

Pathfinder to Estate Files

Estate files contain wills probated with the Courts and probate-related records. If there was no will, the estate file will contain records documenting administration.

You can find more information, research tips, and addresses for local courthouses in our research guide to wills. [Click here to view Research Guide 206, How to Find a Will in Court Records](#). To find this guide on our website, click on “Access Our Collections” and go to the “Research Guides and Tools” page.

Note: Estate files after 1976: We only hold the following post-1976 records:

- Frontenac County: we have the estate files up to 1984
- Lincoln County: we have the estate files up to 1976, and for 1980 to 1985
- Parry Sound District: we have the indexes up to 1986
- Rainy River District: we have the indexes up to 1977.

For information on how to find these records pathfinder. **For other counties/districts and years, contact the local courthouse.**

Note: If you do not find an estate file, the will may have been filed with the local Land Registry Office. See Inventory 61 or [click here to access Research Guide 231, Finding Land registration Records](#) for more information.

Availability Online: Some of the microfilm are also digitized and available on the FamilySearch website, [click here to access our Digitized Microfilm Collections webpage for more information](#). To find this information on our website, click on “Access our Collections” then click on the “Digitized Microfilm” page. The FamilySearch website is www.familysearch.org.

TIP: Wills are sometimes probated a few years after the death occurred.

Determining the County of an Estate File

Most Estate files in the Archives of Ontario collection are organized by the county where the probate case took place. Usually this is determined by where the deceased individual lived (or died). Follow the steps below to find the county of an estate file:

1. Go to the User’s Guide to Surrogate Courts and Surrogate Clerk Microfilm Reels, or [click here to access the Microfilm Interloan Catalogue](#), and follow the instructions on how to find and use the Surrogate Clerk for Ontario applications for probate books and indexes. This province-wide index covers the years 1859-1982.
2. If you find the name you are looking for, write down the county, year and name, and follow the appropriate set of instructions below.

How to Find an Estate File

Before 1793

We hold records for the following districts/counties:

- Hesse District (Lake Erie and Windsor area)
 - [Click here to access the Archives Descriptive Database description for series RG 22-6](#). If you find the name in the description of the records, contact us to request retrieval or a copy of the file.
- Lunenburg District (Upper Canada-Lower Canada border area)
 - [Click here to access the Archives Descriptive Database description for series RG 22-7](#). If you find the name in the description of the records, contact us to request retrieval or a copy of the file.
- Essex County and Leeds and Grenville County, Follow these steps:
 1. [Click here to go to the Archives Descriptive Database](#) and enter the person’s name in the keyword field. There may be unrelated hits.

2. Write down the name, location, file number, microfilm reel number, and whether the file is from the Probate or Surrogate Court. If there is no file number, the files will be arranged alphabetically.
 3. Retrieve the microfilm from the self-service cabinet or borrow it through our Microfilm Interloan Service.
- Other counties and districts: We do not have estate files from before 1793.

Between 1793 and 1858

Follow the steps below to find an estate file:

1. [Click here to access the Archives Descriptive Database](#) and enter the person's name in the keyword field (Note: there may be unrelated hits).
2. Results:
 - a. **If the name is there:**
 - i. Write down the name, location, file number, microfilm reel, and whether the file is from the Probate or Surrogate Court. If there is no file number, the files will be arranged alphabetically.
 - ii. Retrieve the microfilm from the self-service cabinet, or borrow it through our Microfilm Interloan Service
 - b. **If the name is not there**, the will may have been probated after 1858. Follow the instructions below for files from 1859 to 1930.

Between 1859 and 1930

Follow the steps below to find an estate file:

1. **For York County (to 1862) and Norfolk County (to 1869):** Follow the steps for the files between 1793 and 1859, above.
2. **For other counties and years:**
 - a. You can either
 - i. Check Guide 206, How to find a will in court records, for a list of printed indexes for 1859-1900. Then retrieve the printed index for the county from the Genealogy section and write down the year and estate file number
 - OR**
 - ii. Go to the *User's Guide to Surrogate Courts and Surrogate Clerk Microfilm Reels*, or [click here to access the Microfilm Interloan Catalogue](#) to determine which microfilm reel contains the index for the county and year you are looking for. Note the instruction on how to find the file number for each county.
 - b. Retrieve the reel from the self-service cabinet, or borrow it through our Microfilm Interloan Service. Find the name and write down the estate file number and year.
 - c. Go back to the *User's Guide to Surrogate Courts and Surrogate Clerk Microfilm Reels* or the Microfilm Interloan Catalogue and find the number of the microfilm reel corresponding to the county, year and file number.
 - d. Retrieve the microfilm from the self-serve cabinet, or borrow it through our Microfilm Interloan Service.

Between 1931 and 1976

Follow the steps below to find an estate file

1. Go to the *User's Guide to Surrogate Courts and Surrogate Clerk Microfilm Reels*, or [click here to access the Microfilm Interloan Catalogue](#) to determine which microfilm reel contains the index for the county and year you are looking for. Note the instruction on how to find the file number for each county.
 - a. **If we have the index or register you are looking for:**
 - i. Write down the microfilm number for the index or register you need, and retrieve the reel from the self-service cabinet. Search the reel to find the name and write down the estate file number and year.
 - ii. Once you have the file number and year:
 1. **For York County to 1967**, go to the *User's Guide to Surrogate Courts and Surrogate Clerk Microfilm Reels* to find the number of the microfilm reel corresponding to the county, year and file number. Retrieve the reel from the self-service cabinet.

2. **For Prince Edward County:** Contact the Prince Edward County Historical Society, in Picton (until 1970) or the local courthouse (after 1970)
 3. **For Manitoulin and Rainy River Districts (after 1974):** contact the local courthouse.
- b. **If we don't have the index or register you are looking for:**
- i. Contact the local courthouse to determine the file number and year.
 - ii. Files from Prince Edward County (after 1970) Manitoulin and Rainy River Districts (after 1974) and Wentworth County (after 1975) are held by the local courthouses.
 - iii. For other counties and years: Contact reference staff with the name, county, year and file number. Estate files are held offsite, and usually take 1-2 business days to retrieve. Reproductions will take longer.

Between 1977 and 1986

To access estate files for Frontenac County, 1977 to 1984 and Lincoln County, 1980 to 1985, follow the steps above for the files between 1931 and 1976.. **To obtain estate files for other counties/districts and years after 1976, contact the local courthouse.**

To access indexes to Rainy River District (to 1977) and Parry Sound District (to 1986), review the *User's Guide to Surrogate Courts and Surrogate Clerk Microfilm Reels*, or [click here to access the Microfilm Interloan Catalogue](#).

You can use the Surrogate Clerk for Ontario applications for probate books and indexes as an index for Ontario estate files up to 1982. Review the "Determining the County of an Estate File" section at the top of this guide for information on using this index.