

## Questions for Analyzing the Will of Joseph Pratt III 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 write his will?
2. Around when did Joseph Pratt die?
3. How much land did Joseph Pratt own?
4. How many children did he have?
5. What were the names of his children?
6. What was his wife's name?
7. What did he leave to his wife? Why do you think he left these items?
8. Judging by the number of beds listed, how many bedrooms do you think Joseph had?
9. Which is worth more, a chaff bed or a feather bed?
10. What did Joseph Pratt grow on his land?
11. What animals did he keep?
12. Who were his friends and neighbors?
13. What do you think his profession or trade was? (Hint: Joseph may have had more than one occupation.)
14. Was Joseph Pratt 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:** Joseph Pratt specifically lists all of the things he leaves to his wife, and finishes by stating that “all the foregoing bequests and privileges to my loving wife I leave her as her dower.” What is a dower? Why was it important to leave his wife one?

**Bonus Question:** At the time of his father's death, Davis Pratt is only thirteen years old, which is the exact age for him to be “put out,” or set up with an apprenticeship in a craft or trade. Why was this especially important for Davis, and less important for his brothers Joseph and Lewis? What are some trades that Davis might have chosen to apprentice in?