

BC Archives Research Guide

WILLS

Wills probated in British Columbia between 1861 and 1981 are available at the BC Archives.

LOCATING A PROBATED WILL NUMBER

1. Begin by retrieving the central will indexes ([GR-1417](#)) on self-serve microfilm. Use the [Finding Aid](#) to determine the reel number for the year you wish to search. The dates represent the year a will was filed, not necessarily the year of death.
2. Orient the microfilm view to see the 'title strip' at the the bottom of each page. It will provide the volume number and date range that you are currently viewing. Proceed through the microfilm to the volume/date range that you need.
3. Each volume/date range is arranged in alphabetical groupings by the first two or three letters of a person's last name. Proceed to the section of the volume/date range for the person's last name. Check all of the names on each page within that grouping, as the names are not alphabetized beyond the first two or three letters.
4. The index will provide some or all of the following details. If you are only searching for a will, note the Original Will Number in the REMARKS column and the volume and folio number, if it is included in the WILLS column. Other details may be included in the following columns:
 - PAPERS—provides the Victoria Supreme Court probate file number. If this column is blank, the will was probated in another court registry. The name of the registry may appear on the line between the PAPERS column and the REMARKS column. If not, access the death registration for the deceased via our [Genealogy database](#) to determine the location.
 - A or P—indicates whether the estate was 'Administered' by an official administrator or 'Probated' by an Executor named by the testator or appointed by the court.
 - BOOKS—refers to any possible Victoria Letters (Grants of) Probate and Letters of Administration associated with the will.
 - WILLS—provides a possible volume and folio number, which will assist in locating the will.
 - REMARKS—provides the Original Will Number, which is needed to locate the probated will record.
 - Note: RESEALING means the estate was probated outside of BC. There may, however, be a probate file for BC and a copy of the will should be within that file.

ACCESSING WILL RECORDS

Once you have located the probated will number from the index (REMARKS column), use the following Finding Aids to locate the microfilm reel or container which contains the record.

Dates	File Range	Series	Reel/Container List
1861-1939	1 to 31,200	GR-1052	Finding aid
1939-1946	31,201 to 46,021	GR-1574	Finding aid
1946-1981	46,022 to 236,339	GR-2009	Finding aid

If a volume and folio number were provided in the index's WILLS column, use them to help you navigate to the relevant section of the microfilm reel (using title strips at the bottom of each page) or container.

COPYING WILL FILES

Microfilm scanners are available for printing microfilmed will files during full-service hours or for downloading PDF copies onto a USB.

For hardcopy records, you can take photographs using a digital camera or submit a copy request, in person or by emailing access@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca. Pre-payment is required for all copy orders. Please see our most current price list on our [Reproductions webpage](#).

Certified copies of will files can only be made by BC Archives staff and are an additional fee. Indicate whether you required a certified copy when placing your copy order. Please see our most current price list on our [Reproductions webpage](#).

LOCATING WILLS AFTER 1981

To access wills dated after 1981 that have *not* been probated, contact the [Vital Statistics – Wills Registry](#). They can conduct a Wills Search.

To access wills dated after 1981 that have been probated, contact the court registry where it was registered:

- Wills probated before July 1986 were tracked through the Central Wills Registry, which was maintained by the [Victoria Court Registry](#).
- In July 1986, Vancouver, New Westminster, Nanaimo, Chilliwack, Penticton, Vernon, Kamloops, Prince George and Kelowna began to track their own original probated wills. All other registries continued to send their original probated wills to the Central Wills Registry in Victoria.
- As of August 1998, each registry became responsible for their own wills.

UNABLE TO LOCATE A WILL FILE?

If the name you are seeking is not found in the central will indexes ([GR-1417](#)), this means no will was filed or only a probate file exists. See the *Probate Case Files Research Guide*, available on our [Guides, Indexes and Inventories webpage](#), for possible next steps.

Further information on wills and probates can be found in Attorney General Guide to Estates Binder 7A or the Court Records Guide Binder 7B, in the Reference Room and the *Probate Case Files Research Guide*, available on our [Guides, Indexes and Inventories webpage](#).