

A Guide to the Accomack County (Va.) Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1818-1860

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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

0007593069

Language

English

Collector

Accomack County (Va.) Circuit Court

Physical Characteristics

.35 cu. ft.

Repository

The Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

Patrons are to use digital images found at [Virginia Untold: the African American Narrative](#).

Acquisition Information

These items came to the Library of Virginia in a transfer of court papers from Accomack County.

Preferred Citation

Accomack County (Va.) Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1818-1860. Local government records collection, Accomack County (Va.) County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va. 23219.

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Additional Accomack County court records can be found at the Library of Virginia.

Historical Information

Accomack County was named for the Accomac Indians, who lived on the Eastern Shore at the time of the first English settlement in Virginia. The word means "on-the-other-side-of-water place" or "across the water." It was one of the original eight shires, or counties, first enumerated in 1634 and spelled Accomac without the k. The county's name was changed to Northampton County in 1643. The present county was formed from Northampton about 1663. In October 1670, the General Assembly temporarily reunited Accomack and Northampton Counties as Northampton County. In November 1673, Accomack County was again separated from Northampton. In early records, the county's name was spelled many ways. In 1940 the General Assembly adopted the present spelling, Accomack. The county gained a small part of the southern end of Smith's Island from Somerset County, Maryland, in 1879, after the United States had approved boundary changes between Virginia and Maryland that had been agreed to in 1877. The county seat is Accomac.

Slaves 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 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)

Scope and Content

Accomack County (Va.) County Judgments (Freedom Suits), 1818-1860, 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:

Accomack County (Va.) Circuit Court.

Subjects:

African Americans -- History -- Virginia -- Accomack County.

Slaveholders -- Virginia -- Accomack County.

Slavery -- Virginia -- Accomack County.

Geographical Names:

Accomack County (Va.) -- History.

Genre and Form Terms:

Civil actions -- Virginia -- Accomack County.

Freedom suits -- Virginia -- Accomack County.

Judicial records -- Virginia -- Accomack County.

Local government records -- Virginia -- Accomack County.

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