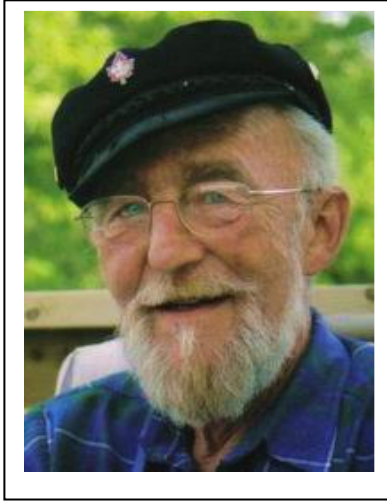


The Family Historian

Patrick Wohler

Column #38

Wills and the Family Historian



I love finding wills and probate records because they often have a lot of information about the ancestor and his family that might not be easily found elsewhere. Of course, not everyone left a will, nor was every will probated but they are definitely worth checking out.

The administration of wills and estate records is a provincial matter and varies from province to province and even, within Ontario, it varies a little among the various judicial districts. The court that deals with these matters is known variously as “Probate” or “Surrogate” Court and it operates basically at the county level.

In previous columns we discussed how a will that was used as an instrument for the transfer of title of land will frequently be found at the county Registry Office. In Lanark, the office in Almonte has them on microfilm. In Renfrew, they are in the custody of the Arnprior and District Archives. In Ottawa, check the Court House on Elgin Street.

If you can't find what you want there, then you have a somewhat larger search on your hands. The retention period for estate records is usually about 40 years. At the end of that period they move out and

eventually end up in the Archives of Ontario (AO). Most of the records up to 1930 are available on microfilm. They also have indexes and Application To Probate Clerk Books that allow you to search by surname.

Before you go too far, however, check out the local Archives. They have a lot of material on wills and just may be able to help you.

The Lanark County Archives

You can't miss the enthusiasm and energy of the volunteers when you visit the Lanark County Archives. This fledgling repository was begun in 2002 by the Lanark County Genealogical Society and it is already outgrowing its space in the former municipal building in Drummond Centre.

The core of its collection is the Land Registry Abstract Books and Deeds (1868-1955) for Lanark County but they also hold microfilm copies of the *Lanark Era* (1903-1999) and the *Almonte Gazette* (1921-1979) along with Assessment Rolls, Minute Books, Census Returns, School Registers and Voters' Lists, BMD's, Parish Registers, and other school and settlement records.

They are actively collecting the Tweedsmuir Histories and other records of the various Women's Institutes of the county and have an impressive collection of records from a number of the fraternal organizations that once flourished in the area.

Of growing importance is the number of private papers from researchers and collectors throughout the county which are loaded with nuggets for the researcher about people, groups, and local areas.

The most recent acquisition is the "Poole Papers". This is an extensive collection of original administrative and judicial documents dating back to 1816, proudly bearing the large appended seals of the time. They include the appointments and duties of colonial administrators, lists of jurors, estate settlements and much, much more. They are now arranging for some conservation work on these so that they can be made more safely accessible to researchers.

Of course, there is a lot more to running an archives than collecting and putting it on shelves. Irene Spence, the Archivist, and George Stewart, President of LCGS, head up a dedicated group of volunteers who are constantly busy cataloguing, organizing, digitizing, and doing everything they can to make these records easily accessible, findable, and useful to us researchers.

The Archives is equipped with microfilm and microfiche readers and provides an inexpensive photocopy service. In fact, they are well geared up to meet all the technological needs of most of their clients.

There is ample parking and the Archives is open from 10:00a.m. to 3:00p.m. on the first and third Fridays and the second and fourth Saturdays of the month.