

Society of Ohio Archivists spring meeting May 18, 2012
Ohio Historical Records Advisory Board Reprints Program panel

Unfolding History

Clark County Probate Records Project

Clark County Historical Society, Springfield

Natalie Fritz

2011

History of the Project

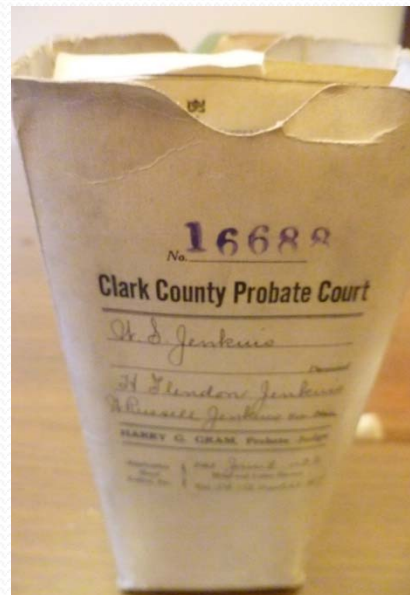
- Thousands of original Probate Court case files donated to the Historical Society since 1980
 - Cases from 1818-1990, totaling 90,000
- Processed periodically as time, money, manpower, and space available from 1991-2007
- June 2008 - Began basement collections reorganization which freed space for more cases
- February 2011 - Applied for and received funding to process 4,000 additional file folders worth of cases

Importance of Project

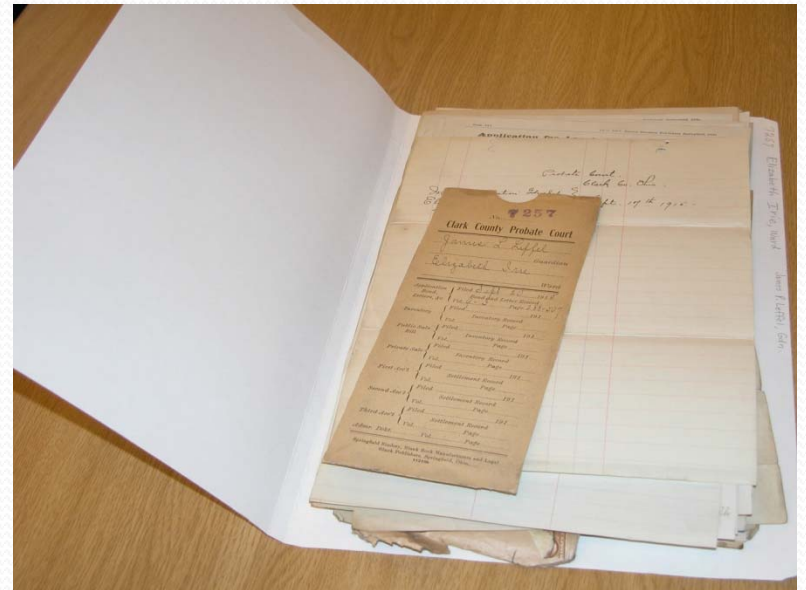
- Original cases packets contain more information than microfilm copies at the county courthouse
- Unprocessed case files are:
 - Less accessible to researchers
 - More susceptible to damage
- Better preservation for future users

Results You Can See!

Before



After



What We Discovered

- Probate Court records can be REALLY interesting!
Who knew?
- Interesting work can become more time consuming
- You can learn a lot more than family history from Probate records

One of many weekly “Probate Parties”

Several of our
Wednesday
afternoon
volunteers.



Uncovering Tragedies, Scandal, and Humor

- Trends in county history
- Family tragedies
- Amusing Names
- Family Thieves

Results

- 11 volunteers, 3 interns, 3 staff members
- 925 hours total, average of 23 hours per week
- 1-6 people working on the project each day
- Used all 4,000 files folders and 100 of 135 boxes
- Processed 4,600+ cases from 1908-1921 over 30 weeks, finishing a month ahead of schedule

Before



After





Previously Processed Cases



Newly Processed Cases

Looking Back Probate records



Volunteers Virginia Warren (left) and Ruth Stiles comb through Probate Court cases at the archives of the Heritage Center last week. STAFF PHOTO BY BARBARA J. PERENIC

Family history from 1908-21 is unfolding

16 at Heritage Center are working to preserve county probate records.

By Tom Stafford
Staff Writer

History has been unfolding recently at the Heritage Center of the Clark County — well, unfolding, unpinning and unstapling, too.

Thirteen volunteers and three staffers have been busy removing Clark County probate records from 1908-21 from their thick paper case files and putting them in acid-free folders for twofold reasons: to better preserve the files and to make the records' valuable information available to genealogists and other historical researchers.

Rich resource

The cases are "great for genealogical research," said Curatorial Assistant Natalie Fritz, who organized the volunteer effort after successfully securing an \$1,800 grant from the Ohio Records and Archives Board.

"Some of them (the cases) are

just such a jackpot," said Fritz. "If somebody were looking for that family, they'd find out so much."

"I don't think people realize that even if there is no will, there's an estate packet," said Flossie Hulsizer, a longtime volunteer with the Ohio Genealogical Society's Clark County Chapter. "So even without a will, you can find out about your ancestry if (the case) went through probate."

Not only do estate records list "every item they own — every shovel" sold at auction, Hulsizer said, they include the names of everyone who made a purchase, including neighbors, and the names of relatives who received the proceeds.

As a result, "you get the names of the heirs, even if there's no will."

Wider worth

Fritz said that although she pulls probate records "all the time" for genealogists, the records have a wider worth.

"We've learned a lot about the community," she said.

Cases have covered the city's use of eminent domain to claim

the land for the present-day Veterans Park and have provided glimpses into the extensive estates of the Champion Company's Scipio Baker and Ohio first lady Ellen Bushnell.

The files also include the stuff of everyday life, Fritz said, showing "what things cost (and) what people were buying."

That's particularly true in guardianship cases, which are filled with receipts on items purchased for children.

Those provide more precise information than the sort volunteer Marguerite Brinkman has found in estate auctions in which a "bucket (of) dishes" might go for 25 cents, a "table and junk" for 30 cents and a "bag of rags" for 10 cents.

Estate cases are, however, a reliable source for finding funeral costs.

The Menter Co., for instance, charged the estate of Christopher Downey \$8.85 apiece for two burial suits and 50 cents for a burial cap. Not addressed — and a mystery to the volunteers — is why the late Mr. Downey needed two suits.

Looking Back continued on C3

Publicity

History Continues to Unfold!

After receiving a second OHRAB grant to process 4,000 more case files, our volunteers happily jumped into their next batch of cases at the end of April 2012!

