

# A Guide to the Princess Anne County (Va.) Coroner's Inquisitions, 1810-1935

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## Title Statement

A Guide to the Princess Anne County (Va.) Coroner's Inquisitions, 1810-1935

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## Descriptive Summary

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### Collector

Virginia Beach (Va.) Circuit Court

### Physical Characteristics

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## 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 shipments of court papers from the city of Virginia Beach.

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# Historical Information

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.

The separate office of coroner appeared in Virginia about 1660. The judicial duty of the office is to hold inquisitions in cases when persons meet sudden, violent, unnatural or suspicious death, or death without medical attendance. The coroner would summon a jury to assist him in determining cause of death. Prior to November 1877, the jurors numbered twelve. Between November 1877 and March 1926, the jurors numbered six. The jury viewed the body of the deceased and heard the testimony of witnesses. The coroner was required to write down witness testimony. After seeing and hearing the evidence, the jury delivered in writing to the coroner their conclusion concerning cause of death referred to as the inquisition. After March 1926, only the coroner determined cause of death. He could require physicians to assist him with determining cause of death. If a criminal act was determined to be the cause of death, the coroner was to deliver the guilty person to the sheriff and the coroners' inquests would be used as evidence in the criminal trial.

# Scope and Content

Princess Anne County (Va) Coroners' Inquisitions, 1810-1935, are investigations into the deaths of individuals who died by a sudden, violent, unnatural or suspicious manner, or died without medical attendance. Causes of death found in coroners' inquisitions include murder, infanticide, suicide, domestic violence, exposure to elements, drownings, train accidents, automobile accidents, and natural causes, or as commonly referred to in the 19th century, visitation by God. Documents commonly found in coroners' inquests include the inquisition, depositions, and summons. Criminal papers such as recognizance bonds can be found in coroner inquisitions. Information found in the inquisition include the name of the coroner, the names of the jurors, the name and age of the deceased if known, gender and race of the deceased, and when, how, and by what means the deceased came to his or her death. If the deceased was African American, the inquest would identify the deceased as a slave or free person if known. If the deceased was a slave, the inquest would include, if known, the name of the slaveowner and the slaveowner's residence. Information found in the depositions include the name of the deponent and his or her account of the circumstances that led to the death of the deceased. Slaves were occasionally deponents in coroner investigations.

# Index Terms

## Corporate Names:

Virginia Beach (Va.) Circuit Court.

## Subjects:

African Americans--History.

Coroners--Virginia--Princess Anne County.

Death--Causes--Virginia--Princess Anne County.  
Free African Americans--Virginia--Princess Anne County.  
Infanticide--Virginia--Princess Anne County.  
Murder--Investigation--Virginia--Princess Anne County.  
Murder victims--Virginia--Princess Anne County.  
Slaveholders--Virginia--Princess Anne County.  
Slaves--Virginia--Princess Anne County.  
Suicide--Virginia--Princess Anne County.  
Women--Virginia--Princess Anne County.

## **Geographical Names:**

Princess Anne County (Va.)--History.

## **Genre and Form Terms:**

Death records--Virginia--Princess Anne County.  
Local government records--Virginia--Princess Anne County.  
Reports--Virginia--Princess Anne County.

## **Added Entry - Corporate Name:**

Princess Anne County (Va.) Circuit Court.

## **Arrangement**

Chronological by date coroner filed inquisition in the court.

## **Selected Coroners' Inquisitions of Interest**

### **1811 September, Death of Jesse Bonney:**

#### **Scope and Content**

Jesse Bonney, probably a child as he is referred to as the orphan of James Bonney, was killed by accidental hanging after he "went alone into the orchard to get some apples and went up a tree and accidentally fell and hung the hind part of his frock over a limb which twin'd the said frock over his head... which choked him."

### **1819 February 19, Death of Mingo:**

#### **Scope and Content**

Mingo was not listed as either slave or free but as a "felon taken from the county jail." Mingo was shot on the road by an unknown person as a group traveled from the Princess Anne County jail towards Richmond.

### **1819 August 4, Death of Jonas (slave):**

#### **Scope and Content**

Jonas, a slave belonging to Julia Brown, "voluntarily and feloniously drowned" himself in the North River.

### **1821 October 10, Death of unknown infant:**

#### **Scope and Content**

Unknown infant was starved to death by its mother Elizabeth Wilborn and the midwife Sally Fuller. After its death, the infant was buried under a fence.

### **1828 March 7, Death of Dudley Armistead:**

#### **Scope and Content**

Armistead was killed by the accidental discharge of a gun that he placed in a cart he was walking behind. "The shaking and jolting of the cart caused the gun to go off."

## **1829 February 18, Death of Isabel (slave):**

### **Scope and Content**

Isabel, a slave of Richard Land, was hired out to and murdered by John S. Marley. Marley struck her with a club or stick on the right shoulder and left thigh in November 1828. Isabel "languished under the said beating" until she died on 13 February 1829.

## **1829 September 26, Death of Thornton B. Stone:**

### **Scope and Content**

Parker and Fama, two slaves owned by Daniel Stone, with their fists struck Thornton Stone "on the right breast which caused his shoulder and other parts to give way two mortal wounds."

## **1830 October 10, Death of Charles (slave):**

### **Scope and Content**

Charles, a slave owned by Josiah Hunter, quarreled with and made an assault on another slave, Ned, who struck Charles on the head with the axe he had been holding.

## **1834 September 23, Death of Nelson (slave):**

### **Scope and Content**

"Not having God before his eyes," Nelson, a slave owned by Mary Stone, "being alone on the public road called the north landing road himself voluntarily or accidentally (being drunk) in a steer cart, caught his head between the spokes of said cart and caused his death."

## **1834 September 23, Death of Daniel A. Grimstead:**

### **Scope and Content**

Grimstead was murdered by Elizabeth Franklin, noted as a spinster of the county, who "of her malice aforethought put a certain potion of poison in some baked beef of which the said Daniel A. Grimstead eat heartily... after which he was taken mortally sick."

## **1842 August 1, Death of Erasmus Chappel:**

### **Scope and Content**

Erasmus Chappel, along with Dennis Uel, Jordan Showard, and Augustice Brinson, went to the home of Jasper Hunt, an African American man, to "use violence on said Hunt and family or property." Hunt with a gun loaded with lead shot inflicted on Chappel "27 mortal wounds with large shot scattered from his breast to his knees... and wounded two others of the mob."

## **1848 May 23, Death of Mary Whitehurst:**

### **Scope and Content**

Mary Whitehurst came to her death by being poisoned, and the coroner believed that "according to the evidence that the poison was in some flour sent to the deceased by Mrs. Nancy Whitehurst at the request of her husband who carried it."

## **1852 April 12, Death of Erasmus Chappel:**

### **Scope and Content**

Erasmus Chappel, a child, came to his death by a wound inflicted on his head by the hand of his father, Noah Chappel. Female neighbors testified that Noah Chappel asked them to come attend his child that "had fallen and nearly killed itself," but they found no evidence of a fall. Dr. D. H. Bright believed that the wound could not have come from a fall and testified that Noah Chappel had told him "the child was not his and he did not care what became of it." Noah Chappel claimed that his wife, who had left him some days prior to the incident, had "come back and done the mischief to get him in business."

## **1859 June 20, Death of Benjamin F. Flanagan:**

### **Scope and Content**

Benjamin Flanagan was killed by wounds from a gun discharged by Walter S. Land, and the coroner believed that the numerous wounds on Flanagan's breast, side, and neck indicated that there were two or three loads discharged at Flanagan. According to depositions in the inquest, Walter Land believed that Flanagan was having an affair with his wife.

## **1878 November 18, Death of Thomas Elliott:**

### **Scope and Content**

Thomas Elliott was shot on election night by an unknown person during an altercation between whites and African Americans. Numerous deponents described what they saw as the "hostile and belligerent demonstrations displayed on the part of the colored people." African Americans deposed described arguments erupting over votes for the conservative ticket they described as the "white ticket." Dr. H. T. Hunter recalled hearing chants of "Rally, rally, rally, let us go back; one of our party is shot... G-d d-m I will see us righted" when a group of African Americans brought the wounded Elliott to his house for treatment.

## **1914 June 9, Death of Carey Dyer:**

### **Scope and Content**

Carey Dyer came to his death by stepping too close to a moving train. The coroner's jurors censured the railroad company for not having properly sounded warnings. Inquisition includes testimony from railroad employees and nearby residents who claimed to have not heard the train whistle.

## **1914 September 30, Death of Marie Wilford:**

### **Scope and Content**

Marie Wilford, a 6-year-old African American child, was struck by a Norfolk Southern train while attempting to cross the tracks. The death was found to be an unavoidable accident. Included in the case is testimony from railroad employees, passengers, and nearby witnesses.

## **1914 December 7, Death of Andrew Jimison:**

### **Scope and Content**

Andrew Jimison, African American, died from pistol shots fired by Babel Twiford. After extensive depositions regarding the conflict, the shooting was ruled as self-defense. After a verbal confrontation, Jimison approached Twiford while wielding a club. Twiford shot at Jimison in self-defense.

## **1919 September 22, Deaths of C. C. Bailey, Clyde E. Chapman, and Constance Skinner Chapman:**

### **Scope and Content**

Mrs. Clyde E. Chapman lost control of an automobile while driving on some sand causing the car to overturn throwing out and killing her husband Clyde E. Chapman, her daughter Constance Skinner Chapman, and C. C. Bailey.

## **1922 October 4, Death of Grace L. Parker:**

### **Scope and Content**

Suffering from chronic heart weakness, Grace L. Parker, "being wholly alone," left instructions with her hotel about what should be done with her body and estate should she die there: "...that it would be my wish that my body be buried wherever I may happen to be when life leaves it - but please be sure that it is not just a case of suspended animation before I am consigned to a resting place in the earth."

## **1929 January 7, Death of Edward Woodhouse:**

### **Scope and Content**

Child, referred to as "undeveloped mentally," was unable to escape the house fire started by sparks from a heater setting the wallpaper on fire.

## **1929 September 22, Death of Charles Butler:**

### **Scope and Content**

During a family fight, Charles Butler was stabbed in the chest with a paring knife by his daughter Mrs. Chapman. The coroner ruled that it was a justifiable killing.

## **1934 November 21, Death of Ida Lee Owens:**

### **Scope and Content**

After disappearing from the Eastern Steamship liner the *Robert E. Lee*, the body of New Yorker Ida Lee Owens washed ashore at Virginia Beach. Her death was ruled a suicide by drowning. According to a newspaper article accompanying the coroner's inquest a note was found in Owens' stateroom that expressed boredom at having to live with "these human beings, with their petty affairs and pretenses and pitiful ego... The philosophers say that dreams are the best part of life. I have had my dreams. This world is too ugly for me to live in. For one with my ideals, life among such people is no longer endurable. If only he knows how bored I am."

## **1934 November 21, Deaths of Sarah Owens and William Owens:**

### **Scope and Content**

Retired navy petty officer William Owens shot and killed his wife Sarah Owens before shooting himself. William Owens had a history of undergoing treatment for mental trouble. Inquest is accompanied by a newspaper article reporting on the incident.

## **1935 December 10, Death of Alexander Nelson:**

### **Scope and Content**

Alexander Nelson, an African American parachute jumper, misjudged his landing and came down in the water where he drowned.