

A Guide to the Lancaster County (Va.) Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1818

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia 0007711550
Library of Virginia
2018

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History

Processed by: Greg Crawford

Title Statement

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Publication Statement

Date: ©2018 By The Library of Virginia. All Rights Reserved.

Publisher: Library of Virginia

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Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from being created directly into EAD, created by Greg Crawford, 04 April 2018

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Barcode number

0007711550

Language

English

Collector

Lancaster County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

.10 cu. ft.

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 papers from Lancaster County.

Preferred Citation

Lancaster County (Va.) Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1818. Local government records collection, Lancaster County (Va.) County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va. 23219.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Lancaster County (Va.) County Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1818, is available at [Virginia Untold: the African American Narrative digital collection](#).

Historical Information

Lancaster County was named probably for the English county. It was formed from Northumberland and York Counties sometime between 26 March and 16 September 1651. The county court first met on 1 January 1652. The county seat is Lancaster.

Enslaved people sued for emancipation in freedom suits based on the following: they were descendant(s) of a free female ancestor, typically a Native American (Henings Statutes, volume 2, p.170); failure of enslaver(s) to abide by the 1778 "slave nonimportation act" (Henings Statutes, volume 9, pp. 471-472); or claimed to have been freed by enslaver(s) by deed of emancipation or last will and testament (Henings Statutes volume 11, pp. 39-40)

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.

Lancaster County (Va.) County Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1818, consist of one suit: Billy and others versus Ezekiel G. Shearman. Suits initiated by enslaved people seeking to gain their freedom on the law side of the court. Cases are identified by style of suit consisting of plaintiff and defendant names. Surnames of others involved in a suit, including secondary plaintiffs and defendants, witnesses, deponents and affiants, and family members with surnames different from the plaintiff or defendant are indexed. Also identified are names of enslaved and enslavers found in suit as well as whether enslaved won their freedom. Predominant documents found in freedom suits include petitions, records of suits, depositions, affidavits, wills, among other items. Information found in documents include enslaved's argument for freedom, acquisition of enslaved people by enslavers, ancestry of enslaved people, and relationship between enslaved and enslavers.