BC Archives Research Guide

PROBATE CASE FILES

Probate case files and other probate records for persons who died in BC with or without a will are available at the BC Archives. These files are mostly court files and are open for public access. While the contents may vary, many files contain a copy of the will, if there was one.

Probate files were usually created and maintained by the court registry closest to the residence of the deceased person or the executor of the estate. If the probate cannot be found within the BC Archives Collection Search, you will need to know which court registry it was filed in. If you don't know which court registry, locate the death registration for the deceased via our Genealogy database for date of death, location, and legal name.

To access a probate file, you must:

1. Locate its microfilm reel or container (box) and probate file numbers.

2. Access the files on self-serve microfilm in the BC Archives Reference Room OR request hardcopy, paper files from BC Archives retrieval staff. Whether a probate is available on microfilm or hardcopy depends on the location and date that it was registered.

LOCATING PROBATE MICROFILM/CONTAINER AND FILE NUMBERS

1. Begin by searching the BC Archives Collection using *First + Last name* OR *Last name, First name* OR *Last name*. You may need to also type in 'probate' or use an asterisk wildcard if you are unsure of the spelling of the name (e.g., Wachter, T* probate).

2. If you cannot locate the file you are seeking via the BC Archives Collection, search the file lists below.
   - For lists that are arranged alphabetically by last name, check all of the names within each alphabetical grouping, as they are not always alphabetized beyond the first letter of the family name.
   - For lists organized by probate number, conduct a search within the PDF file (Ctrl + F) for the deceased's name.

Estates Probated in Victoria, 1859-2000

Dates	File Range	Series	File/Nominal (Name) List	Format of files
1859-1941	1 to 410/1941	GR-1304	Finding aid	microfilm reel
1941-1950	411/1941 to 66/1950	GR-2083	Finding aid or BC Archives Collection search	microfilm reel
1950-2000	67/1950 to 1606/1981 and VI820001 to VI991249	GR-3016	Nominal file list (1950-1968) Nominal file list (1969-1981)	microfilm reel
			Nominal file list (1982-1992) Nominal file list (1993-2000)	hardcopy

To search for estates probated in Victoria after 2000, speak to Archives Staff in the Reference Room or email access@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca. Staff will search internal databases for locating microfilm reel or container and probate file numbers.

Estates Probated in Vancouver, 1893-1995

Dates	File Range	Series	File/Nominal (Name) List	Format of files
1893-1941	1 to 28,115	GR-1415	Finding aid or BC Archives Collection search	microfilm reel
1941-1947	28,116 to 36,499	GR-2202	Finding aid or BC Archives Collection search	microfilm reel
1947-1949	36,500 to 42,999	GR-2203	Finding aid or BC Archives Collection search	microfilm reels
1949-1966	43,000 to 93,199	GR-2989	Finding aid (reel list), if you know the estate file number	microfilm reels
		GR-2112	Nominal file list (1947-1951) on microfilm reel B02531(2)	
		GR-2988	Nominal file lists (1952-1986) on microfilm (see Finding Aid)	
1966-1995	93,200 to 214,899	GR-2991	Finding aid (reel/container list), if you know the estate file number	microfilm reels (up to file 121155)
		GR-2988	Nominal file lists (1952-1986) on microfilm (see Finding Aid)	hardcopy (starting with file 121156)

To search for estates probated in Vancouver after 1986, speak to Archives Staff in the Reference Room or email access@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca. Staff will search internal databases for locating microfilm reel or container and probate file numbers.

Probate Files outside Victoria and Vancouver

To access probate files registered outside of Victoria and Vancouver, speak to Archives Staff in the Reference Room or email access@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca. Staff will search internal databases for locating microfilm reel or container and probate file numbers.

ACCESSING PROBATE RECORDS

Once you have located the microfilm reel or container and probate file numbers, you can access the probate file in one of two ways:
- Microfilmed probate files are available on self-serve microfilm in the BC Archives Reference Room. Reels are arranged in numerical order by probate number. Microfilm scanners allow you to view, print, or download a PDF copy of the probate file. Archives staff are available to assist with the microfilm scanners during full-service hours.
- Hardcopy probate files that have not been microfilmed are stored in off-site containers that must be retrieved by Archives staff. Provide the appropriate reference (e.g., GR-####), container, and probate numbers to staff by filling out a call slip and submitting it to the Retrievals Desk or by emailing access@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca. Archives staff will order the container from off-site storage. Containers can take up to 24 hours or longer to retrieve.

COPYING PROBATE FILES

Microfilm scanners are available for printing microfilmed probate 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 probate 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](#).

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UNABLE TO LOCATE A PROBATE FILE?

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- Probates for recent deaths may still be in the custody of the court registry at which it was processed.

- If you do not know where the will was probated, and a search by family name is unsuccessful, see the *Probated Wills Guide* available from our [Guides, Indexes, and Inventories webpage](#). For estates (with wills only) probated outside of Victoria there will be a place name noted.

- Early probate records are often 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 records from Chilliwack you might need to search New Westminster, Vancouver, and/or Victoria).

- A probate record 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 a person's death.

- If you are not successful in locating either a probate or a will, you can try searching for other types of estate records:
  - Succession duty and probate registers, 1892-1935 ([GR-2930](#)). 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.
  - Succession duty and probate fees index cards, 1934-1981 ([GR-3259](#)). The index is arranged in date groups by name of the deceased and will provide the name of the registry where the estate was probated, or, if not probated, settled by letters of administration or other means.
  - Letters Probate
  - Letters of Administration
  - Letters of Administration with Will Attached
  - Probate Cause Books

  The Attorney General Guide to Estates Binder 7A or the Court Records Guide Binder 7B, in the Reference Room, provide further definitions and descriptions for many of these types of records, including those not yet described in our descriptions database.