

# A Guide to the Staunton (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1808-1913 (bulk 1871-1913)

Staunton (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1808-1951 (bulk 1871-1933)  
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## History

**Processed by:** Library of Virginia staff

## Title Statement

A Guide to the Staunton (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1808-1913 (bulk 1871-1913)

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**Author:** G. Crawford

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## Profile Description

**Creation:** Machine-readable finding aid derived from MARC record, created by Greg Crawford, 14 May 2008

**Language Usage:** Description is in English

## Revision Description

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

## Descriptive Summary

### Chancery Records Index

Staunton (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1808-001-1913-005

### Language

English

### Collector

Staunton (Va.) Circuit Court

### Physical Characteristics

39.25 cubic feet (86 boxes); Digital images

### Location

Library of Virginia

### Repository

The Library of Virginia

# Administrative Information

## Access Restrictions

Staunton (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1808-1951 digital images can be found on the [Chancery Records Index](#) available electronically at the website of the Library of Virginia. Please use digital images.

## Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

## Acquisition Information

These records came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from Staunton (Va.) in 2007 under the accession number 43238.

## Processing Information

The bulk of these records were processed in 2007. An additional box of records was processed and interfiled into the collection during a cataloguing assessment project in 2024.

Encoded by G. Crawford: 2008; Updated by E. Swain: November 2024.

## Preferred Citation

Staunton (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1808-1951, (Cite style of suit [and chancery index no. if available]). Local government records collection, Staunton Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, 23219.

# Adjunct Descriptive Data

## Related Material

See also: [Staunton \(Va.\) Superior Court of Chancery Summonses, 1810-1819.](#)

Additional unindexed and unprocessed post-1913 records may be available at the Circuit Court Clerk's Office.

Additional Staunton 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."](#)

# Historical Information

**Context of 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:** Staunton, in Augusta County, was named, according to most authorities, for Rebecca Staunton, wife of Sir William Gooch, lieutenant governor of Virginia from 1727 to 1749. Staunton was laid out in 1748 at the site of the Augusta County courthouse and was established as a town in 1761. It was incorporated as a town in 1801 and as a city in 1871.

# Scope and Content

Staunton (Va.) Chancery Causes, 1808-1951, 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.

# 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 Chancery Causes 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.*

### **1875-005 Town of Lexington vs. Valley Railroad Company etc:**

#### **Scope and Content**

Town invested in the railroad on the condition it would be built quickly and come near the town. Now Lexington officials are afraid that the railroad is not holding to the conditions of the investment.

### **1886-009 City of Staunton vs. John M. Carroll:**

#### **Scope and Content**

Carroll served as city treasurer for years but the city removed him from office in 1885. He owes the city around \$10,000 and the city is suing to have his property sold to settle the debt.

### **1898-001 Trustees of Fairview Cemetery etc vs. Charles L. Brock:**

#### **Scope and Content**

Fairview Cemetery is an African American cemetery located in Staunton. Brock was treasurer and as such responsible for selling grave plots and keeping track of the cemetery's finances. He kept the finances in a disorderly fashion and after his removal from the board, the new trustees allege that he owes money to the cemetery. Various depositions as to his financial management style and troubles with upkeep in the cemetery. Exhibits include lists of plot owners.

### **1901-018 Alexander Campbell Chewning vs Mary Lee Chewning:**

#### **Scope and Content**

Divorce and child custody case. Copious depositions as to the bad character and reputation of the father including accusations that he was as a "wanderer", a "criminal", had "no fixed address", was considered "notorious", etc. Mary Lee's family never wanted her to marry Alexander, he was even banned from in-laws' house after Alexander convinced his mother-in-law to sign a contract that turned out to be signing over all her property to him. Additional, Alexander once kidnapped his children and took them out west where he had them participate in some money-raising scheme. Also included are letters to the court from his 14 and 17 year old children declaring that they would not live with him, they wanted nothing to do with him, and that they chose to remain with their mother.

### **1901-021 Mary Baldwin Seminary vs. City of Staunton:**

#### **Scope and Content**

City has begun to tax city lots that belong to the school after years of not taxing them. School claims the lots were deeded to the school and rented out to support their educational mission and that therefore according to both state law and Staunton city regulations, they are tax exempt. Mary Baldwin prevailed both in the suit and on appeal.

### **1906-022 Trustees of Augusta Street Methodist Episcopal Church vs. Moses Lake, etc:**

#### **Scope and Content**

Fight between trustees and pastor over church finances and authority over money. Trustees claim that the pastor has seized control of the finances and is doing whatever he wishes, making himself obnoxious, and splitting the congregation. Pastor contends that the trustees are former trustees. Suit dismissed because

the issues at hand had been settled by a congregation vote.

## **1908-008 W. H. Garman vs. Aaron H. Adler etc:**

### **Scope and Content**

Proprietor of the Beverley Hotel puts a lien on two travelling cases of umbrellas and umbrella parts to satisfy Adler's hotel bill debt. Cases were eventually sold by the sheriff to pay the debt.

## **1917-002 Executor of Caroline M. Marquis vs. Legatees of Caroline M. Marquis:**

### **Scope and Content**

Suit contains lots of information about her extensive properties in Staunton and a list of her furniture. Also includes photographs of her, her family members, and interiors and exteriors of buildings she either owned or had an interest in, including the Marquis Memorial Chapel.

## **1918-003 Executor of Charlotte Straith vs. Legatees of Charlotte Straith:**

### **Scope and Content**

Suit contains lots of information about her properties including a house called Oakenwold and a list of silverplate owned. Extensive bills for house construction and decoration indicate building and decorating trends and methods of the time period.

## **1924-002 Edna Wright vs. Frank Wright:**

### **Scope and Content**

Divorce case that includes as an exhibit photographs that feature Mr. Wright kissing and hugging someone who is not Mrs. Wright but is in fact Mrs. Duffey.