

A Guide to the Princess Anne County (Va.) Deeds of Emancipation, ca. 1786

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia
Library of Virginia
2025

History

Processed by: L. Neuroth, M. Mason

Title Statement

A Guide to the Princess Anne County (Va.) Deeds of Emancipation, ca. 1786

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Author: Mary Ann Mason

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Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from MS Word, created by Mary Ann Mason, 26 November 2025

Language Usage: Description is in English

Descriptive Summary

Language

English

Collector

Virginia Beach (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

1 item.

Location

Library of Virginia

Repository

Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection is open to research.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

These records came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court records from Virginia Beach (Va.) Circuit Court in an undated accession.

Processing Information

Princess Anne County Apprenticeship Indentures were originally described as part of the Princess Anne County (Va.) Free and enslaved records, but were removed to the present Princess Anne County (Va.) Deeds of Emancipation, to enhance discoverability in November 2025.

Encoded by M. Mason, November 2025.

Preferred Citation

Princess Anne County (Va.) Deeds of Emancipation, ca. 1786. Local government records collection, Princess Anne County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

See Also: [Princess Anne County \(Va.\) Free and Enslaved Records](#)

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

Additional Princess Anne 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."](#)

Historical Information

Context for Record Type: Deeds of emancipation and manumission record an enslavers' intent to emancipate enslaved people from bondage. Some of the earliest legal manumissions in Virginia occurred in the early 1770s. However, there was a sharp rise following the 1782 manumission act that allowed enslavers to privately emancipate enslaved people "by last will and testament or other instrument in writing sealed." They were no longer required to seek a special act from the General Assembly. These documents sometimes include an enslavers' intent for emancipation ranging from religious and moral motivations to binding legal agreements.

Deeds of emancipation and manumission essentially provide the same information and there is little difference between the two. Both include the name of the enslaver, the name of the enslaved person to be freed, the date of anticipated freedom, the date the manumission was proved or certified, and as mentioned, sometimes a reason why the enslaver decided to emancipate the enslaved person. In a deed of manumission, an enslaver directly freed an enslaved person by manumission. In a deed of emancipation, an enslaved person could be freed after the enslaver's death by those executing a last will and testament. This collection also includes court orders that record the date or age when enslaved individuals were to be emancipated by deed as stipulated in an enslaver's will.

Locality History: Princess Anne County (extinct) was named for Anne, daughter of James II, who became queen of England in 1702. The county was formed from Lower Norfolk County in 1691 and became extinct in 1963, after its consolidation with the city of Virginia Beach. The county seat was Princess Anne.

Scope and Content

Princess Anne County (Va.) Deeds of emancipation, ca. 1786, include the deed of emancipation for Rachel, a Black woman, written by Edward Moseley, clerk of the court, on behalf of Holland and wife to Thomas Wishart Sr. , noting Rachel is emancipated by way of the will of John Thorowgood. It appears the deed was not recorded due to want of being fully proved.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged

- Series I: Deeds of emancipation, ca. 1786

Contents List

Series I: Deeds of Emancipation, ca. 1786

Extent

1 item

Physical Location Library of Virginia

Barcode number 1120074: Free and Enslaved Records, 1766-1862

Library of Virginia