

Probate, Land and Court Records in Connecticut

Connecticut Research Tour 2025

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Background

While many families have lived in Connecticut for several generations, this area can often be seen as a “go between” for people with ancestry from New England. Frequently New Englanders from further east resided here for a few generations with subsequent descendants eventually migrating further west. Many early settlers of the Woodstock area were from the Roxbury and Dedham areas in Massachusetts, and even the ancestors of the Nipmuc Nation often came from other parts of the region. While vital records do exist for these various towns, they are not always complete. Probate and land records can greatly help clarify families of the same name, and state line changes with Massachusetts sometimes have the consequence of the records not always being where you’d expect.

Probate Records

Probate Records in Connecticut have been maintained under a variety of jurisdictions from the colonial period to the present. Probate courts were not created until 1698, so copies of most will and administrations for New Haven Colony, which existed from 1638 to 1655, were included in the town records, and the originals were filed with the secretary of the colony. For Connecticut Colony, after 1639, estates were in the jurisdictions of the Particular Court (sometimes called the “Quarterly Court”). The Particular Courts were abolished with the new chart in 1662 and were replaced by the Court of Assistants. In 1666, the General Assembly established the original four counties of Connecticut – Hartford, New London, New Haven, and Fairfield. The Court of Sessions for these four county courts handled probate records until 1698, with the brief exception during Governor Edmond Andros in the 1680s when probate records were again filed with the Particular Court, but estates valued over fifty pounds were filed in Suffolk County, Massachusetts.

In 1698 specific probate districts were created for each of these four counties. Additional probate districts were created from 1719 on, often for a larger town and nearby towns, not always in the same county. Beginning in 2011 the number of probate districts was reduced to 54 from a high of 131.

Many early probate records have been published (see bibliography). Probate Estate File Papers from the Connecticut State Library (mid-1600s to 1948) is available there on microfilm and at the



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FamilySearch Library, which has also digitized these records online (access can vary). Also on film at both repositories are the town clerk's transcriptions of probate volumes until around the turn of the century. These transcribed volumes are available in their original format at the town halls of the namesake of the probate district.

Land Records

Land records in Connecticut have always been kept at the town level. The only exceptions are border towns such as Woodstock and Suffield that were once part of Massachusetts. To locate records for these towns prior to their joining Connecticut, consult the Massachusetts county. In 1639, the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut required the recording of deeds in town records. The Connecticut General Court (later the Connecticut General Assembly) established town proprietors to distribute land that would be divided and sold in lots. Town clerks were responsible for recording land records. Most land records are available at the given town hall, and those to 1900 have been microfilmed by the FamilySearch Library and are available at the Connecticut State Library. Nothing is indexed on the county level and there is no statewide index. FamilySearch has also digitized these records although access from home can vary depending on the town, sometimes needing to be in a Family History Center or Affiliate library (such as the Connecticut State Library or American Ancestors).

Court

Court records are one of the few types of records in Connecticut that were kept at the county level. The earliest court records were under the jurisdiction of the Particular Court (which was the first recorder of Probate Records) from 1639 to 1663, when the 1662 chart abolished these courts. The records have been published in *Records of the Particular Court of Connecticut, 1632-1663*, volume 22 (Hartford: Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society, 1928). County courts began in 1665 with the original four counties; the Court of Assistants maintained trial court records from 1665 to 1711. Some of these court records have been transcribed (see bibliography).

The Court of Assistants was replaced by the Superior Court in 1711, and Superior Court districts were also at the county level. Matters not heard at the Superior level were tried at the county level. These courts existed until 1855 and their records are primarily available at the Connecticut state Library. After 1855, what had been handled by County Courts was divided between Superior Courts and Justice Courts. Courts of Common Pleas handled what the Justice and Superior Courts did not, until in 1961 the justice courts were abolished. The current system has district courts, county superior courts, and the State Supreme Court. Courts today generally keep criminal and civil records, including divorces and cases of paternity. Online case lookups to relatively recent proceedings are available at <https://www.jud.ct.gov/jud2.htm>

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