

## Estate, Wills, Probate, Guardianship/Orphan Court Records

Sue Mueller

suepasta@roadrunner.com

### Estate and probate records—what they are and how to use them in your research

Genealogist's guide to estate records: <https://familytreemagazine.com/records/courthouse/probate-records-workbook/>

Understanding wills, intestates, and probate: <https://genfiles.com/articles/wills-intestates-probate/>

Seven steps to research probate records: [https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Research_Steps_for_probate_records)

[Research Steps for probate records](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Research_Steps_for_probate_records)

How to locate online wills and probate court dockets and request copies of document

<http://genealogy.about.com/cs/wills/a/probate.htm>

Analyzing wills for useful clues from *OnBoard* newsletter: <https://bcgcertification.org/skillbuilding-analyzing-wills-for-useful-clues/>

Wills and testaments: [www.genealogy.com/46 donna.html](http://www.genealogy.com/46_donna.html)

Probate terms [https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Glossary of United States Probate Terms](https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Glossary_of_United_States_Probate_Terms)

Five things to know about probate: <https://www.amyjohnsoncrow.com/5-things-about-probate-records/>

Wills and probate records: <https://lislouisecooke.com/2018/01/31/wills-probate-records-genealogy/>

Understanding probate paperwork: <https://www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/probate-records-workbook/>

Use wills and estate records to learn about your ancestors: <https://www.thoughtco.com/probing-into-probate-records-1420839>

Understanding dower and curtesy rights (for historic estate records):

<https://genfiles.com/articles/dower-and-curtsey/>

Videos- search youtube for more. Link to how to find wills and probate records and what they can tell us: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0c5trJYJTyQ>

### Search for online probate records by state and county

Links to states by county for wills, probate, and orphan court records

<https://www.theancestorhunt.com/probate-and-wills.html>

USGenWeb Archives' virtual courthouse - search by state and then county for online wills and probate records (availability varies by state/county sites): <http://usgenweb.org/>

Cyndi's List of sites pertaining to wills and probate: [www.CyndisList.com/wills.htm](http://www.CyndisList.com/wills.htm)

Debbie's Lineage Research Corner, links to historical probate and vital records

<http://www.learnwebskills.com/lineage/hidden.htm#vital>

Will book testators lists: <http://www.sampubco.com/wills/index.htm>

[Familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org) has many unindexed probate records; however, they are browsable. Search collections: [State] probate. Most counties have an index book. Check familysearch CATALOG search (by location) first (as most collections are not indexed) in the collections section of regular search page. *Alternate method:* To find online probate records, go to the state wiki page at familysearch.org. Click on "[State] Online Records," button and scroll to probate records

### Guardianship/Orphan Court Records

Deciphering guardianship documents: <https://familytreemagazine.com/records/courthouse/guardianship-records/>

Understanding orphans and guardians: <https://genfiles.com/articles/orphans-guardians/>

Using guardianship records <https://genealogists.com/2015/02/using-guardianship-records/>  
Understanding guardianship in genealogy: <https://www.legacytree.com/blog/guardianship-genealogy>

### Other resources:

An example of a site with digitized county court records (use google to search by location for areas of interest to locate others). This site has PA and NY counties (not all counties, nor all records for the counties listed) \$ with a per order fee in addition to document costs, at least some of the information on the document itself can be viewed for free:

<https://www.landex.com/webstore/jsp/cart/DocumentSearch.jsp>

*Black's Law Dictionary* free online legal dictionary, 2nd ed. <https://thelawdictionary.org/>

State and local government on the net <http://www.statelocalgov.net/>

UK probate records: <https://www.gov.uk/search-will-probate>

Vancouver, Canada, Public Library, wills and estates for British Columbia and Ontario provinces:

<https://www.vpl.ca/guide/genealogy-and-family-history/wills-and-estates>

### Other Hints

**Locating probate records:** Usually found in local courthouse (county, district, etc.) that presided over area where ancestor died. Older probate records may have been moved from local courthouses to larger regional facility, such as state archives. In some cases, older records may be located in an historical library facility or genealogy/historical society facilities. Contact clerk's office of court where person lived at time of death for information on location of probate records for time period of interest.

**Identify county of location:** *County Lines on Google Map Tool* puts search in historical geographic context (displays US county boundaries) by year: <https://www.randymajors.org/maps>

Download an individual **state formation of county boundaries** for specific state research. Locations vary, use a google search to locate.

**County will index books:** Many counties have an index book (for wills, for estates, for orphan court or guardianship records) which provides the volume number, then page number for the actual records. Multiple volumes may be involved in the settlement of an estate. Start your search with the index books. These historical index books are usually NOT in alphabetical order. ***It is important to look in the front of each index volume for an explanation of sequence/order of records.*** A common ordering method is to group surnames by first letter. [In larger counties, the surnames may then be grouped by second letter or by first defined significant letter.] These surname sets are then grouped according to the first letter of the first name and then in chronological order by this subset. However, always check the explanation at the beginning of the index record book to determine the method of ordering, as the methods may vary.