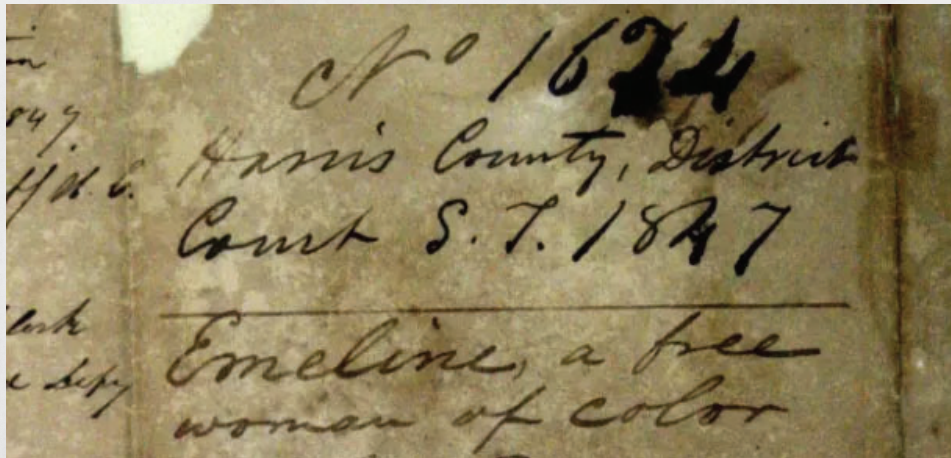


# Case of the Month: Hollywood Comes to the DCO

Judge Mark Davidson



## Photo of Emmaline's case file, styled "Emeline, a free woman of color, vs. Jesse P. Bolls, a suit for freedom"

In 2005, the amazing Curator of the Historical Documents Room Francisco Heredia helped me locate an 1848 file styled Emilene, a Free Woman of Color v. Jesse Bolls. The file tells a captivating story of a woman who sued for her freedom in pre-Civil War Houston and won. After an article on her story was published, and several articles appeared about Emilene and her lawyer, Peter Gray, a local writer/playwright named Pete O'Herron wrote a screenplay modeled after the case.

In time, the case was turned into an opera that had twelve performances and was featured in an article in Texas Monthly. The play begins with two modern-day employees of the District Clerk's Office finding this file during a file moving assignment. This serves as an introduction to a flashback and the trial in which a Harris County jury found an African-American woman more credible than a Caucasian man.

Last month, Mr. O'Herron reached out to update me about his play. The story had been optioned twice to country music superstar Tim McGraw, and most recently with a production company in Hollywood that has a deal with CBS! This month, a writing team is said to be visiting the Courthouse to go over the file.

This is appropriate since the courage it took for Emilene to take on the system of slavery in 1848 deserves remembrance and praise. She knew that if a jury had ruled against her, Bolls probably would have sold her two children to someone else to punish her for her actions. Peter Gray, the founder of the firm known today as Baker Botts, deserves our praise for using his immeasurable legal talents to do the right thing, even in a society whose economy was built around slavery – the American equivalent of the Holocaust. The District Clerk's Office – then and now, deserves praise for working to preserve these records.

If and when the movie is produced and premieres, we should all celebrate that Emilene's story is being told in a way that will make sure that future generations of Americans will know that our court system can make the world more just. It will serve as an example to all of the hardworking clerks that your work can make a difference today and for centuries to follow.