



Indexes for Alaskan Probate Records, 1884-1959

Introduction:

The Alaska State Archives holds more than 17,000 probate case files and/or dockets spanning the period 1884-1959. These probate cases were created by the U.S. Commissioners of Alaska District Courts. Probate records document the legal process whereby a person's will is "proved" in court and accepted as a valid public document that is the true last testament of the deceased. Cases primarily concern estates, search and rescue, and sanity hearings, but may also contain estate inventories, guardianship of minors, adoptions, burial expense accounts, notices and claims of creditors, proofs of heirs, wills, oaths, bonds, missing person inquiries, coroner's inquests, testimony and affidavits, and accounts of administrators.

From 1867 to 1884 Alaska operated with a rudimentary American judicial structure as a possession of the United States. With the passage of the Organic Act of 1884, Alaska became a District and District Courts were established. Commissioners oversaw the courts and served as both justices of the peace and probate judges. One U.S. Commissioner served the entire District from Sitka in 1884, but by the time of Statehood there were four district courts and approximately sixty commissioners.

Index Descriptions:

Two indexes have been created to assist researchers in finding specific probate cases at the Alaska State Archives.

The first index was created during the 1980s by Alaska State Archives staff and volunteers, and regular but minor updates have occurred since that time. Although the index is extensive and the most comprehensive of the two indexes, it is not completely comprehensive. The State Archives has received some additional probate records since the index was created, and the index has not been completely updated to include all added holdings. The index is arranged alphabetically by last name, and includes the following information, case number if available, precinct, type of case, date, whether docket or a case file, and the location of either or both if available.

This second and much smaller index documents probate actions for the Sitka precinct only. It was generated in 2016 by Ancestry in cooperation with FamilySearch and the Alaska State Archives. Due to the extensive cost of digitizing historical records, the Alaska State Archives partnered with FamilySearch to digitize the State Archives' holding of pre-1959 records of genealogical value. 1.1 million images were created from the scanning project, which included probate records. FamilySearch partnered with Ancestry to index select Alaska State Archives' probate records as part of a national probate initiative project. This index of Sitka probate records is arranged

alphabetically by last name of individual. Researchers should also know that these digitized records from Sitka are available online via Ancestry.com, and it's estimated that these same records and other probate records will be placed online at FamilySearch.org and Ancestry.com during or after 2017.

Preferred Citation:

[Name of individual, date, location, case # if known, box/volume #], Probate Docket/Casefiles, Alaska State Archives, Juneau, Alaska.

Restrictions on Access:

There are no restrictions on pre-1959 probate records. Adoption case files, which may accompany some probate case files, are confidential under AS 40.25.120(a)(1). Researchers desiring access to adoption case files must submit a notarized letter to the appropriate Alaska Court System Deputy Clerk stating the title, year, and file number of the case file; the exact documents in the file requested; and, the reason for the request. The Alaska Court System Probate Clerk will review the request and forward to the Judge for a determination. The Alaska State Archives cannot release adoption case files without written authorization from the Alaska Court System. Certain juvenile records are also confidential under AS 40.25.120(a) (2) and Article 1, Section 22, Alaska Constitution.

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