

Durham Region Surrogate Courts—Unlocked... Part 1 – Where the story takes me...

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Durham Region Surrogate Courts—Unlocked... Part 1

by [Jane E. MacNamara](#) | Published [September 8, 2022](#)

I've written this post (the first of two) to accompany a presentation to the Durham Region Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society. I'm very pleased to say that the digitized records on FamilySearch for Ontario County, Durham County and Northumberland County were unlocked for viewing at home over this past Labour Day weekend.

For this presentation, I focused on the records for today's Durham Region. Established in 1974, Durham Region includes most of the previous Ontario County and Durham County. Because Durham and Northumberland were combined as a "United County", Northumberland surrogate court records come along as a bonus. If you're researching in this area, be sure to spend some time absorbing the geography and jurisdictional changes. That knowledge will help with all your research.

We're lucky in Ontario that complete estate files were retained so we can see how the process worked—with all the paperwork. An estate file contains the documents created for the court and by the court to administer an individual's estate. The estate file exists whether there was a valid will or none. It tells a story if you let it.

Let's look at an example:

Edward John Donovan died October 18, 1918, and is buried in the churchyard of St. Columbkille's Parish in Uptergrove, in Rama Township, which was part of Ontario County. Edward was only 25, single, and working as a manager in the wood department of the Standard Chemical Company. (Lumber was needed to make charcoal to supply heat for the manufacturing processes.)

He died of pneumonia, possibly resulting from influenza. He had the odd distinction of two death certificates—one in Penetanguishene where he died, and another in Rama Township where he was buried.

It is a bit unusual to find his estate file in Ontario County rather than in Simcoe where he died, but certainly more convenient for his family.

Start by searching for Ontario County records in the [FamilySearch Catalogue](#). Using the default “Place” search, enter “Ontario”. From the suggestions offered in the drop-down menu, pick “Canada, Ontario, Ontario”. Under Availability, select “Online”. And Search.

From the short list of categories, click “Probate records” to expand the items.

Refine your search

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Part of [Canada, Ontario](#)

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- ▶ [Canada, Ontario, Ontario - Church records \(4 \)](#)
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- ▶ [Canada, Ontario, Ontario - Genealogy \(1 \)](#)
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- ▶ [Canada, Ontario, Ontario - Land and property \(4 \)](#)
- ▶ [Canada, Ontario, Ontario - Maps \(1 \)](#)
- ▼ **[Canada, Ontario, Ontario - Probate records \(4 \)](#)**

[General registers, 1854-1878; index, 1853-1931](#)
Author: Ontario County (Ontario). Registrar of Deeds

[Probate records, 1825-1900; index, 1801-1955](#)
Author: Ontario. Surrogate Court (York County)

[Probate records, 1854-1902; index, 1854-1970](#)
Author: Ontario. Surrogate Court (Ontario County)

[Probate records, 1901-1930](#)
Author: Ontario. Surrogate Court (Ontario County)

FamilySearch catalogue showing expanded list of online holdings for Ontario County. Of the four items, only the last two are Ontario County Surrogate Court records.

We'll start with the index 1854–1970, which is part of the third item. Click to open the full catalogue entry.

Probate records, 1854-1902; index, 1854-1970 [Add to Print List](#)

Authors: [Ontario. Surrogate Court \(Ontario County\)](#) (Main Author)

Format: Manuscript/Manuscript on Film

Language: English

Publication: Salt Lake City, Utah : Filmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah, 1970

Physical: 41 microfilm reels ; 35 mm.

Notes

Microreproduction of original records at the County Courthouse, Whitby, Ontario.

Consists of probate record books and the original probate papers from which the books were compiled. Probate papers contain wills, petitions, letters of administrations, etc.

[View this catalog record in WorldCat for other possible copy locations](#)

Subjects

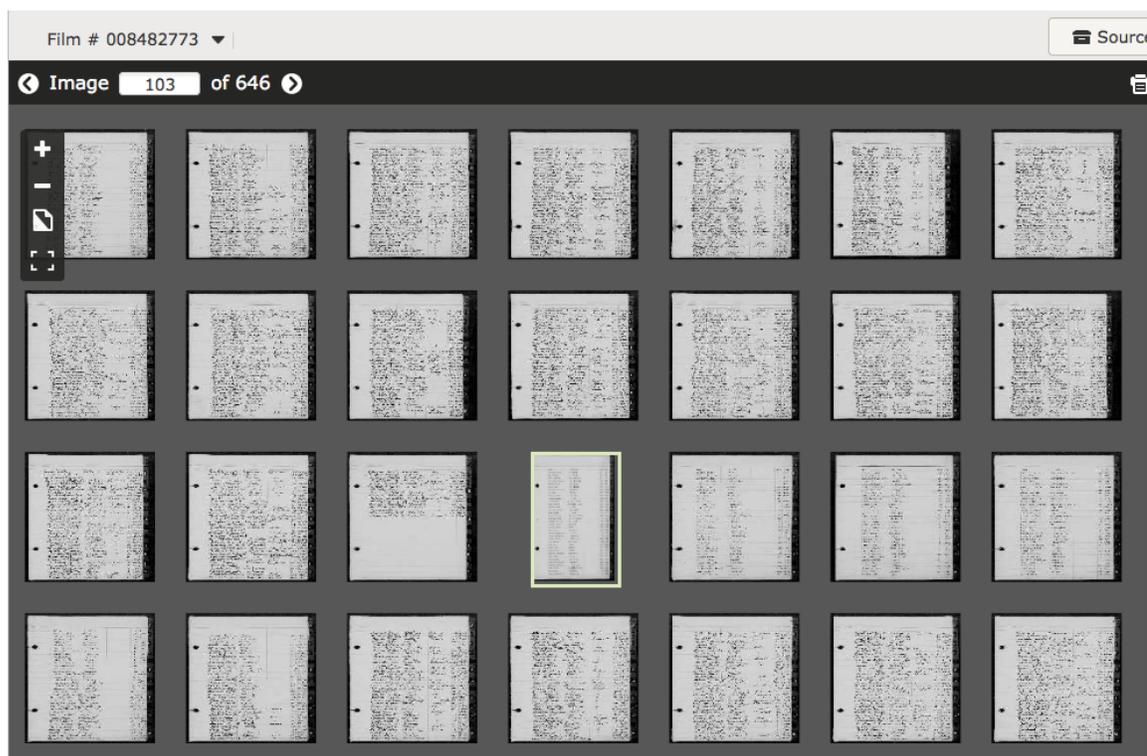
Locality Subjects

[Canada, Ontario, Ontario - Probate records](#)

Film/Digital Notes

Note	Location	Collection/Shelf	Film	Image Group Number (DGS)	Format
Index 1854-1970	Family History Library	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	453684	8482773	
Probate books 1854-1865	Family History Library	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	453685	8482774	
Probate books 1865-1875	Family History Library	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	453686	8482775	
Probate books 1875-1882	Family History Library	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	453687	8482776	
Probate books 1882-1888	Family History Library	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	845976	8484080	
Probate books 1888-1893	Family History Library	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	845977	8130539	
Probate books 1893-1897	Family History Library	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	845978	8484081	
Probate books 1897-1902	Family History Library	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	845979	8484082	

This is the top of the catalogue entry showing the first few of 41 digitized microfilms. To view the images, you must be signed in with a free FamilySearch account. Once you are, you can click the little camera icon to open the filmstrip.



The filmstrip shows miniatures of the index pages. All the names beginning with A are together. Same with B, C, D, etc. You can often see where one letter ends and the next begins and make a pretty accurate guess. The start of the letter D is shown in yellow.

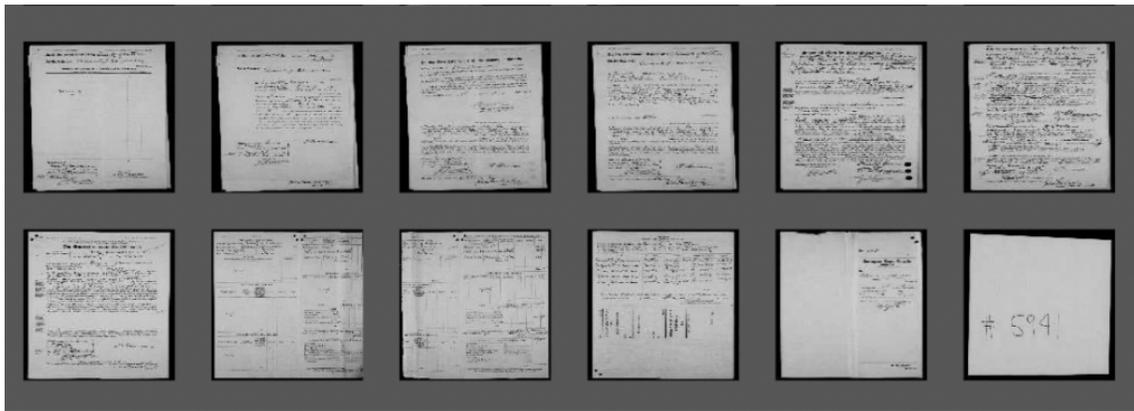
The index spans 1854 to 1970 and will be chronological within each letter. Unfortunately the entries are not dated. But 1918 will be roughly halfway through the list. For this particular index, you'll find a key to years at the start of the film.

Donovan Edward J.	Pawa	140	5940
Dib Sato	Oshawa.	141	5945
Doyle Joseph	Pickering	141	5957
Doble Blair O.	Proct.	141	5967
Domanski Herb	Oshawa.	141	5969
Duffy Bernard	Uara.	141	5972
Doble Luke	Uara.	141	5981
Doubt Arthur B.	Port Perry.	141	5992
Dixon Mary Ann	Pickering	142	6043
Drovisky Felony	Oshawa.	146	6117
Doble Egerton Pyerson	Brook	148	6170
Doten Hilda Jane	Pickering	148	6188
Douglas Alden	Beaverton	148	6195
Dewey Wm P.	Beach	148	6197
Dougherty Michael	Uara	157	6255
Donovan Timothy	Pawa.	151	6274

I had to scroll through ten pages of the letter D to find the page with Edward J. Donovan. Although unmarked on this page, the columns are Name, Residence, G.B. (grant book page), and No. (grant number).

We can now use the **grant number 5940** to find the estate file for Edward J. Donovan. Go back to the FamilySearch catalogue to find the listing of [Probate records 1901-1930](#). Look for 1918, and the span of file numbers that encompasses 5940.





We're lucky that on this filmstrip view, there are divider cards between the multi-page estate files. It is a breeze to pick out #5940.

Stay tuned for part two, where we'll look at each document in the estate file and the story they tell.

- [Estate files](#)
- [FamilySearch](#)
- [Ontario County Surrogate Court](#)
- [Records of Inheritance](#)

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Durham Region Surrogate Courts—Unlocked... Part 2 – Where the story takes me...

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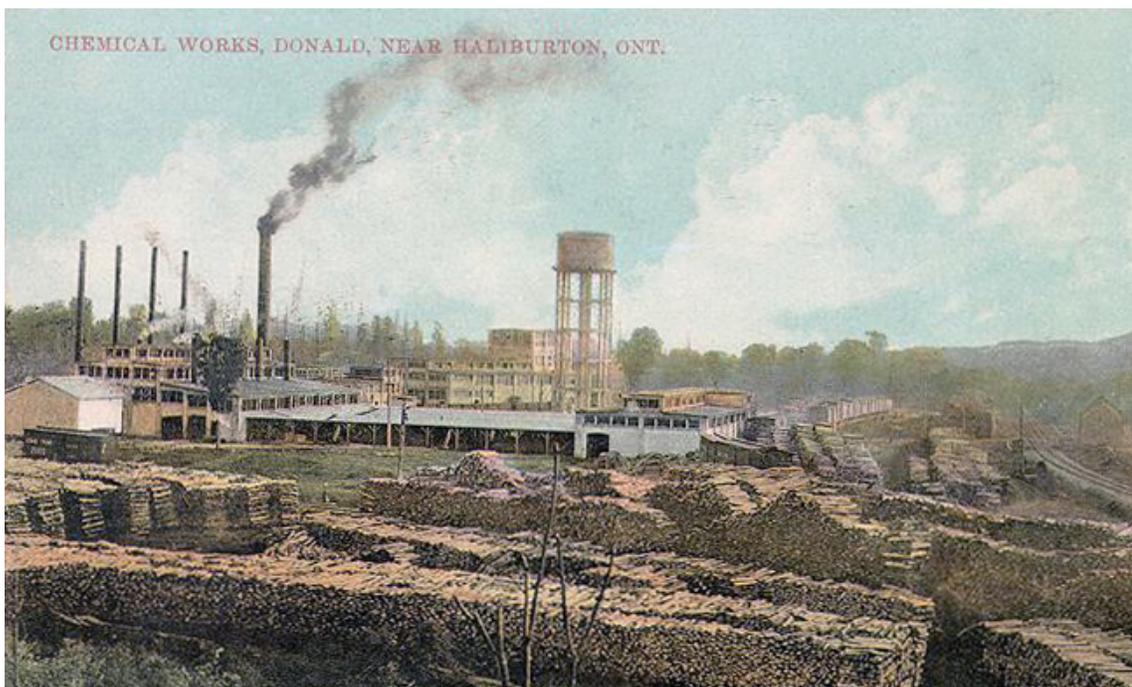
Durham Region Surrogate Courts—Unlocked... Part 2

by [Jane E. MacNamara](#) | Published [September 13, 2022](#)

This is part 2 of a post written to accompany a presentation to the Durham Region Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society. It will make more sense if you read part 1, in which I explain how to find young Edward Donovan's estate file using the digitized records on FamilySearch.org. [Click here to be transported back to that post.](#)

Let me refresh your memory about our subject.

Edward John Donovan died October 19, 1918, and is buried in the churchyard of St. Columbkille's Parish in Uptergrove, in Rama Township, then part of Ontario County. Edward was only 25, single, and working as a manager in the wood department of the Standard Chemical Company. He died of pneumonia, possibly resulting from influenza. Edward died in Penetanguishene but I'm not sure whether he had moved to the town or spent his final days in the local hospital.





This postcard shows the enormous stockpiles of lumber at the chemical works at Donald near Haliburton, Ontario, in about 1912. While not where our Edward worked, it shows the scale of the operation before the additional demands of the First World War. (digitalarchiveontario.ca PCR-663)

The last census that included young Edward was 1911. In the image below, you'll see that Edward, aged 18, is listed with his parents Timothy and Margaret, and younger siblings May Catherine, Carmen, Percival, and Helen, near Longford Mills. Edward is employed as a stenographer at the sawmill and his father is listed as a foreman on the river. (I'm not sure what that means.) A quick scan of the neighbours shows that most are working at the sawmill or in the chemical factory—likely a branch of the Standard Chemical Company where Edward was working when he died. The sawmill may well have been associated with the company, too.

It may have been that Edward's employment and the company's production of chemicals needed for military use, exempted him from military service as an essential worker. I found no sign of an attestation form for him.

But he didn't live to see the armistice.

1	2	2	Donovan Timothy	Nov 13	Mr	Head	M	Dec.	1844	0
2			Margaret		W	Wife	M	June	1848	0
3			Edward		M	Son	M	April	1893	0
4			May Catherine		F	Daughter	F	Feb	1896	0
5			Carmen		W	Daughter	F	Oct	1899	0
6			Percival		M	Son	M	June	1905	0
7			Helen		F	Daughter	F	August	1908	0
8										

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/film/007526767>

A detail of the 1911 census for Rama Township showing the Donovan family. Click the image to go to FamilySearch to see the full page, Look for image 296. (You'll need to sign in to your free FamilySearch account.)

Let's look at estate file #5940. As I mentioned in part 1, an estate file contains the documents created for the court and by the court to administer an individual's estate. The documents are stuffed in a file folder or otherwise fastened together and folded into a bundle. What you're seeing on the digitized microfilm are the pages from that bundle, filmed in no particular order. I find sorting them into the order in which they were created makes the file—and the process much easier to understand. I have done so for 14 documents in Edward Donovan's estate file. (You can click on the images to enlarge them.)

Twenty-five years old and single, Edward did not have a will. So his father, Timothy Donovan had to apply for letters of administration rather than "proving" a will for a grant of probate.

The first seven documents were forms completed by Timothy Donovan and his lawyer in preparation for his application to the court. The first document is an inventory of Edward’s worldly goods—just cash in hand, in the bank and Victory Bonds. The second shows that he owned no real estate. The third document is Timothy’s assurance that he had made a “diligent and careful search” and didn’t turn up a will.



1. Inventory of personal estate



2. Inventory of real estate



3. Affidavit of search for will

The next three documents all have to do with obligations to the court. The first is Timothy’s oath that the estate was worth \$1067, that he’d make an inventory, pay any debts, and look after distributing whatever was left over. Note that Timothy called himself a lumberman, and Edward an inspector. It carries his signature.

Next is the administration bond required by the court. Timothy and his sureties, William Thomson of Orillia, gentleman, and George Thomson of Orillia, postmaster, were all obliged that the inventory, payment of debts, and distribution of funds happened—or they'd have to come up with \$2,150. Double the value of the estate seems to be typical. The second page warrants that the sureties were worth that and more. It might be worth investigating who the Thomsons were—perhaps neighbours or relatives?



4. Oath of Administration



5. Administration bond



6. Oaths of sureties

The next document is broken into four images, but it is really one sheet of paper about 17 x 14 inches, folded in half to create four legal size pages. This is the Succession Duty Affidavit of Value, a wonderful addition for family historians, but unappreciated at the time—to say the least. It repeats some of the material we've seen before, but gets into specifics—like the name of Edward's bank in Orillia. But most crucially, it names his

heirs, their relationship to Edward, residence, and what they got. Compare this list to the 1911 census above and you'll see that younger brother Carmen is missing—and likely dead.



7a. Succession Duty affidavit



7b. Succession Duty affidavit



7c. Succession Duty affidavit



7d. Succession Duty affidavit

With those documents all signed on 9 December 1918^[i], it was time to apply to the court for a grant of administration. The application summarized the information we've already seen including listing Edward's family members as heirs. Its submission to the court triggered a number of other actions.

The next document shows the Succession Duty Office had perused the affidavit and decided that there was no duty to be paid. That is followed by a certificate from the Office of the Surrogate Clerk that no one else had started the court process. And finally, there's certification from the Ontario County surrogate court registrar, that Edward didn't deposit a will with them.



8. Application for grant of administration



9. Succession Duty Office consent



10. Administration certificate from Surrogate Clerk

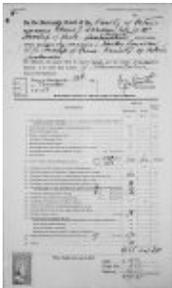


11. Certificate of search for will deposited with the court

Timothy's team had submitted everything required. Replies had come in. Just the final wrap-up was left for December 13. First, a boilerplate list of the documents submitted to the court registrar. Then an itemized list of fees to be paid—\$19.05, and finally a cover or “jacket” with the salient details and numbers for filing purposes. All the pages would be attached and folded within this jacket so the information could be easily seen.



12. List of papers submitted



13. Memorandum of fees



14. Jacket

The documents in Edward J. Donovan's estate file have revealed quite a bit about his young life—and opened many potential avenues to investigate. How did he travel from Longford Mills to Orillia to do his banking? By road or by boat? What was his role at Standard Chemical Company? How did he feel about not being in uniform? What happened to his brother Carmen? What did his surviving siblings do with the legacy left by Edward? So many questions.

I've written a lot about estate files on this blog. [Click here to display the "Records of Inheritance" category](#). I've also written a book that provides a lot more background. [Click here to read more about it](#).

[i] Many of the documents have had a November date crossed out or overwritten as December. (Likely