

A Guide to the Albemarle County (Va.) Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1782-1832

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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

0007555608

Language

English

Collector

Albemarle County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

.10 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 Albemarle County.

Preferred Citation

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Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

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

Additional Albemarle County 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 Albemarle 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

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

Albemarle County was named for William Anne Keppel, second earl of Albemarle, and governor of Virginia from 1737 to 1754. It was created by a statute of 1744 and formed from Goochland County; part of Louisa County was added in 1761 and islands in the Fluvanna (now the James) River in 1770. The court met for the first time on 8 February 1745. The county seat is the city of Charlottesville.

The District Courts were created by an act of the General Assembly passed on 22 December 1788. The purpose for the creation of the District Courts was to alleviate congestion in the General Court which had caused unreasonable delays in the adjudication of common law cases. The state was divided into eighteen districts, each composed of several counties, plus the district of Kentucky. The District Court held at Charlottesville heard cases originating in the counties of: Albemarle, Amherst, Fluvanna, and Louisa as well as the city of Charlottesville.

Scope and Content

Albemarle County (Va.) Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1782-1832, consist of suits initiated in the District Court and County Court by enslaved people 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 enslaved people and emnslavers found in suit as well as whether enslaved people 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 enslaved persons' argument for freedom, acquisition of enslaved by enslavers, ancestry of enslaved people, and relationship between enslaved and enslavers.

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.

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically.

