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ESTATE PAPERS: INTERESTING AND VALUABLE

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(The following material was originally presented as a talk to genealogical organizations some years ago. It is here published with some modifications and additional examples. All locations are in Pennsylvania, unless otherwise stated. If no location is given or only a township is noted, the estate was settled in York County, Pennsylvania. The writer notes that this information is not intended to be a comprehensive study of estate papers and regrets any deficiencies or errors that may be in this material.)

Intrigued would be a good word to describe my feelings when I first realized that documents still existed which were associated with the settlement of the estate of an ancestor who had died more than two hundred thirty years ago. Intrigued and captivated and hooked into feeding quarters into courthouse copiers with about the same helplessness as a slot machine addict.

By estate papers I am referring to original wills, administrative bonds, renunciations, inventories, administrative accounts and guardian accounts as well as certain other documents. Some or all of these may exist for a decedent's estate. These papers or contemporary copies were filed originally in the courthouse with jurisdiction over the estate.

They may contain no genealogical help, and many -- let me emphasize that last word -- many times they do not. From my point of view all of them are interesting and useful. Of course, the ones you most need as a last resort to provide you with genealogical breakthroughs are often genealogical duds. However, I consider all of them useful because they add dimensions to an ancestor's life that birth and death dates and a list of children lack. Some family genealogists have worked on a family or families over a span of many years and have made little or no effort to use estate papers. I feel a disappointment for them knowing they have missed so much interesting material. It is true that their retrieval can be time consuming and troublesome and that photocopying them can be expensive. And not all courthouse and archive employees are sympathetic with our interest in these old papers.

Just as today, the settlement of estates of 150 or 200 or more years ago was not always an easy, smooth, and peaceful process. Caveats were filed against wills by disappointed legatees or by those who wanted to be legatees. Mental soundness of will makers was challenged. Exceptions were filed against administrative accounts. Guardians of minors were charged with mismanagement of the inherited money of their wards. Some people who owed the estate money proved insolvent or absconded. Others were slow in paying debts and had to be taken to court. Money and goods sometimes dropped significantly in value while in the hands of executors or administrators because of unstable financial conditions, mismanagement, or fraud. Many people died in debt leaving insufficient cash or goods to cover the debts, so that all or part of the plantation had to be sold.

Some wills were so confusing and complicated as written that I do not know how the executors knew how to proceed to satisfy the writers' intentions. If a widow had lifetime right to the property, the estate could go unsettled twenty or more years before final settlement. By then the original executors may have died or moved from the area. Some will makers forgot to name executors. Some executors refused to take on the responsibility. Some administrators and executors died before the final settlement, making researchers unscramble the heading of an administrative account that may read as follows: Administration account of John Smith administrator of Sam Jones, deceased, who was administrator of Tom Miller, deceased, who was executor of Adam Davis, deceased. Doubtless there were estate feuds, that if known in detail today, would make very exciting reading.

The settlement of estates today is legally highly structured. Two centuries ago it was more structured than we may realize. Rather lengthy laws governed the settlement of intestate estates, that is, the estates of those who died without a will. More died intestate than testate! For those interested in reading some of the earlier laws affecting settlement, they can be found in the series titled The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania. Among them are the following significant acts found in the above mentioned source.

A) "An Act for the Better Settling of Intestates' Estates";
Vol. II, pages 199-206, Chapter CXXXV, Passed 1705-06.

B) Amendment to the previously listed act;
Vol. V, pages 62-64, Chapter CCCLXXIV, Passed 1748-49.

C) Supplement to 1705-06 act and repealed 1748-49 act;
Vol. VI, pages 339-343, Chapter DXII, Passed 1764.

D) "An Act Directing the Descent of Intestates' Real Estates, and Distribution of Their Personal Estates, and for Other Purposes Therein Mentioned"; (repealed all above acts previously listed);
Vol. XV, pages 80-95, Chapter MDCCLI, Passed 19 April 1794.

E) "An Act to Provide for the Settlement of the Estates of Deceased Officers and Soldiers who Served in the Pennsylvania Line during the Late War";
Vol. XV, pages 538-540, Chapter MCMXLVI, Passed 1797.

F) Supplement to 1794 act -- "goods of testators and intestates sometimes wasted by executors or administrators ... ";
Vol. XV, pages 543-550, Chapter MCMXLIX, Passed 1797.

There is significance in the date 19 April 1794, date of passage of the one act listed above. Genealogists should be aware of this significance. Occasionally in Orphans Court petitions there is the statement that a man died on or after 19 April 1794. Do not be misled into believing that this refers to the date of death of the person. The person may have died several years after that date. The date is given because of the date of passage of the above act and the significance of that act in governing the distribution of the estate. Prior to 19 April 1794, the law in effect entitled the oldest son to a double share. The act of 19 April 1794 required that all children of a person who died intestate were to share equally. Let it be noted that prior to 1794 some oldest sons waived the advantage given them by law of taking a double share. At least in some cases, this choice was made publicly in court.

I must caution you that some estate papers can not be found after a lengthy search. They never did exist or they do not now exist in the expected locations.

Those which did exist but are no longer extant may have been thrown out, stolen, or taken out by lawyers and never returned.

If a deceased person left nothing of value or had debts totaling more than assets, there was nothing to distribute to the heirs. For example, my ancestor Jacob Hively died sometime before his father wrote his will in 1839. I have not found one shred of evidence that an estate process was ever begun in York County for Jacob Hively although an Adams County Orphans Court record calls him late of York County, deceased. For various other reasons I am fairly certain Jacob had few of this world's goods.

There is ancestor, John Arnold, who must have died about 1800 since he then disappears from the records. There are no estate papers. He apparently transferred real and personal property to children before his death. A tombstone in York County indicates he died while residing in York County.

On the other hand, some estate papers show so little of value left by the deceased that a person must wonder why a formal estate settlement was made. Was it to prevent disagreement between the heirs over what little of this world's goods the person did have?

It also seems that some heirs settled estates outside the direct jurisdiction of official government. I do not know how often this was done, how legal such action was, or under what circumstances it was legal. Perhaps it was a matter of the heirs trusting each other and distrusting government and lawyers. My ancestor, Jacob Strickler, died in 1859. The amount of his estate was certainly significant. The method of settlement is given in an agreement recorded in the York County Recorder of Deeds Office. Abstracted, the agreement notes that "Jacob Strickler, Sr. died intestate owning property; heirs all of full age; want to avoid unnecessary expenses, trouble and delay; agree not to take out Letters of Administration; real estate is to be sold as soon as possible; one-third of sale price is to go to widow's dower fund and rest divided among heirs by 1 April next; Andrew Strickler and Samuel Strickler are appointed agents for all the heirs to attend to the duties of settling up the affairs thereof."

At this point I will discuss each type of estate document, giving examples of their interest and value. Many, but not all examples, are from estates of my ancestors or their collateral relatives.

ORIGINAL WILLS

It is the original will and not the recorded will book copy that shows the actual signature or mark of the testator. The same is also true for the signatures or marks of the witnesses.

Joseph Scholl of Baltimore County, Maryland, made his will in 1785. His signature on the original will matches very closely that of a Joseph Scholl who qualified at Philadelphia in 1749. They would appear to be the same man.

Having a copy of the original will avoids any recording errors that may have crept into the book copy. Some original wills are in such poor condition --faded, torn, brittle sections broken away at the folds, that one must go to the recorded will to have the total wording. Many early wills originally written in German were not recorded. Having copies of such wills is significant. The probate information was apparently written on the original will. Often a contemporary English translation exists, although also unrecorded, because it was not the original will. Certain wills that were not recorded for

various reasons still exist. Unprobated wills may also still exist, Lancaster County seems to have numerous of these. Several of the entries in Fulton and Mylin's index of Lancaster County testators for which no page and volume information is listed fall under this category.

My ancestor, Wendel Trout, died in Lancaster County in 1760. His will, written in English, was never recorded. In the will index the only information listed is the name and the year. A search turned up the original will. In spite of no evidence of probate written on the will, there is an administration account filed by the surviving executor and it lists probate cost. It is good the original exists. The information it contains is quite valuable and connects this Wendel Trout with his son, Nicholas, who was killed in Augusta County, Virginia, in 1753. I suppose it is possible this is an irregular case because I believe Wendel Trout bequeathed more than he was worth.

ADMINISTRATIVE BONDS

The form and wording of these documents was prescribed by the major laws previously described. If a person died intestate and an estate needed to be settled, an administrative bond was required. There were other situations requiring a bond which will not be detailed here. In York County the early bonds up to about 1800 mostly exist as individual papers and are not bound in books as are those from later time periods. Apparently for a period of time there exist two bond copies for an individual -- the original which is unbound and a bound duplicate copy.

The original bonds contain the signatures or marks of administrators and their sureties -- those putting up the bond money. The date of a bond can give an approximate time of death of the deceased that may be helpful if there is no other known date of death. Morris Engle, in his 1927 genealogy of Ulrich Engle and his descendants, gives Ulrich's death in Lancaster County as about 1764 and that of his wife, Anna, as 1767. Ulrich's administration bond is dated 14 June 1757, seven years before 1764, and Anna's bond is dated 26 June 1764, three years before 1767.

In the administrative bond of Christopher Hively, Jr., who died in 1783 in York County, the administrator, Jacob Hively, is identified as the eldest brother of the deceased. I was thus able to place the deceased in the correct Hively family and I know for certain he was not the son, Christopher, of my ancestor Jacob Hively.

Frederick Poff's bond is dated 22 May 1798. In that bond the administrator, George Poff, is identified as the only son and only heir of the deceased Frederick.

RENUNCIATIONS

In some cases an executor named in the will did not want to take on the responsibility and renounced. The reason given may be a general "for divers good causes". In some cases the reasons given are more specific: poor health, living at too great a distance, incapable.

One of the executors named by the previously mentioned Joseph Scholl renounced with the following: "I am not capable to serve for I cannot talk english nor hardly understand any therefore I hope you be kind enoug to excuse me and I would acquainted you with it before but I never heard anything of it till Captain Steven gill told my brother of it". It was signed in German by Martin Schneider.

My ancestress, Sophia Heibly (Hively), wrote her will in 1794 naming her son, Michael, as executor. She lived until 1809 without changing her will although her son Michael had left Pennsylvania, several years before. His renunciation, still in the courthouse at York, unfortunately does not give his location at the time he made the renunciation. So his exact location in the "West" is not definite, because both Sophia's son, Michael, and his first cousin, Michael, left York County and there were by that time, other adult Michael Hivelys in the next generation. The renunciation does give clues that could be useful, however: "I Michael Heibly, nominated & appointed Executor of the Last Will & Testament of my Mother Sophia Heibly deceased Do hereby for divers good causes Renounce my appointment as aforesaid & Request that Letters of Administration, with the Will annexed, may be granted to my Brother Jacob Heibly. Witness my hand & Seal this _____ Day of _____ 1809

Witnesses present
Jacob Bushong Esqr

Michael hivly

To Jacob Barnitz Esq Register
of Wills, etc. York County".

In addition to the value of having the signature of Michael, there is the good chance of finding one Jacob Bushong Esquire in 1809 in Ohio, or Virginia, in the areas of those states where it is known Michael Hivelys were settled by 1809.

Renunciations by executors are not as common as those by widows who did not want to exercise their legal right to administer their intestate husbands' estates. In some cases this renunciation may be one of the few places in which can be found the widow's first name and her signature, or, more commonly, her mark. In her renunciation she often names those who are to serve in her place as administrators. If a family relationship exists between she or her deceased husband and these intended administrators, the relationship is commonly specified.

As an example, in her renunciation dated 25 February 1807, Barbara Shetrone, widow of Jacob Shetrone, late of Newberry Township, granted the administration of the estate to her brother-in-law, Daniel Shetrone, and "my father George Mansperger". As a somewhat different example we have the following: "We the subscribers heirs of Catharine Seits late of Shrewsbury Township, York County, PA certify that it is our wish that George Kleinfelder be the sole administrator". It is dated 1820 and is signed by Christian Stabler, John Zeller, Andrew Seitz, and John Seitz.

DEPOSITIONS

Very uncommon, but extremely interesting and valuable, are depositions made regarding an estate. In law, a deposition is a written statement by a witness, made under oath, to be used as testimony in court.

John Faller the Elder of Mountpleasant Township, now Adams County, died near the end of 1785. After his death, among his papers was found a German will purported to be that of John Faller and in his own handwriting (a holographic will) but without any witness signatures. Many useful facts can be found in the depositions. Family members listed as appearing are "Elizabeth

Faller the Widow, John Faller Junior the Eldest Son of the deceased, Adam Faller the other son of the said deceased";"Anthony Little of the Township of Mountpleasant Weaver, being of the age of about Twenty four or Twenty five years, being duly sworn saith, That he lived a near Neighbour, unto the said John Faller the Elder, That he had considerable Dealings with him; That for the Space of four Years he had wove for him; That he had known him for the Space of Ten Years immediately before the Time of his Death..."; "David McCreary of full age, upon his Solemn Affirmation he Conscienscious scrupling the taking of an Oath Saith That he was personally acquainted with the said John Faller deceased, for the Space of about Seven or Eight years; That he had sundry dealings with him; That he knew him to be Rational possessed of a good Understanding, and endued with Sagacity and Care in the management of his Affairs; --- That he was present when he met with the Accident which brought him to his Sudden Death and that the same was brought about by a Way unaccountable to this Affirmant both in Regard to the Simplicity and Suddenness thereof; That it happened by the Wheeling of a Living Hog, thro a narrow Gate adjoining or including the dwelling House, and that from and after the deceased's first Complaint, and Settling down the WheelBarrow until the Time of his Death was not exceeding Ten Minutes--during which time he spoke sensibly to the Last Breath". As an interesting footnote, I had the pleasure of sending that set of depositions to a Faller descendant.

There is in York County a paper called "Notes Relative to the Estate of Maria Hoover who died intestate the 7th Day of May 1777". Reading portions of it shows the valuable information included. "Mary Bechtel saith That upon Easter Monday last past she the said Mary Bechtel in Company with the said Maria Hoover on a friendly Visit to a Certain John Sherrack's (the said Sherrock being intermarried with a Sister of the said Mary Bechtel) -- That on the Road as they were Riding to the said Sherrock's said Maria Hoover related to her said Mary Bechtel that Isaac Coghanour son of John Jacob Coghanour had left his Father in Maryland and had come to her House in a very bad State of Clothing ... Upon this said Mary Bechtel said to Maria Hoover, Your Brother meaning John Jacob Coghanour ...". "Catharine Wickertin an hired Maid with the said Maria Hoover said that on Saturday the 26th Day of April last, she the said Catharine was working in the Meadow--That Maria Coghanour, a Daughter of John Jacob Coghanour's was present ..." A Joseph Coghanour, relationship not identified, also presented information. These people made depositions because Maria Hoover had not made a will, but they related that while she lived she had spoken repeated disapproval of her brother, John Jacob Coghanour, and she had said he should not have any of her estate.

INVENTORIES

An inventory is a listing, often detailed, of the possessions of a person at the time of death. Names of those against whom the deceased held bonds or notes are often included. In a very few inventories the possessions are specifically listed by a certain room of the house. In some cases the appraisers can be followed around the farm and through the various buildings according to the order of the listing of the personal property.

Even if the inventory contains no genealogical information, I find it interesting to see what was owned by the decedent. The inventory of the previously mentioned Joseph Scholl is one of the most detailed I have seen. There are 307 entries, including garden seeds, a black handkerchief, three pocket handkerchiefs, one black silk handkerchief, one linen handkerchief, and three bottles of snuff.

Listed in Daniel Beidler's 1777 inventory are these two items: "to a note due by Abraham Strickler living in Verginia" and "to a note on Peter Gravius living in Juniatah". In Michael Miller's 1796 inventory there is a list of his children and the book charges against them. In Paul Shafer's 1784 inventory, the appraisers are Henry and Christofer Shafer, who are clearly identified as brothers of the deceased. Philip Ilgas died in 1792 and listed in the resulting inventory are one petticoat and other clothing items identified as "belonging to his first wife". This is the only solid reference I have yet seen that indicates two marriages for this man.

To remind us of the conditions of the time, the inventory of Jacob Herrington of Chanceford Township and dated 1770 lists "a Neagor woman, a Neagor man, and a Neagor boy". The same inventory has as a footnote: "beside the above appraisement the said Mary Herrington (the widow) also says that there came to her hands one black Horse and one black Mare the horse since Dead and the Mare supposed to be dyeing also one Sow & one Sheep not to be found". The lost animals remind us that livestock was not fenced in at that time but allowed to roam at large.

The 1782 inventory of the estate of John Finley of Chanceford Township not only lists Negroes but identifies them by name: Elias Dykes, Hannah, Bill, Bet, Murphey, and Jack. Their assigned values ranged from 65 pounds for Jack to 115 pounds for Bill. The same inventory also lists most cows by name: Dorty, Silkey, Cherry, Young Hawkey, and Young Dourty.

Jacob Hively was one of the appraisers of his brother-in-law's goods in 1761. The original, in German and a translation both exist. This document for the estate of Michael Valentine was signed by Jacob Hively in German and is one of only about two documents that I know about which have his signature. (Years later Jacob Hively marked his will instead of signing it.)

George Homspocher's (alias Amspacker) estate inventory is dated 3 June 1748 and is filed in Lancaster County (because of that early date) although he lived in what is now York County. It is headed "An Inventory of all the Estate Goods Chattles & Cattles of George Homspocher deceased, in the Township of Manchester in the County of Lancaster & Province of Pensilvania Trawn out of the vendue paper whereby all the Estate is Sold upon the Prise here Set the vendue is held by Michael Remble the Father in Law of sd. George homspocher". As you note, the township of the deceased's residence was given. Sometimes an inventory is one of the few places that such information is found. More valuable is the name of the father-in-law.

Four pages of inventory were taken on 16 February 1818 of the estate of Andrew Sweitzer of Fawn Township. Somebody apparently forgot some of the estate for on 18 March 1818 two additional pages of inventory were appraised. This later listing begins with the heading, "We the subscribers having formerly taken an Inventory and appraised the personal Estate of Andrew Switzer the elder of Fawn Township deceased to which Inventory then made we were qualified according to law and we do make this additional Inventory and appraisment of the following articles then omitted as the residue of the property of the said deceased". Maybe someone was trying to get away with something!

An inventory may also indicate an occupation that is not otherwise known. Henry Forry died in 1766 in Hellam Township. Besides being a farmer, he must have been a blacksmith, for the inventory includes the three entries, "Blacksmith Tools", "2 Bars of steel", and "632 pounds of Iron".

Andrew Miller died as an aged man in 1842, resident in North Codorus Township. He is listed in the 1840 Census of Pensioners, but I have not, to this point, found his pension application or pension records. However, the last item in his inventory is "Pension, $15.55".

Inventories were often taken before the trip to the courthouse was made for letters of administration. People knew it had to be done and this saved a trip to town. Therefore, an inventory may give an earlier date as the latest possible date of death, than either the date of the bond or the date of the probate of the will. The administration bond for the previously mentioned Ulrich Engle is dated 14 June 1757 and the inventory is dated 11 June 1757. So he died at least prior to 11 June not 14 June.

Maryland inventories, in addition to being signed by the appraisers, were signed by two of the nearest kin and one or two of the significant creditors.

In addition to the regular inventory, among the papers for the estate of Paul Dittenhafer is "An Inventory of the Improvement of Paul Deethenhaver & the builthing Seentz done", dated 1756. Paul Dittenhafer had died in 1748 when the area was in Lancaster County rather than York County as it was in 1756. Listed are "To the Improvement with all the Land", "To one Dweling Stone House and one Spring House of Stone and one Mil House of Stone". "The above is True Appraisement of the Inprovement of Paul Deethenhaver Deced & also of the builthings which wer done Seents by the wittow Mare Deethenhavern to our best View according to the best of our Judgement". It is signed by Martin Egckelberger, Conrad Holtzbaum, and Michael Bart and marked by Emanuel Harman. It is also noted that John Schults was one of the viewers, but now "being sick (as we are informed) can not be present to sign with us" on 26 March 1756. Not all widows of that time would have undertaken to complete such a project that was begun by her husband.

Trying to decipher the goods listed in early inventories can be an interesting project because of the strange and unexpected phonetic spellings. And in some cases the handwriting adds to the problem.

VENDUE LISTS

I do not know if vendue lists have survived in large numbers for many counties. Such lists are similar to and served the same purpose as those lists kept by auction clerks today. These lists can serve as very detailed inventories. For each sale lot the buyer's name is given as well as the price paid. These sales of the deceased's goods would normally occur before the administration account was filed.

If buyers with the same name are present they may be uniquely designated to prevent confusion. After his widow died, Jacob Dellinger's remaining goods were sold in 1840. Buyers included: George Dellinger, farmer; George Dellinger, Senior; and George Dellinger, shoemaker; as well as John Poff, shoemaker; John Poff, Junior; and John Poff, Senior. Vendue lists do not seem to exist in York County before about 1835 except for a very few exceptions. It is possible that vendue lists may be useful in tracing ownership of a major piece of identifiable furniture.

GUARDIANSHIP ACCOUNTS

Apparently, by law, guardians of the money that minors inherited were to

report to the court every three years. I do not believe this was always done. Very few guardian accounts from the earliest years seem to have survived. Those that do exist sometimes contain information of interest and value.

The 1837 account of Peter Fried, guardian of Maria, Elizabeth, and Henry, minor children of Ulrich Forry of Hellam Township contains the item, "Also recd Septr. 2, 1826 of Henry Musser of the minors grandmothers estate". This is one more piece of evidence showing they were the great-grandchildren of Magdalena Engle of Lancaster County and that their paternal grandmother was Barbara Engle, first wife of Henry Forry, of Hellam Township. From a 1 December 1840 guardianship account it is known that the above Elizabeth died as a minor and by a 16 November 1838 guardianship account it is known that the above Mary Forry married Frederick Stouffer.

Henry Strickler of Hellam Township died in 1824 as a young man leaving an infant daughter named Susan. Seven guardianship accounts exist for her over a period of many years exhibited by four different guardians including one by her stepfather, Samuel C. Bonham. These accounts give a good picture of the finances involved in such a situation.

MISCELLANEOUS PAPERS

When Henry Strickler of Hellam Township wrote his will in 1792, he directed that seven or eight men should be chosed by his heirs, who "shall value the land of his son, Henry, how much it may be worth". That real estate valuation still exists with the signatures of the eight men selected to perform the task. There is a similar paper for his son Jacob.

Daniel Beidler died in the same township in 1777. He made a similar order and we know it was carried out in 1790 when the son Daniel came of age since the original paper still exists.

ADMINISTRATION ACCOUNTS

When the administrators or executors presented the financial settling of the deceased's estate, it is the disbursements side that is often the most interesting and useful. Persons may be named who were paid for funeral expenses--coffins, shrouds, "laying out the body", and tombstones. Often the auctioneer who conducted the vendue of the deceased's goods is named. Accounts may list payment for "liquor at vendue". For one funeral payment is recorded for "wine and sugar". People may be named as receiving payment for schooling of children. Medical doctors may be listed for payment for medicine most likely used in the deceased's last illness. I have seen several accounts where payments were made to two or three doctors--indication that second opinions have always been sought.

The Henry Forry previously mentioned died at a young age and probably suddenly and possibly violently or suspiciously for in the first account of his estate there is payment of one pound to "Joseph Adlum Cor [oner] for viewing the Body of the dec". The account of Christian Stoner's estate, dated 1793 in York County, has two entries of muster fines totaling almost five pounds. These fines are not unreasonable since Christian Stoner was a Mennonite.

Christopher Hively, Senior's will was probated 2 June 1798. His wife was still living when the will was written 11 May 1797. When the executors exhibited the account 22 November 1799, references are made to her death, including a listing of the cost of her coffin. This is the only reference

known to me that gives a time period for her death. In the same account, payment is made to Michael Hively for attending the deceased in his sickness.

There is a sad entry in Henry Dellinger's estate account of 1822: "Paid Jacob Neff for coffin for deceased's son". But knowing of that entry means there is no need to wonder what became of one of the sons.

Remember the lost hog and sheep of the 1770 Herrington inventory? The 1774 administration account of that estate shows that not only were they found, but that a second hog was "supposed to be lost and since found".

Rare is the York County administration account that lists the heirs. This is an unfortunate situation for genealogists. However, there is a bonanza in the administration account of the estate of Jacob Harrington who died intestate prior to 11 December 1754. Listed are the heirs: Mary, wife of John Jasper; Isaac Harrington, the administrator, who received a double share as the oldest son; Ann, wife of Thos. Lawson; Jacob Harrington; Thomas Harrington; Francis Harrington; Rachel, wife of John Freeharty; Sarah Harrington; and John Harrington. They are probably listed in order of age.

Along with the administration account, by Andrew Sweitzer, of his father, Andrew's, estate is a "list of exceptions to Andrew Sweitzer's account: 1. vouchers are not produced 2. No.12 --the hog credited was not the property of accountant but belonged to deceased's estate 3. Accountant credits himself with 80 dolls for his trouble which is exhorbitant 4. Interest credited on a note which was to be without interest". Maybe somebody was indeed trying to get away with something!

On the credit side of an account in a few cases, may be found information on the sale of the deceased's real estate. The name of the buyer is sometimes given and the terms of payment may also be given.

If a man by his will gave his widow a lifetime use of some or all of his goods, the administration account may come only after her death which may be many years after his death. In such cases two inventories may exist. The first at the time of his death and the second at the time she died. In two cases the date of this second inventory is the only evidence I have of the approximate date of death of the widow. In one case the widow died about 16 years after her husband's death and in the other case, 25 years.

The following three examples show what other types of interesting information can be found in administration accounts.

John Strickler died in Windsor Township in 1770. The account was not filed until 1787. It was in 1787 that the only child, a daughter, most likely came of age. The account is interesting because of the types of money and various rates of conversion listed. The kinds of money are Continental, Hard, Specie, Congress Money, and State Money. Respectively, the conversion ratios are 2 for 1, 5 for 1, 24 for 1, 75 for 1, and 1.5 for 1. The accountants were probably relieved when they finally finished the financial computations for that estate. And they had to do their computations without electronic calculators!

George Keller wrote his will 23 February 1792 in York County. The will mentions wife Veronica for whom a "house shall be erected and built for my said wife Twenty feet long and sixteen feet wide shingled and two floors laid with

plancks and two glass windows in the same". The account presented on 26 March 1793 verifies that the structure was built because payments are listed as having been made to the following persons for reasons specified: Jacob Henry for making a chimney; Conrad Leatherman for hinges; Barnet Ziegler for sundrys for said house; John Hoober for planks; Lewis Decker for making shingles; Christian Keller for making shingles and squaring logs; William Harris for latches; William Ness for window glass; Benjamin Pierce for making windows; George Keller for hawling logs; Jacob Krahmer for nails; Henry Keller for work done at said house; John Roth for hauling stone; and unspecified persons for sundries for said house. I wonder if this house still stands?

Theodore Herr, in his Herr genealogy, lists the wives of Rudolph Herr of Manor Township, Lancaster County, who died about 1777 as Barbara Brubaker and Ann _____. It is true that he was married at least twice, for the will lists the given names of five stepdaughters. The widow is given in the administration account as Barbara and not Ann: "Cash paid Barbara Herr the Widow & Relict of the said Rudolph Herr deceased, in lieu of her thirds of & in the personal estate of the said deceased pursuant to a composition or Agreement in writing & entered into with her for that purpose". I believe the first wife was Ann and the second Barbara. Each of Rudy's children who had children had a daughter named Ann. In all but one of these families Ann is the oldest daughter. Only one known granddaughter appears to be named Barbara.

Occasionally an account will create problems as well as solve them. Christian Gerber's will was written in Hempfield Township, Lancaster County in 1803 but not probated until November 1806. The will contains the paragraph, "Item I give and bequeath unto my Grand Daughter Mary (being the only Child of my deceased Daughter Mary) the Sum of One hundred Pounds money aforesaid as and for her full and whole Share ... shall put and keep the said sum of One hundred Pounds at Interest ... and apply the Interest thereof for the support of the said Mary if necessary untill she attains her Lawful age, and then pay unto her the Interest which may remain in their Hands and if she behaves herself well then they may also pay unto her the said Principal Sum". The account filed in October 1807 includes this item that somehow must relate: "Cash paid Maria Sternman 9..6 The said Accountants also retain in their hands the sum of L155 the interest thereof amtg. to L9..6..0 to be paid yearly unto Maria Sterneman Widow (late Maria Gerber) during the Term of her natural Life, and after her Death the principal Sum to be paid to the Children of the said Maria Sterneman". What is the explanation? Is Maria Sternman the daughter or granddaughter of Christian Gerber? If the granddaughter, why is she said to be "late Maria Gerber" when she would be the daughter of a daughter? (Or had the daughter married a Gerber?) If the daughter, why did Christian Gerber mistakely believe his daughter was deceased and additionally had only one child as opposed to "children" of account?

I have had limited experience with Maryland estate papers but some information seems to have been more regularly included in Maryland administration accounts that was given infrequently in Pennsylvania accounts. Almost nonexistant is the York County administration account that lists the heirs and the amount of inheritance received. Instead there is simply the phrase "to be distributed according to law" or the phrase "to be distributed according to the deceased's will". In each of the half dozen Maryland accounts of which I have copies, the heirs are listed with their amounts of inheritance. This includes both testate and intestate cases. Such a listing is very helpful in intestate cases where there is no petition, to the orphans court to evaluate the real estate, which usually names all the children. Such an account listing of heirs is a good find if the testator directs "to all my children equally" but names

none or only some of them. Some researchers mistakenly assume that those children named in the will comprise a full list to which division is to be made equally. Those specifically named may or may not be a complete list.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Many additional examples could be used to exemplify the value of estate papers. However, the given examples should be sufficient to make the point of my presentation.

Wills in most cases have been recorded in books. Rarely in early times and well into the 1800's were any of the other documents so recorded. Any use of estate papers should be with care, for they are one of a kind. Hopefully more effort will be given by the responsible authorities to preserving and securing these documents. Genealogists themselves must make certain they handle these documents with respect. Genealogists must work to make certain that the depositories can and do maintain security and have acceptable climatic conditions.

I would point out that apparently from early times copies of certain documents associated with an estate were made for the executors or administrators. Occasionally, you will see on copies in a courthouse a note that the executor or administrator does not want a copy of the inventory. Apparently he already had a copy. A few years ago when a trunk in York County containing family papers back to 1758 were "rediscovered", it contained estate papers for the estates which family members had helped to settle. It even contained a large quantity of numbered vouchers, the little slips of paper by which creditors of the estate acknowledged receipt of payment. In some cases the set of vouchers is almost complete and can be matched with the administration account list of payments.

For the most part estate papers presently exist either in the original depositories, courthouses, county archives, or local historical societies. Regardless of their location, some estate papers can be of definite value in solving genealogical mysteries. Most estate papers can add meaningful dimensions to the lives of our ancestors. All deserve to be preserved and secured. They are tremendous documents for better understanding the lives of the ordinary men and women who are our ancestors.

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