

Questions for Analyzing the Will of Joseph Pratt II and his Inventory of Estate

A *Will* is a legal document that lets you tell the world who should receive which of your assets after your death. It also allows you to name guardians for any dependent children. An *Estate Inventory* is a listing of the personal belongings of an individual taken near the time of death for tax purposes or bequest—usually items considered rare or valuable in some way. Under many circumstances these items will be specifically left to a certain individual, or may be sold in order to pay the debts of the deceased or the money bequests that the deceased might leave to people named in his or her will. The value of each item is listed in pounds, shillings and pence (the standard currency of colonial America.)

Historians use both wills and estate inventories to discover information about the lives of the people they study. Below are some questions that you can answer using information from both the will and estate inventory. At the bottom are bonus questions, which may require some more research to answer.

1. When did Joseph Pratt II write his will?
2. Around when did Joseph Pratt II die?
3. How many children did he have?
4. What were the names of his children?
5. What did he leave to his daughters?
6. Joseph mentions his sons and his daughters, but who is not mentioned? Why do you think this person was not mentioned?
7. How much land did Joseph Pratt II own?
8. What natural and man-made landmarks did Joseph Pratt use to mark the boundaries of his land? Do you think this is a good way to survey property?
9. Why do you think Joseph Pratt talked about the water that ran through the property he divided between his sons?
10. Who else is mentioned in Joseph's will? What does Joseph order his sons to do? What does he order his sons NOT to do?
11. What did Joseph Pratt II grow on his land?
12. What animals did he keep?
13. Who were his friends and neighbors?
14. What do you think his profession or trade was? (Hint: Joseph may have had more than one occupation.)
15. Was Joseph Pratt II rich or poor? Why do you think that? (Hint: the average annual income for a schoolmaster was 60 pounds, or about \$4000 in today's money.)

Bonus Question: The money Joseph Pratt left to his daughters is specified as “lawful money of Pennsylvania.” Why does Joseph Pratt say it this way?

Bonus Question: Joseph Pratt left land and property to his sons, but only money to his daughters. Why did he do that?