

(Level: Beginner-Intermediate)

Probate Records

A Genealogist's Tool that Should Not Be Overlooked

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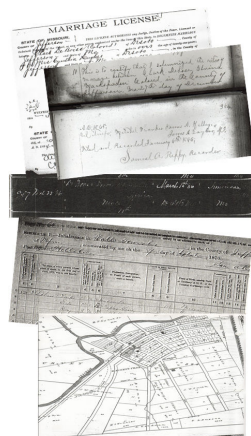
Some common probate terminology:

- Administrator: person appointed by court.
- Decedent: a deceased person
- Executor: person appointed by testator.
- Intestate: decedent dying without a will to distribute possessions.
- Probate: process of settling a decedent's estate (property & debt)
- Testate: decedent dying with a will to distribute possessions.
- Testator/Testatrix: person who creates a will; the decedent.
- Will: document providing instruction to distribute possessions.



Remember: Anyone can have a probate file! Rich and poor; resident and transient!

Probate files can provide us with clues such as family relationships, approximate ages of children, previously deceased relatives, property details, land locations, residences of married daughters & extended family, family heirlooms, debt, and so forth.



4 key steps to begin analyzing documents:

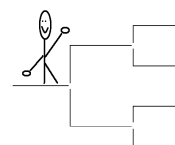
1. Transcribe the document word by word.
 - Make use of word processors.
2. Abstract the facts from each document.
 - Blank forms help simplify findings.
3. Cite your sources
 - Photocopy documents, apply citations to facing side.
 - Reduce size if needed to add white space.
4. Log your findings.
 - Keep a journal of ALL research steps.

Be ready to search & go prepared:

- ✓ Get familiar with the areas your ancestors resided. Use Maps for county boundaries.
- ✓ Scan all known information from previous research.
- ✓ Make a timeline of family events.
- ✓ Have on hand: notebook & pencils, quarters & dimes, folder, paperclips/stapler.
- ✓ Ask before you go about restrictions on personal items, office hours & procedures.

Remember: always be courteous and patient with clerks and staff. A smile can be inspiring for someone just having a bad day! ☺

Best wishes in finding your lost leaves of the family tree!



Where to find probate records for Jefferson County, Missouri

Original Files (1819 to ~1929*)

- Jefferson County History Center, Jefferson College Library on 2nd floor.

Microfilmed

- Circuit Court Office, Hillsboro, Mo.
- Northwest, Jefferson County Public Library*
- Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, Mo.

Index of Decedent & File No. online & in print

- Jefferson County History Center www.jeffco.edu/library
- Jefferson Co. Genealogical Society publication

Visit with these repositories to locate probate records in other areas:

- County and State level Offices & Archives
- St. Louis Probate Court Digitization Project, 1802 – 1900 www.sos.mo.gov
- Genealogical & Historical Societies & Libraries
- Handybook for Genealogists, Everton Publishers

Additional Reading:

American Genealogy: A Basic Course (Home study). Arlington, VA: National Genealogical Society, 2006.

Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo. *A Genealogist's Guide to Discovering Your Female Ancestors: Special Strategies for Uncovering Hard-To-Find Information About Your Female Lineage*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Betterway Books, 1998.

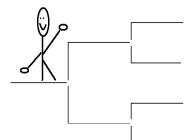
Everton, George. *The Handybook for Genealogists: United States of American*. Logan, Utah: Everton Publishers, 2002.

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. *Evidence!: Citation and Analysis for the Family Historian*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1997.

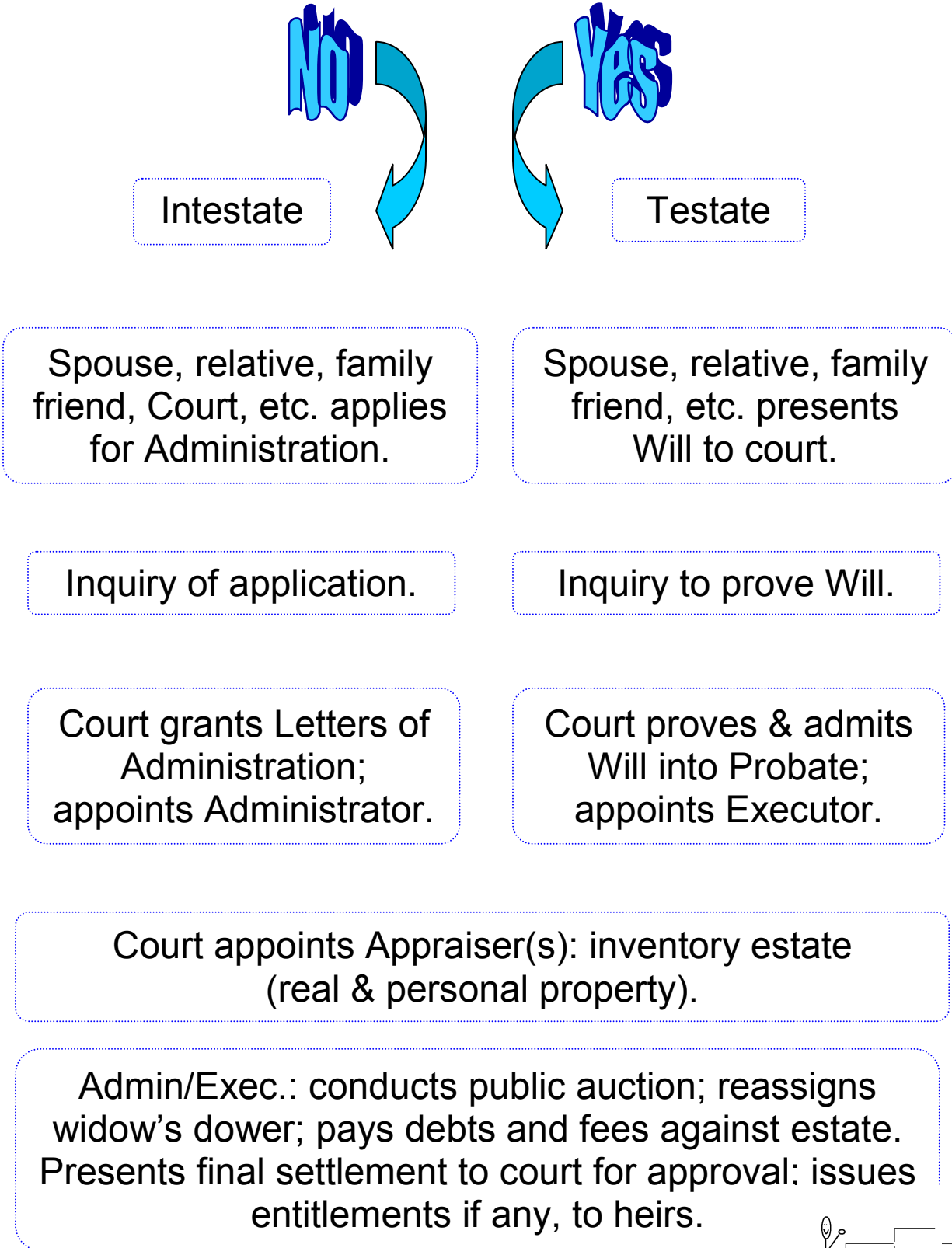
— *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2007.

Perry, Kip. *Reading Early American Handwriting*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1998.

Rose, Christine. *Courthouse Research: Your Guide to Genealogical Treasures*. San Jose, California: CR Publishers, 2004.



Person (Decedent) Dies: Is there a Will?*



*Note: This diagram is a summary for lecture purposes only and does not represent all steps possible during the probate process.

