

A Guide to the Northampton County (Va.) Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1723-1845

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History

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Title Statement

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Summary

Barcode number

0007532874

Language

English

Collector

Northampton County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

.25 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 Northampton County.

Preferred Citation

Northampton County (Va.) Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1723-1845. Local government records collection, Northampton County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia 23219.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Additional Northampton County Court Records are found at the Library of Virginia.

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

Additional freedom suits may be found in the Northampton County Chancery Causes. Search the [the Chancery Records Index](#) found on the Library of Virginia web site. Enter the tilde symbol in the plaintiff surname field.

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)

Northampton County was named probably for the English county, of which Obedience Robins, a prominent early resident of the Eastern Shore, was a native. The county, which originally included all of the peninsula south of Maryland and which was one of the eight shires, or counties, first enumerated in 1634, was first called Accomack. The General Assembly changed the name to Northampton County in 1643. Accomack County was created from Northampton County about 1663, but in October 1670, the General Assembly temporarily reunited the two counties as Northampton County. In November 1673, Accomack County was again separated from Northampton. The county seat is Eastville.

Scope and Content

Northampton County (Va.) Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1723-1845, 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 found 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:

Northampton County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Subjects:

African Americans -- Virginia.

Free African Americans -- Virginia -- Northampton County.

Slaveholders -- Virginia -- Northampton County.

Slavery -- Virginia -- Northampton County.

Geographical Names:

Northampton County (Va.) -- History.

Northampton County (Va.) -- Genealogy

Genre and Form Terms:

Civil actions -- Virginia -- Northampton County.

Freedom suits -- Virginia -- Northampton County.

Judicial records -- Virginia -- Northampton County.

Local government records -- Virginia -- Northampton County.

Petitions -- Virginia -- Northampton County.

Wills -- Virginia -- Northampton County.

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically.