

A Guide to the Isle of Wight County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1805-1866

Isle of Wight County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1805-1866
1805-1866

A Collection in the Library of Virginia
Library of Virginia
2026

History

Processed by: LVA Staff

Title Statement

A Guide to the Isle of Wight County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1805-1866

Subtitle: Isle of Wight County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1805-1866

Author: Mary Ann Mason

Publication Statement

Date: © 2026 By The Library of Virginia. All Rights Reserved.

Publisher: Library of Virginia

Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from MS Word, created by Mary Ann Mason, 10 March 2026

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Collector

Isle of Wight County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

digital images.

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Isle of Wight County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1805-1866, concerning Black and Mutliracial individuals are digitized and available through [Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative Digital Collection](#) on the Library of Virginia website. Please use digital images.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

Digital images for this collection were created by the Image Services Department in 2013 under accession 54744.

Processing Information

Isle of Wight County Coroners Inquisitions related to Black and Multiracial individuals pre-1867 were processed by LVA staff in 2013. These coroners' inquisitions were scanned for the purposes of Virginia Untold. The remaining coroners' inquisitions for Isle of Wight are not available through the Library of Virginia.

Encoded by M. Mason, March 2026.

Preferred Citation

Isle of Wight County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1805-1866. Local government records collection, Isle of Wight County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA.

Custodial History

These records came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court records from Isle of Wight in an undated accession, but were returned to the locality by request of the clerk in 2015

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

See also: [Isle of Wight County \(Va.\) Health and Medical Records](#)

See also: [Isle of Wight County \(Va.\) Commonwealth Causes](#)

Records related to free and enslaved people of Isle of Wight County (Va.) and other localities are available through the [Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative Digital Collection](#) on the Library of Virginia website.

Additional Isle of Wight County (Va.) court records can be found on microfilm at the Library of Virginia. Consult ["A Guide to Virginia County and City Records on Microfilm."](#)

Location of Originals

Physical original records of Isle of Wight Coroners' Inquisitions are retained in locality by the clerk of the Circuit Court for Isle of Wight County.

Historical Information

Context for Record Type:

A carry over from the British system, the separate office of coroner appeared in Virginia about 1660. The judicial duty of the office was to hold inquisitions in cases when persons met a sudden, violent, unnatural or suspicious death, or death without medical attendance. The law did not encourage the Coroner to be a medical professional until the 20th century, and only stipulated that the local court be responsible for the appointment. Although not reliant on profession, this system of affluent white men making the decisions largely ensured that only other white men served in this position for much of its history

Prior to the Civil War, the coroner would summon a jury of twelve white men, usually prominent citizens of that locality, to assist him in determining cause of death. The jury viewed the body of the deceased and heard the testimony of witnesses which did include both white and Black perspectives. This witness testimony was recorded and after seeing and hearing the evidence, and unlike other judicial proceedings, enslaved people could provide depositions in coroner's inquisitions, but still, an all-white jury delivered in writing to the coroner their conclusion concerning cause of death referred to as the inquisition. These causes of death would be determined by a white perspective and Black individuals were only consulted; they were never in a position to make decisions. After the Civil War, the process remained the same but the racial distinctions stipulating jury eligibility no longer remained. However, as appointments still continued and juror eligibility reserved for those "entitled to vote and hold office," the authority and influence in the hands of white citizens remained throughout the late 19th and early 20th century.

In 1877, an act of the General Assembly changed the number of jurors to six, and by 1926, only the coroner determined cause of death but they could require physicians to assist them with determining cause of death. Then in 1946, the General Assembly abolished the Coroner's office/ office of Coroner's Physician altogether,

appointed instead a Chief Medical Examiner, and by 1950 transitioned to a statewide Office of the Chief Medical Examiner which now lives within the Department of Health.

If a criminal act was determined to be the cause of death, the coroner delivered the guilty person to the sheriff and the inquests would be used as evidence in the criminal trial. In this case, coroner's inquisitions were filed with the trial papers. If there was not a trial, coroner's inquisitions were filed separately and are more likely to appear in this collection as a standalone set of documents.

Locality History: Isle of Wight County was named probably for the Isle of Wight off the south coast of England. It was first known as Warrosquyoake for an Indian tribe living in the area whose name means "swamp in a depression of land," and was one of the original shires, or counties, first enumerated in 1634. The present name was given in 1637. Parts of Nansemond County were added in 1769 and 1772.

Lost Locality History: Recognized as Warrosquyoake County, one of the original shires, in 1634 and given its present name in 1637. Most pre-Revolutionary War-era loose records are missing. Volumes that record deeds, court orders, and wills exist. During the Civil War, the county clerk had Randall Boothe, a Black man he enslaved, transport the court records to Greensville and Brunswick counties for safekeeping. After the war ended, Boothe returned the records to Isle of Wight and served as courthouse caretaker.

Scope and Content

Materials in the Library of Virginia's collections contain historical terms, phrases, and images that are offensive to modern readers. These include demeaning and dehumanizing references to race, ethnicity, and nationality; enslaved or free status; physical and mental ability; religion; sex; and sexual orientation and gender identity.

Coroners' Inquisitions contain graphic and in some cases violent or otherwise disturbing descriptions of death.

Isle of Wight County (Va.) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1805-1866, contains investigations into the deaths of free and enslaved Black and Multiracial individuals who died by a sudden, violent, unnatural or suspicious manner, or died without medical attendance. Causes of death found in these records include accidental, alcohol, drowning, homicide, injuries, infanticide, medical conditions, natural causes ("visitation by God"), and suicide.

Documents commonly found in coroners' inquisitions include the inquisition, depositions, and summons. Some inquisitions contain other documents such as exhibits. 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 coroner knew the deceased person to be Black or Multiracial, the inquest should identify the person individual's legal status (free or enslaved). If the coroner knew the deceased person to be enslaved, the inquest often includes their name, their enslaver and the enslaver's residence. Information found in the depositions include the name of the deponent(s) and their account of the circumstances that led to the death of the deceased.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Coroners' Inquisitions, 1805-1866, chronological by date coroner filed inquisition in the court.

Contents List

Series I: Coroners' Inquisitions, 1805-1866

Extent

digital images

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Barcode number 0007396693: Coroners' Inquisitions, 1805-1866