

Wills & Probate on Ancestry

Wills and probate records are rich sources of information for family historians. Ancestry and FamilySearch have numerous collections of records in this category. This handout will focus on what you can find and how to find them on Ancestry.com

Remember, if a person died without a will, that is called “intestate.” That does not mean there is not a probate package to find.

If the ancestor owned land (look at census records to see if they had a land value or owned land), they likely have a probate package.



What is in a Probate Package?

Here is what probate records might contain for your ancestor:

- Wills – If there was a will, it is typically found within the package.
- Family Relationships: Wills often mentions relatives like spouses, children, and siblings, confirming family ties.
- Property and Assets: These documents detail the deceased's belongings, providing insight into their wealth and lifestyle.
- Debts and Obligations: Any debts owed by the deceased and promises made are usually recorded.
- Executor and Witnesses: The will names someone to conduct its instructions and often lists witnesses, giving clues about the deceased's social circle.
- Guardianship of Minor Children: If the deceased had children, the will may designate guardians.

These documents detail the legal process of managing the deceased's estate, providing more information on assets and debts. This process can go on for years. Be sure to document a timeline, putting the documents you find in chronological order. This will help you to understand the ancestors story.



Finding Wills & Probate on Ancestry

Once logged into your Ancestry account go to:

- **Search, Card Catalog**, choose **Court, Land, Wills & Financial**, then **Wills, Estates & Guardian Records**.
- From there you can add **filters** to drill into your location, and time.
- Next **sort by record count** in the upper right corner.
- Often these records are held at the state level in the U.S., so, you might not need to drill into the county level.
- By sorting by record count, it raises the biggest collection to the top, often the state level records we want. In this case it is **West Virginia, U.S. Wills and Probate Records, 1724-1985**.

- **Drill into the record set** you want.
- Here you can **fill in the information about your ancestor**. If they are already in your tree, then an auto-populate will pop up to let you easily select your ancestor.

The screenshot shows the 'Card Catalog' interface with a search bar and filters. The results table is as follows:

Title	Category	Records
West Virginia, U.S. Wills and Probate Records, 1724-1985	Wills, Estates & Guardian Records	1,272,117
The Mayflower Reader	Wills, Estates & Guardian Records	530
American Wills and Administrations	Wills, Estates & Guardian Records	423
English Origins of American Colonists	Wills, Estates & Guardian Records	294
Fifty Puritan ancestors, 1628-1660 : genealogical notes, 1560-1900	Wills, Estates & Guardian Records	230
Collections for a genealogy of the noble families of Henzey, Tyttery, and Tyzack (De Hennezel, De Thiétry, and Du Thisac)	Wills, Estates & Guardian Records	218
West Virginia Estate Settlements	Wills, Estates & Guardian Records	179
Records of the Halls of Wallingford and the Buckingham of Milford	Wills, Estates & Guardian Records	166

- If you want to narrow to the specific county, the right side collection filter may help you. Try it both ways, with and without this filter.
- Do not forget to try various spellings of your ancestor.

The screenshot shows the search page for 'West Virginia, U.S. Wills and Probate Records, 1724-1985'. It includes a search bar, a 'Match all terms exactly' checkbox, and input fields for 'First & Middle Name(s)', 'Last Name', 'Death' (with Day, Month, Year), and 'Lived In' (with Location). A dropdown menu on the right lists counties: Cabell, Calhoun, Clay, Doddridge, Fayette, Gilmer, Grant, Greenbrier, Hampshire, Hancock, Hardy, Harrison, Jackson, and a 'Choose...' option.

- From there, it is just a matter of playing with the filters to narrow your results.

[See this episode](#) to learn more about finding more estate records on FamilySearch with the Full Text Search.

