

## Orphans' Court (General Information)

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### What is Orphans' Court?

**Always check orphans' court if you are doing family history.** The court handled the sale and division of real estate out of estates, the confirmation and auditing of accounts, and the guardianship of minor children (who may not be orphans).

### There are two types of orphans' court files:

A **decedent's estate** contains records of an estate settlement; it is a continuation of the probate process. The most common type of record in these files is an account of administration. Most of these are duplicates of accounts that were filed with the will or administration (probate) records. Records related to the sale or division of real estate are not duplicated in the probate file; these papers may list family members. Records related to the auditing of accounts may also contain information of genealogical value.

A **minor's estate** contains guardianship papers. A minor was someone under the age of 21. A child could have a guardian even if one or both parents were alive. The guardian was given charge of the minor's **property**; in most cases, the minor continued to live with family members. Guardianship records often name one or both parents and state if the child was above or below the age of fourteen. Typical files contain petitions for guardians; by the second half of the 19th century, inventories and guardianship accounts become more common. The files are **not** duplicates of probate records.

### Where are Chester County Orphans' Court records?

Chester County Archives has records for 1714-1923. Records after 1923 are available at the Register of Wills/Orphans' Court.

### Are there Orphans' Court dockets for Chester County?

Chester County Archives has Orphans' Court dockets for 1716-1923. In most cases, the information in the docket is less detailed than what is in the decedents' and minors' estate files.

The orphans' court dockets for 1716-1781 have been transcribed and indexed; they are available in the CCA reading room. The dockets contain the court proceedings and summaries of the records filed by the court. Every name is indexed.

**1716-1761** dockets are published. The page numbers in the indexes refer to the original page numbers (included within the text), not the numbers at the bottom of the page.

**1762-1781** dockets are in notebooks. The page numbers in the indexes correspond to the numbers at the bottom of the page of the transcription.

For orphans' court proceedings before 1716, see the published transcriptions of the early court dockets of Chester County (1681-1710), available in the CCA reading room.