
Making the Most of “New” Online Probate Records

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Description: This intermediate level class focuses on the use of Ancestry & FamilySearch’s probate record collections.

Why use will & probate records?

- Decedent’s death date: Sometimes the exact death date is given but if isn’t the death date can always be estimated from the probate record.
- Relationships: Names of spouses, children, parents, siblings, in-laws, neighbors, associates, and their places of residence are often listed in the will and probate records.
- Addresses of heirs are often given in probate records.

Strategies for Using Probate Records

- Use indexes where available.
- Don't overlook searching the court minutes because they provide clues to finding unindexed records.
- Review both bound volumes and probate packets maintaining the order of the documents as found.
- Carefully study the documents found. A good way to do this is to transcribe or abstract the documents. Caution be careful to copy spelling and punctuation as it is in the document. Also, keep documents in the same order they were in the records.
- Learn about the laws that effect the probate records for the time frame and place where your ancestor died.
- Be sure to consult all related probate records for your ancestor. Probate related records include: Petitions, Wills, Executor's Letters of Testamentary or Administrator’s Letters of Administration, Administrator Bonds, Inventories and Appraisals, Distributions, Probate Packets, Guardianship Records.
- Records may be filed in different files/cabinets at the court house. Sometimes they are even in different courts.

Ancestry's US Will and Probate Collection

Important things about using Ancestry's Probate Record Collection.

- The collection contains more than just the wills. Find out what they are.
- Understand the county history where your ancestor died.
- Become familiar with the laws governing probate in the locality where your ancestor died.
- Learn the record arrangement of the collection and review Ancestry's search tips.
- Estate records can be helpful in doing African American research of slaves.

The above are based on Ancestry's article ["5 Things You Should Know to Get the Most from the Probate Collection on Ancestry."](#) Click the title or use URL listed below to view the article.

[\[http://c.ancestry.com/cs/media/5-things-about-probate-collection.pdf\]](http://c.ancestry.com/cs/media/5-things-about-probate-collection.pdf)

How to access Ancestry's Will and Probate Collection for your state.

1. Go to <http://ancestry.com>.
2. Select "Card Catalog " from the "Search" dropdown menu.
3. Enter search term, name of your state of interest, in the "Title" field in the upper left side of screen.
4. Enter search term "probate" in the "Keyword(s)" field.
5. Click on search button.
6. Probate titles will display.
7. Click on title of interest and enter data into the search screen that displays and click on search button.

Your search results may include links to original court index pages instead of images of documents because not all records in Ancestry's Probate Record Collection are indexed. When this happens see the article ["Finding Your Family in Wills and Probate Records,"](#) for instruction on how to navigate to the image. Click the article title above or use URL listed below to view the article.

http://c.mfcreative.com/mars/landing/probates/ProbatesResearchGuide_final.pdf

Ancestry also has an online tutorial in their 5 Minute Find series called ["Finding Probate Records That Aren't Indexed."](#) Click the article title above or use URL listed below to view the tutorial.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OmlY79G2Tk&index=2&list=PL0xuz8BBkD4hP8k3ExCn1hxhbeuWdVY5x#>

FamilySearch Will and Probate Records

FamilySearch has a large collection of wills and probate records that includes online images, microfilmed records, and authored books containing abstracts and transcriptions.

How to access:

Use the "Find a Collection" option on the main "Search" page of FamilySearch or search the Catalog option using Places or Keywords fields.

- For instructions on using the FamilySearch Catalog see [Introduction to the FamilySearch Catalog](#). Click the article title above or use URL listed below to view the article:
https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Introduction_to_the_Family_History_Library_Catalog
- For instructions on navigating through images see [Viewing and navigating through the images in a collection of historical records](#) in the FamilySearch help center.

For additional help see the following FamilySearch Wiki Articles URL's listed below:

https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Analyzing_United_States_Probate_Records

https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/United_States_Probate_Process

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Terms to Know Matching Activity

Enter the number from the definition field beside of the correct term.

Term	Definition
_____testate	1. Appointed by the court to oversee the estate of someone who died without a will.
_____intestate	2. Document that adds to or changes the instructions of the person has an existing will instead of writing a new one.
_____will	3. Record submitted by the administrator(trix) to the court that shows how creditors were paid and how the estate was appropriate to heirs.
_____executor or executrix (if it's a woman)	4. Person appointed by the court to oversee the estate of someone who died with a will.
_____testator	5. Person appointed by the court to protect the rights of the minor children of a deceased person.
_____letters of testamentary	6. Person who inherits an intestate estate.
_____legatees	7. Wife or husband's right, upon the death of the spouse, to a life estate in land that the husband or wife owned while living.
_____letters of administration	8. Dying having a will.
_____administrator or administratrix (if it's a woman)	9. Dying without having a will.
_____distribution	10. Someone who receives land or personal property by way of a will. Also called an heir.
_____rights of dower and curtesy	11. Document from the court granting authority to handle the affairs of an intestate estate.
_____guardian	12. Document approving the appointment of an executor and authorizing that person to administer the estate.
_____heir at law	13. Author of the will.
_____codicil	14. Document that states what to do with a someone's property after their death.

This is a list of a few important terms. For additional terms see FS Wiki "Glossary of United States Probate Terms" article at https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Glossary_of_United_States_Probate_Terms.