

# A Guide to the Hanover County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1831-1913

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A Collection in the Library of Virginia  
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## History

**Processed by:** Field processors

## Title Statement

A Guide to the Hanover County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1831-1913

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## Profile Description

**Creation:** Machine-readable finding aid derived from MARC record, created by Greg Crawford, 13 March 2008

**Language Usage:** Description is in English

## Revision Description

**2013-11-21** Converted to schema conforming EAD by dtd2schema.vh.xsl.

## Descriptive Summary

### Language

English

### Collector

Hanover County (Va.) Circuit Court

### Physical Characteristics

Digital images; 1.45 cubic feet (3 boxes).

### Location

Library of Virginia

### Repository

The Library of Virginia

## Administrative Information

## Access Restrictions

Hanover County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1831-1913, use digital images found on the [Chancery Records Index](#) available electronically at the website of the Library of Virginia.

## Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

## Acquisition Information

Digital images were generated in 2008 by PTFS.

Additional digital images were generated in 2012.

## Processing Information

Hanover County Chancery Causes were processed in the locality by field processors prior to 2007. Additional records were found at the Library of Virginia after the initial scanning and were processed by Library of Virginia staff.

Digital images were generated in 2008 by PTFS through the Library of Virginia's Circuit Court Records Preservation Program.

Additional digital images were generated in 2012 by Backstage Library Works through the Library of Virginia's Circuit Court Records Preservation Program.

Encoded by G. Crawford: 2008; updated by J. Taylor: November 2023.

## Preferred Citation

Hanover County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1831-1913. (Cite style of suit and chancery index no.). Local government records collection, Hanover County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

# Adjunct Descriptive Data

## Related Material

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

See the [Lost Records Localities Digital Collection](#) available at Virginia Memory.

## Location of Originals

The vast majority of the Hanover County Chancery Causes remain in the locality. Contact the County Clerk for access.

## 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:** Hanover County was named for George I, who at the time of his ascent to the English throne was elector of Hanover in Germany. The county was formed from New Kent in 1720. The county seat is Hanover.

**Lost Locality Notes:** Most county court records, particularly deeds, wills, and marriage records, were destroyed by fire in Richmond on 3 April 1865, where they had been moved for safekeeping during the Civil War. The circuit court records were not moved to Richmond and were relatively unscathed. Consequently, there is a strong run of common law papers and chancery papers after 1831 that were generated by the circuit superior court of law and chancery and its successor, the circuit court.

## Scope and Content

Hanover County (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1831-1913, 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.

Due to Hanover County's proximity to Richmond, a center for the American slave trade, many chancery causes prior to 1865 contain 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. Many specifically involve the business of selling enslaved people further south to resolve debts and increase wealth.

In the chancery causes from before 1865, a number of enslaved individuals are described as being hired out by their enslavers to do work such as building a road or rail line. Many enslaved people are also described as knowing a trade, such as carpentry and smithing.

## 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.*

### **1834-003: Exr. of Mahala v. Admr of John Bowe, etc.**

#### **Scope and Content**

Mahala, a "free woman of color," lived in Hanover County prior to her death in 1831. John Bowe, Mahala's enslaver, emancipated Mahala in 1824. Col. Thomas Tinsley enslaved Mahala prior to John Bowes. John Bowe additionally emancipated an unnamed "mulatto" girl, after purchasing her from Mrs. Bowler which was documented in the Hanover Court. John Bowe wished to educate both Mahala and the unnamed girl. Mahala died and her will was recorded in 1831. In her will, Mahala states that she purchased her children from Col. Thomas Tinsley.

### **1834-011: Betsey Bazinett (Free) v. Charles Tinsley, etc.**

#### **Scope and Content**

Betsey Bazinett stated that she was a "free woman of color" because she was the daughter of Matilda Bazinett, also free. John, Betsey's father, was enslaved by Charles Tinsley and worked as a blacksmith. Due to their circumstances, Betsey's parents were separated. Betsey was put into the custody of her father's mother. Betsey fled from Tinsley's property upon discovering that he wished to deprive Betsey of her freedom and planned to remove her to parts unknown. Betsey was afraid that she would be seized upon and sold.

### **1839-003: Hester Ann Jones by, etc. v. Elisha Jones, infant, etc.**

#### **Scope and Content**

Military Bounty Land Warrant No. 6908 was granted to the heirs of Ella Jones, who was herself an heir of Absalom Jones. Absalom Jones was given the bounty land warrant for his service as a private in the Revolutionary War.

### **1848-001: Charles Webb v. Richard Gaines, etc.**

**Scope and Content**

John Gaines sold Beverly, Nancy, and her two children, all of whom were enslaved by John. John did this to prevent Robert B. Gaines, his brother, from selling the four of them in Norfolk. Maria and Isbell, two enslaved women, were taken to King William County by Robert B. Gaines and sold by the county sheriff. Hetty, an enslaved woman, was sold in 1808 to pay John Gaine's expenses as a student at William and Mary.

**1861-006: Admr of Lucy Dickinson v. James B. Cason****Scope and Content**

Lucy Dickinson was the aunt of James B. Cason. Lucy was said to be a weakly woman, illiterate and under his influence. James was said to be a gambler and drinker. John was said to verbally abuse Dickinson and had forged Virginia Central Railroad stock in her name. Dickinson also owned a considerable number of enslaved persons who helped her manage her plantation known as "Queens." These enslaved individuals used to drive a cart and team in hauling coal and wood and going to the mill. Cason considered them "burdensome, unmanageable and unproductive" primarily because Dickinson was said to "indulge" the people she enslaved and managed them through leniency. Cason sold and hired out a number of these individuals for money, such as Fanny, who was sold to Fendall Carpenter, a slave trader from Tennessee.

**1864-002: Petition of George W. Doswell, admr.****Scope and Content**

Petition of George W. Doswell, a former county sheriff. He sold the personal and real estate of Thomas L. Page, but had difficulties with distributing the funds. The funds were in the only current circulating currency-Confederate Treasury notes which were quickly depreciating. Additional problems included many parties entitled to the funds, but resided in Union territory and parties entitled to the funds, but were in military service and could not be located.