



Negotiating the Maze of Connecticut Probate Records

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General Information on Probate

- Val D. Greenwood, Chapters 15-17, *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., several editions).

Connecticut References

- Mel Smith, "Research Guide to Connecticut Probate Districts," History and Genealogy Unit, Connecticut State Library, posted on www.cslib.org/probate.
- Marcia D. Melnyk, ed., *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research* (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1999/2001 reprint).
- Thomas Jay Kemp, *The Connecticut Researcher's Handbook* (Detroit: Gales Research Co., 1981). [Out of print but often available used.]

Types of Estates

- Testate: will; executors.
- Intestate: no will [or "will attached" if there is found to be a legal problem with accepting it]; administrators.
- Insolvent: a testate or intestate estate with debts more than its value; commissioners.
- Documents survive as loose papers in estate files and as record books kept by court clerks.

Some Types of Probate Documents

- Will
- Executors or Administrators Bond
- Inventory
- Account
- Distribution
- Dower
- List of Claims
- Report of Commissioners
- Court Order
- Guardianship

Probate Research

- Connecticut originated as three separate colonies. Old Saybrook Colony joined Connecticut Colony in the 1640s, but New Haven Colony remained separate until 1662.
 - * New Haven Colony probates prior to 1662 were filed with the colony's secretary and can be found in the colony records (see Hoadley, no. 2 below).
 - * Connecticut Colony probates until 1649 were filed with the General Court records (see J. H. Trumbull and Manwaring below), and afterwards with the Particular Court (see CHS, vol. 22; and Manwaring below).
 - * A few probate records from 1639-1649 are scattered in town records, such as those of Guilford and Stamford.
 - * In Fairfield Co. and New London Co., from 1649 to 1666, there were Special Particular Courts in addition to the statewide Particular Court in Hartford. Estates filed in them are available only in the originals and microfilm copies of the Fairfield and New London Probate Districts.
- From May 1666, probate courts were established in the four original counties, Fairfield, New Haven, New London, and Hartford. These can now be found as the earliest records of these four original "probate districts."
- From 1687-1688, during the reign of Gov. Edmond Andros, probate records were again filed with the Particular Court (see A. E. Trumbull below), but for the period from 1686 to 1689, estates valued at more than £50 were filed in Suffolk Co., Massachusetts (see 4 below).
- In 1698, probate districts were established as entities distinct from counties. The first four were the original four county probate courts.
- In 1719, the process of splitting districts began. As of today, there are over 100 Probate Districts.

Probate Records in Published Form:

1. Connecticut Historical Society [CHS], *Collections*, vol. 22, *The Particular Court of the Colony of Connecticut* (Hartford, 1928).
2. Hoadley, C. J., *Records of the Colony and Plantation of New Haven* (Hartford, 1857-1858).
3. Manwaring, Charles William, compiler, *A Digest of Early Connecticut Probate Records*, three volumes (1904-1906), reprinted by Genealogical Publishing Co.), which includes probate records from the General Court, 1639-1649, the Particular Court, 1649-1677, as well as the first twelve volumes, 1635-1750, of Hartford Probate Court.

4. *The American Genealogist* [TAG], volumes 12, 13, and 14, contain a list of the estates handled in Suffolk Co., Massachusetts, 1686-1689.
5. Trumbull, J. Hammon, *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut* (Hartford: Brown and Parsons, 1850).
6. Trumbull, A. E., *Records of the Particular Court of the Colony of Connecticut, Administration of Sir Edmund Andros, Royal Governor, 1687-1688* (Hartford: Case, Lockwood and Brainard, 1936).

Finding the Probate District When You Know the Date and Town of Death:

- Use *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research* to check back through districts until finding the one that applied.
- Use *A Digest of Early Connecticut Probate Records*, the Appendix which is actually found in front of first volume, to check back in the same way as you would with the Melnyk book.
- Get on the web and go to www.cslib.org/probate. You can click on the alphabet listing to find your city or town page. Each description includes a list of probate districts and the years they applied to that town.

Statewide Index to Estate Files:

- Card index to only those probate packages submitted by local probate courts to the state library for archival purposes.
- Family History Library Catalog: "Connecticut – Probate Records - Indexes."
- Available on microfilm at NEHGS and CSL.

Statewide Collection of Estate Files:

- Ordered by the name of the probate district, then by the name of the decedent (or the child in the case of guardianships).
- Found on the FHL catalog under Connecticut – Probate Records. This creates a list of over 1600 films through which to scroll.
- Available on microfilm at NEHGS and CSL.

Local Probate District Registers or Records:

- Found on the FHL catalog under Probate Records for the town in which the probate district resided.
- Available on microfilm at CSL.

Connecticut Probate Extract Form

Estate of _____; Town of Residence _____
Year _____; Probate District _____; Docket No. _____

Bond of Administrator or Executor Filed on _____
Names of Principals _____
Name of Surety _____; Amount of Bond _____

Will Dated _____; Codicils Dated _____
Proved _____; Executors/Executrixes _____
Witnesses _____
Provisions _____

Inventory dated _____; Assessors _____
Total of real estate _____; Total of personal estate _____
Other inventories filed _____

Distribution Dated _____; Distributors _____
Provisions, including dower _____

Guardianships of minor children
Date _____; Child _____; Guardian _____
Date _____; Child _____; Guardian _____
Date _____; Child _____; Guardian _____

Please note on back all additional information, such as Reports of Commissioners, or Accounts of Administrators or Lists of Claims. Remember to note interesting items found in inventories, such as books which show that the deceased could read. Please note any volume or page numbers for documents recorded in court record books.

This Form Filled in by _____, Repository _____
Citation for documents: _____