

## BRITISH COLUMBIA ARCHIVES RESEARCH GUIDE TO PROBATE CASE FILES

Probate case files and other probate records for persons who died with or without a will are available at the British Columbia Archives. These files are mostly court files and are open for public access. Although there is no central probate index for all past and present probate files, you can use the central wills index (see the *Wills Research Guide* for more details) to determine the court location of a probate action when there was a will. You can also search for current probate files through Court Services Online (<https://eservice.ag.gov.bc.ca/cso/index.do>). Probate files were usually created and maintained by the court registry closest to the residence of the deceased person or the executor of the will. While the contents may vary, many files contain a copy of the will, if there was one.

### ESTATES PROBATED IN VICTORIA, 1859-1992

Dates	File Range	Name Index	Where are the Records?
1859-1941	1 to 5307 & 1/1918 to 410/1941	Y, use GR-1304 <sup>†</sup>	GR-1304 (self-serve microfilm)
1941-1950	411/1941 to 66/1950	Y, use GR-2083 <sup>†</sup>	GR-2083 (self-serve microfilm)
1950-1981	67/1950 to 1606/1981	Y, use GR-3016 <sup>†</sup> (1950-1963) and GR-1417 (1963-1981)	GR-3016 (self-serve microfilm, 1950-1963; see finding aid for hardcopy files list, 1963-1981)
1982-1992	See staff at Archives Reference Desk.	In-house spreadsheet	Accession 83-0409-1000 to 1192

Use the finding aids\* for GR-1304 (1859-1941), GR-2083 (1941-1950) and part of GR-3016 (1950-1963 only) to locate the name of the person. The column to the far left contains the microfilm reel number, the column on the far right the probate file number. The files are arranged in numerical order on each reel.

For the portion of GR-3016 not yet microfilmed, use the microfilmed indexes in GR-1417 (self-serve microfilm) to locate the probate file number. See the *Wills Research Guide* for more details on searching these indexes.

To retrieve a probate file from GR-3016 that's not on microfilm, fill out a call slip with the GR and box number you require. These files are stored off-site and can take up to 24 hours or longer to retrieve.

### ESTATES PROBATED IN VANCOUVER, 1893-1992

Dates	File Range	Name Index	Where are the Records?
1893-1941	1 to 28,115	Y, use GR-1415	GR-1415 (self-serve microfilm)
1941-1947	28,116 to 36,499	Y, use GR-2083	GR-2202 (self-serve microfilm)
1947-1949	36,500 to 42,999	Y, use GR-2203	GR-2203 (self-serve microfilm)
1949-1966	43,000 to 93,199	Y, use GR-2112 (reel B2531(2), 1949-1951) and GR-2988 (reels B11786 - B11788; B09710, 1952-1986)	GR-2989 (see finding aid for hardcopy files list)
1966-1986	93,200 to 180,626	Y, use GR-2988 (reels B11786 - B11788; B09710, 1952-1986)	GR-2991 (see finding aid for hardcopy files list)
1987	See staff at Archives Reference Desk.	In-house spreadsheet	Accession 83-0407-0335 to 378 and 745
1988-1992	See staff at Archives Reference Desk.	Y, use self-serve microfiche Bf00054	Accession 83-0407-379 to 598

Use the appropriate finding aid(s)\* or microfilmed index to locate the name of the person. The column on the left contains the microfilm reel number, the column on the right the probate file number. The files are arranged in numerical order on each reel. Microfilmed Indexes for files dating between 1893 and 1986 are in GR-1416 [reel B02531(1)], GR-2112 [reel B02531(2)] and GR-2988 (reels B11786-B11788, B9710). At the bottom of each index page there will be a footer listing the volume number and date range covered by the index volume. Check all the names on each page within that grouping, as the names are not alphabetized beyond the first letters of the family name. For the 1952-1956 indexes note that family names are recorded by the first letter + the first vowel (soundex index) of the name. Except for this difference, follow the instructions above.

For hardcopy files between 1949 and 1986, fill out a call slip with the GR and box number. These case files are stored off-site and can take up to 24 hours or longer to retrieve.

## PROBATE FILES OUTSIDE VICTORIA AND VANCOUVER

◆ Consult the online descriptions database by selecting the **Search** link, selecting the **Textual Records** index, and entering your search terms (see below) in the search field. Select **Match All Words** (AND) in the **Change Search Method?** box. Do not use quotation marks. Click **Start Search**. Click on the number to the left of any of the results to display the full record.

- Use the family name and **probate?**, e.g. tolmie probate?. This works best if the name is not a common one and only on name-indexed finding aids. Add the registry name if you know it, e.g. tolmie probate? duncan.
- If the name is a common one, use the **Most Specific** search method option and search on **[family name] [first name] and probate?**, e.g. mills george and probate?. Depending on how the name is entered, this may or may not work.
- Use **probate?** and the registry name, e.g. revelstoke probate?. If there is no name index in the finding aid and a printed or microfilmed index is listed for the registry you must search the index first to obtain the probate file number. Locate the file number in the probate records finding aid to determine the box or microfilm reel number.

◆ For probates between 1982-1999, ask staff for assistance.

◆ If you do not know where the will was probated, and a search on the family name is unsuccessful, follow instructions **1 to 5** on the **Wills Research Guide**. For estates (with wills only) probated outside of Victoria there will be a place name noted.

◆ Consult the Attorney General Guide to Estates Binder 7A, entitled **Probate Case Files**, or the Court Records Guide Binder 7B in the Reference Room. These binders provide descriptions of many probate files, including those not yet described in our descriptions database.

## STILL HAVEN'T FOUND YOUR PROBATE FILE?

Early probate records are often be found in the Victoria registry, even though the individual lived and died elsewhere in the province. In the absence of a local registry, the records would be filed with Victoria **OR** the registry in the nearest community e.g. for probate files from Chilliwack you might need to search New Westminster, Vancouver and/or Victoria. A probate file is not always registered in the indexes within the first few months after the death of the individual. You may need to search for several years after the person's death.

If you are not successful in locating either a probate file or a will, you may wish to try and find other types of estate records. The **succession duty and probate registers**, (GR-2930) cover 1892-1935 and the **succession duty and probate fees index cards** (GR-3259) cover 1934-1981. The registers will provide a registry name, whether the estate was settled by probate or letters of administration and, depending on the time period, the date of the probate. The cards are arranged in date groups by name of the deceased and provide the name of the registry where the estate was probated, or, if not probated, settled by letters of administration or other means. See the finding aids for more information. There are also separate collections of Letters Probate, Letters of Administration, Letters of Administration with Will Attached, and Probate Cause Books. The Attorney General Guide to Estates Binder 7A in the Reference Room provides definitions and descriptions for many of these records.

## COPYING PROBATE RECORDS

Copies of microfilmed probate files can be made on our self-serve reader-printers during full service hours. Copies of original probate records on paper, where available, as well as on microfilm may also be self-copied using your own camera or you can request a copy by completing a Photocopy Requisition form (in-person requests) or by writing, faxing or e-mailing Access Services. **Note: Certified copies** of probate files or other records can only be made by BC Archives staff. Pre-payment is required for all copy orders. Archives staff will contact you for payment (remote inquiries).

**Mailing Address:** Access Services, BC Archives  
675 Belleville St., Victoria, BC V8W 9W2  
**Phone:** (250) 387-1952  
**Fax:** (250) 387-2072

**Reference Room:** 655 Belleville St., Victoria, BC

**E-mail:** [access@bcarchives.bc.ca](mailto:access@bcarchives.bc.ca)  
**Internet:** <http://www.bcarchives.bc.ca>

\*Finding aids are available online, on our web site, and in hardcopy in the Reference Room.

† GR-1417, the central wills index, also functions as an index to wills probated in Victoria between 1861 and 1981.