

Hampshire County File Papers, 1660-1889

Originally, Hampshire County encompassed all of Western Massachusetts. Over time, four other counties were formed from regions of Hampshire County. Once the new counties were formed, the probate records from cities and towns within their boundaries were filed in the county seat of these new counties:

- 1731 Worcester County (Worcester)
- 1761 Berkshire County (Pittsfield)
- 1811 Franklin County (Greenfield)
- 1812 Hampden County (Springfield)

The digitized Hampshire Probate Court records include probate files which were *initiated* between 1660 and the end of 1889. The files were digitized as they were found and inconsistencies in the way in which the files were originally assembled can lead to confusion in trying to retrieve information. For example:

- A file opened in 1886 with a guardianship petition *may* also include the same individual's probate documents (will, inventory, etc.) when the individual died 20 years later in 1905.
- A file beginning in 1886 with a guardianship petition may only include that petition. A *separate* file might have been opened in 1905 for the individual's probate documents and those later documents are not included in this digitization or indexing project because the probate file was opened after 1889.
- A file for probate documents may have been opened in 1870 but *might* also include a guardianship petition filed 20 years *earlier* in 1850.

It is not unusual for a trust file to include documents which span 40-60 years or more.

A total of 267 boxes of files were digitized. The file numbers associated with each indexed name reflect the box number in which the file was stored and the item number of the document within the box. Pages within a file are identified with a preceding “:” character. For example, the first document of the 9th file in Box 74 is numbered 74-9:1. Each file contains anywhere from one to hundreds of documents.

The files in the 267 boxes are organized into 2 alphabets and the 2 alphabetical groups have overlapping dates. The first group of files (A-Z) are from Boxes 1-165 and the second group (A-Z) are from Boxes 166-267. There is an exception to these 2 alphabetical groups: Box 239 includes an assortment of random files which are not in *any* order.

As-of March, 2017, the database contains records from both groups (boxes 1-267).

Indexing information

Indexed names have been transcribed from typed and handwritten file cards and *not* checked against the documents. As with any handwritten documents, indexers interpreted the handwriting on documents and slight discrepancies can exist between names in the files and names in the index.

Each file may include names in addition to the name on the file tab, especially when guardianships for children of the deceased are included in the file. As a result, some files may have only one indexed name and other files may have 10 or more indexed names.

Some cities/towns have changed the state where they are located. For example, Somers was in Massachusetts until 1749 when it became part of Connecticut.

A number of Massachusetts towns share a name with another state or country. For example: Holland, Peru, Wales, Florida & Washington are all towns in Massachusetts. A place name is presumed to be a city or town in Massachusetts (e.g., Westfield). Where a city or town has been identified as being another state or country, the state or country's name is added (e.g., Westfield, New Brunswick, Canada). Plantation numbers, when identified, are included. Over time, some cities and towns have had their names changed and the indexed place name is the name of the city or town at the time the file was opened.

In our searchable database, all towns are associated with their current state and county.

There are special notations on some cases:

- **Missing file:** file jacket is present, but empty
- **Skipped number** or **Unused number:** unassigned case number
- **[Sealed adoption file]:** In Massachusetts, records of adoptions are not public records and are therefore not included in the database. Access to adoption records is controlled by state law. Contact Hampshire Probate Court for access.