

A Guide to the Petersburg (Va.) Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1824-1852

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History

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Summary

Barcode number

0007520827

Language

English

Collector

Petersburg (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

.15 cu. ft.

Location

Library of Virginia

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 transfers of court papers from the Circuit Court of Petersburg.

Preferred Citation

Petersburg (Va.) Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1824-1852. Local government records collection, Petersburg (City) Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia 23219.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Additional city of Petersburg Judgments are found at the Library of Virginia.

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

Additional freedom suits may be found in the Petersburg Chancery Causes. Consult "[A Guide to Virginia County and City Records on Microfilm.](#)"

Historical Information

Slaves sued for emancipation in freedom suits based on the following: they were descendant(s) of a free female ancestor, typically a Native American (Henings Statutes, volume 2, p.170); failure of slaveowner(s) to abide by the 1778 slave nonimportation act (Henings Statutes, volume 9, pp. 471-472); or claimed to have been freed by slaveowner(s) by deed of emancipation or last will and testament (Henings Statutes volume 11, pp. 39-40)

Petersburg was formed from parts of Dinwiddie, Prince George, and Chesterfield Counties. A garrison and fur trading post called Fort Henry was established there in 1645 on the site of the Indian town Appamattuck. The present name, suggested in 1733 by William Byrd (1674-1744), honors Peter Jones, Byrd's companion on expeditions into the Virginia backcountry. Petersburg was established in 1748 and incorporated as a town in 1784. In the latter year the towns of Blandford, Pocahontas, and Ravenscroft were added to Petersburg. It was incorporated as a city in 1850.

Scope and Content

Petersburg (Va.) Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1824-1852, consist of suits initiated by slaves seeking to gain their freedom on the law side of the court. Cases are identified by style of suit consisting of plaintiff and defendant names. Surnames of others involved in a suit, including secondary plaintiffs and defendants, witnesses, deponents and affiants, and family members with surnames different from the plaintiff or defendant are indexed. Also identified are names of slaves and slaveowners identified in suit as well as whether slave(s) won their freedom. Predominant documents found in freedom suits include petitions, records of suits, depositions, affidavits, wills, among other items. Information found in documents include slave's argument for freedom, acquisition of slaves by slaveowners, slave ancestry, and relationship between slaves and slaveowners.

Judgments (Freedom Suits) are useful when researching local history and genealogical information, particularly for African Americans. They are a valuable source of local, state, social, and legal history and serve as a primary source for understanding a locality's history.

Index Terms

Corporate Names:

Petersburg (Va.) Circuit Court.

Subjects:

African Americans -- Virginia.

Free African Americans -- Virginia -- Petersburg.

Slaveholders -- Virginia -- Petersburg.

Slavery -- Virginia -- Petersburg.

Geographical Names:

Petersburg (Va.) -- History.

Petersburg (Va.) -- Genealogy

Genre and Form Terms:

Civil actions -- Virginia -- Petersburg.

Freedom suits -- Virginia -- Petersburg.

Judicial records -- Virginia -- Petersburg.

Local government records -- Virginia -- Petersburg.

Petitions -- Virginia -- Petersburg.

Wills -- Virginia -- Petersburg.

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically.

List of Freedom Suits

1824 August: Eady Cary(alias Idy Cary) vs. Stith E. Burton

1831 May: William Walthal vs. - Traylor

1837 May: Hester Jane Carr alias Hester Jane Kerr vs. Richard Beasley

1852 Feb: John B. Simmons vs. Charles Scott