

A Guide to the Norfolk (Va.) Death Records, 1901-1969

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1901-1969

A Collection in the Library of Virginia 1140957-1140980, 1143601-1143799, 1143900-1143999

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Descriptive Summary

Barcode numbers

1140957-1140980, 1143601-1143799, 1143900-1143999

Language

English

Collector

Norfolk (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

323 v.

Location

State Records Center - Archives Annex, Library of Virginia

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

Transferred from city of Norfolk to the Virginia Department of Bureau of Vital Statistics who transferred them to Library of Virginia under the accession number 37862.

Preferred Citation

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Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

An index, arranged alphabetically by surname, for records in this collection dating from 1901-1963 is available for research. Consult the [LVA catalog record](#).

Additional Norfolk Vital Statistic 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

Norfolk was located in Norfolk County, which is now extinct. The city took the name from the former home of an early settler, Adam Thoroughgood, who was a native of the county of Norfolk in England. Norfolk was established in 1680 by an act of assembly. It was incorporated as a town in 1736 and as a city in 1845.

Laws requiring the recording of births and deaths in Virginia were enacted as early as 1632, when a law directed ministers or churchwardens in each parish to present a "register of all burials, christenings, and marriages" yearly at the June meeting of the court. A similar act passed in 1659 stated that "enquiries are often made for persons imported into the collonie, of whose death no positive certificate can be granted for want of registers." Few records survive from these early decades.

In 1713, the General Assembly noted that earlier acts had "for a long time been disused" and once again directed the recording of births and deaths by the minister or clerk of each parish. A return made the same year noted that the list of births and deaths was not complete since many parishes failed to make returns "for tis a thing so new to the people that neither they care to Register their Births and Burials, nor are the Parish Clerks yet brought into a regular method of transmitting them."

The recording of vital statistics continued to be an ecclesiastical function throughout the colonial period. With the disestablishment of the Anglican church after the American Revolution and the rise of other religious denominations, the record-keeping process for vital statistics fell more and more to the individual family. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, medical science began to recognize the advantages of accurate birth and mortality information in controlling and treating communicable diseases. Pressure from local and national health organizations and medical professionals resulted in the passage of vital statistics registration laws. Virginia was one of the earliest states to pass such a law.

A law requiring the systematic statewide recording of births and deaths was passed by the General Assembly on April 11 1853. Every commissioner of revenue registered births and deaths in his district annually, at the same time personal property subject to taxation was ascertained. The commissioner recorded births and deaths that had occurred prior to 31 December of the preceding year and returned the record to the clerk of court by 1 June. Information was obtained from heads of family, physicians, surgeons, or coroners. The law imposed penalties for failing to furnish or collect the information.

The clerk of court in each locality entered the information supplied by the commissioner into registers and prepared an accompanying alphabetical index. A copy of each register was forwarded to the Auditor of Public Accounts. The law went into effect on 1 July 1853, and continued until 1896, when an economy-conscious legislature repealed the recording provisions.

There was no statewide recording of births and deaths between 1896 and 1912. Several metropolitan areas including Norfolk continued to keep records of births and deaths for all or part of the period between 1896 and 1912.

Scope and Content

Norfolk (Va.) Death Records, 1901-1969, consist of certificates of death that record: name, race, and sex of the deceased; date and place of death; name of the disease or cause of death; age at death; date and place of birth; occupation; marital status; whether an autopsy was performed; names of parents of the deceased; name of person giving the information; name of funeral director and location of funeral home where the deceased was interred; description of the informant (whether a physician, nurse, family member, or other person); place of death (whether a hospital, residence, river, etc.); place of residence; interval between onset of disease or injury and death; if death by injury, where injury occurred; and disposition of body (whether buried, cremated, or removed from locality).

Information is often missing from the records. If an infant had not been named at the time of birth or death, the entry would record only the surname or note "Smith, infant." Only the month appears for the date of birth or death in some instances. On death registers, the names of parents of the deceased are occasionally omitted or unreliable.

The collection may include additional record types such as permits for disinternment, transportation, and reinternment of the deceased.

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically by year and thereunder by month.