lived in Albemarle County, Virginia. According to the bill of complaint, Nancy West was a Black woman and the "de facto" wife of David Isaacs, a Jewish merchant residing in Charlottesville, Virginia. They had several children, namely Thomas, Hays, Frederick, Tucker, Jane, Julia Ann, and Agness [sic]. As of the initiation of the suit, Thomas Isaacs was presumed lost at sea; Hays and Frederick were deceased; Tucker and Agness [sic] (along with her husband, German Evans) lived in Ohio; Julia Ann had married Eston Hemings Jefferson, purportedly the son of Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson, with whom she moved to Wisconsin; and Jane had married Nathaniel H. West and presumably lived in Albemarle County. David Isaacs died in 1837 and was buried in the Hebrew Cemetery in Richmond, Virginia. Nancy West moved to Ohio sometime in the 1850s.

1861-002: Lafayette K. Saylor vs. John M. Norvell & wife, etc.:

Scope and Content

Land in Albemarle County, Virginia, referred to as the Norvell Farm and Gold property, came under contention when Lafayette K. Saylor refused to pay John M. Norvell for the land until Norvell perfected its title. As part of their agreement, Saylor offered to pay Norvell \$50,000, or almost \$2,000,000 today, for the land. Saylor discovered that Norvell attempted to sell the land to other speculators after Saylor's nonpayment, at which point Saylor sought the court's aid in forcing Norvell to adhere to the original sale. One of the speculators, Patrick H. Cowen, claimed some expertise in gold mining, "having pursued [gold] for sometime in California," during the California gold rush.

1863-010: Admr. of Frances B. Smith vs. William Smith, etc.:

Scope and Content

The suit involves a monetary bequest by Frances B. Smith to Richmond College [University of Richmond]. Other organizations, such as the Colonization Society and the Baptist Foreign Mission, were also listed as beneficiaries, but the parties involved with the suit could not determine whether the organizations still existed because of the American Civil War. The suit contains limited information about the chartering of Richmond College and its activities during the war.

1863-017: Adms. of Zachariah Shackelford, etc. vs. Caleb A. Colquitt & wife, etc.:

Scope and Content

This suit mentions Tom, an enslaved man, who was "impressed into the service of the Confederate States for labor on the defenses near Richmond."

1866-004: John Bow, etc. Vs. Caroline Matilda Bow, etc.:

Scope and Content

In his will, John Bow stipulated that Susan, an enslaved Black woman and Bow's purported daughter, and her two children, Lewis and Lucy, should either be emancipated upon agreeing to migrate to Liberia or remain enslaved in Virginia under the stewardship of trustees named in Bow's will. The court wrestled with the intent behind the stipulation, as evidenced by a counsel's note that considered the following: was Bow's attempt to will the enslaved people to trustees if they chose to remain in Virginia an evasion of "the policy as well as the letter of statute prohibiting emancipated slaves to remain within the Commonwealth?" The counsel argued that, should such an occurrence be sanctioned by the court, "the whole slave race of Virginia may be thus turned loose upon us, in the hands of trustees, or of nominal masters, holding the privilege...of remaining hence when it suits them." An affidavit states that Lewis, referred to as Lewis Randolph, immigrated to Liberia. As of 1853, Susan and Lucy remained in Virginia.

1866-015: Jack Robinson vs. Amanda Johnson (alias: Amanda Robinson):

Scope and Content

Jack Robinson, a formerly enslaved man, sought a divorce from his wife, Amanda Johnson. According to Robinson, he and Amanda "had a sort of wedding after the fashion of negroes," which became binding in 1866 following the passage of a law by the Virginia legislature stating that all Black individuals

"cohabitating as man and wife" would be considered legally married. Robinson claimed that he left Amanda before the law's passage due to her infidelity, but he nevertheless sought a divorce in case they were married in the eyes of the law.

1866-044: John Thomason, etc. vs. Admr. of Minor Houchins, etc.; Exr. of Sarah Thomason vs. Cur(s) of Sarah Thomason, etc.

Scope and Content

The depositions in this suit highlight a rumored interracial relationship between John Thomason and Frankey Thomason, a Black woman enslaved by the estate of Sarah Thomason, Thomason's mother. Thomason and Frankey were said to have had multiple children, who were considered enslaved due to existing laws that governed enslavement based on the status of the mother. However, several deponents claimed that the children were considered "quasi-free," (whether by themselves or the neighborhood is not specified) and were therefore afforded more leniency when hired out by Thomason or his mother's executor.

1868-018: Michael G Harmon, etc vs Orange & Alexandria & Manassas Rail Road Co]

Scope and Content

Contract suit. Case records detail the predicaments of a railroad company subsidized by the state and bound by Commonwealth law to carry all passengers and freight upon "terms fair and equal to all without unjust preference or discrimination" while at the same time, facing increasing private and public pressure for the transportation of express mail on its rail carriers. Suit also presents allegations made against the Adams Express Company for essentially establishing a monopoly on express mail services in Virginia.

1868-001: Comt of Elizabeth Davis vs. Orville Allen & wife, etc.; Comt of Robert Davis vs. James C. Carter & wife, etc.;

Scope and Content

Three suits heard together regarding the estates of two siblings, Elizabeth Davis and Robert Davis, who were both declared to be mentally unfit by adulthood. Through their respective committees, the siblings appeared to have made standard requests for permission from the court in order to sell property originally inherited from older members of the Davis family to a neutral third-party. However, their sister Virginia Carter claimed that fraud had been committed by those committee members instead as she accused her brother-in-law and her now deceased husband of illegally purchasing that property for their own benefits. Moreover, that the Albemarle County Clerk of Court directly assisted in this scheme by helping to forge the paperwork for these purchases.

1869-007: Martha A Wheeler, by vs Alexander St. Clair Wheeler

Scope and Content

Divorce suit. The plaintiff accused her husband of having committed adultery. Depositions include extensive details on Mr. Wheeler's alleged attempts to have extramarital relations with a number of women including Sallie Stewart, an African American woman employed by his father-in-law, James O. Hardin. Stewart's own deposition is included with the suit records.

1871-006: John A Shackleford vs Clementine Shackleford

Scope and Content

Divorce suit. John A Shackleford sought a divorce against his second wife, Clementine Shackleford (Marshall) on the grounds of adultery. Depositions given by midwife Lucy Rives and neighbor F. M. Wells provide details on the accusations made by Shackleford against his wife who had allegedly given birth to an interracial daughter. (Both plaintiff and defendant were presumed to be white). In their respective testimonies, Rives recalled her experience in assisting with the birth of this child and Wells recounted a conversation with Clementine Shackleford regarding the possible paternity of the baby. According to the final decree, Clementine Shackleford failed to make any court appearances and to provide an answer to her husband's bill. Instead, on the back of a deposition notice, there appears to be a signed statement giving her consent for her husband to take depositions and an assertion that she had no "intention" to "defend [her] conduct." A note by the court discusses what Virginia law required for a divorce on the grounds of adultery at that time.

1871-018: Noah Jackson & wife vs. Admr. of D H E Saunders, etc.

Scope and Content

Plaintiffs Noah Jackson and his wife, Louisa Tyree sought to settle a contract made in May 1860 with D. H. E. Saunders and John Simpson. Jackson and Tyree assert that they had entered into a formal agreement with Saunders and Simpson that arranged for Jackson, who had been formally enslaved by Saunders at that time, to be sold to Simpson under the mutual understanding of all parties that Jackson would live a free man. Moreover, that their contract would allow Jackson to trade as a freeman and to remain in the Commonwealth for as long as he personally desired to do so. Tyree, a freewoman at the time, put her house and lot in Charlottesville up as security for this contract. According to the bill, the plaintiffs were unaware prior to 1868 that their contract did not legally provide those rights and privileges to Jackson; the very condition that was their primary motivation for entering into such a formal agreement with Saunders and Simpson in the first place.