

THE PROBATE RECORDS OF DENMARK

INTRODUCTION

There are many problems encountered in preparing a paper of this type. For one thing, many procedures used in the courts of Denmark have no equivalent in English-speaking countries. Accurate description of court activities and of the records they produce is thus quite difficult because words and terms often have no exact English counterpart. We have tried to use those English terms which most nearly convey the desired message, but there are differences and this paper is of insufficient scope to explore all of them. That would require a complete transculturalization. Problems can best be discussed with a professional genealogist who has had extensive experience with the records.

Records involving the legal transfer of property upon the death of its owner exist in practically every country. These records of probate and administration of estates often give relationships and other important genealogical data.

The three most common types of probate records in Denmark, and those with which this paper is concerned, are:

- (a) Administrations of estates (*skifteprotokollerne*)¹
- (b) Guardianship supervisions (*overformynderi protokollerne*)
- (c) Wills (*testamenter*)

Before discussing these records and what they contain, however, we shall first look briefly at the jurisdictions within which these records have been created. This information is critical to the genealogist who has need to locate and use the records.

¹At various times these administrations have been referred to as *wills intestate* but that expression is actually a contradiction of terms since *intestate* indicates the non-existence of a valid will at the time of death. The nature of these administrations is discussed later in this paper.

PROBATE JURISDICTIONS

The probate jurisdictions of Denmark can be divided into three main areas:

- (a) Copenhagen City (*København*)
- (b) Other cities (*købstæderne*)
- (c) Rural areas (*paa landet*)

In Copenhagen there are three important time periods which we must consider, and in the rural areas we must consider both the time periods and the nature of the jurisdictional control under which our ancestors lived.

COPENHAGEN CITY

A. Before 1771:

CHART I

PROBATE COURT	PERSONS WITHIN THE JURISDICTION	PERIOD COVERED	CALENDAR (INDEX) AVAILABLE	RECORDS AVAILABILITY
<i>Byretten</i> or <i>Magistratens Skiftekommission</i> (city court)	The common citizens of the city	1709, 1711-1712, 1717-1772	Sjælland Provincial Archives, Copenhagen; on (first) microfilm	Sjælland Provincial Archives, Copenhagen; on film (GS)
<i>Borgretten</i> (civil court)	Lower civil officials and employees	1682-1771	On (first) microfilm	Sjælland Provincial Archives, Copenhagen; on film (GS)
<i>Generalauditøren</i> (military court) (auditor-general)	Commissioned officers of the army	1719-1863	National Archives (not filmed)	National Archives, Copenhagen; on film (GS)
<i>Regimentsauditørerne</i> (military court) (regiment-auditors)	Enlisted men in the army	Information not available	Information not available	Hærens Arkiv, Copenhagen;
<i>Hofretten</i> (royal court)	Higher civil officials	1679-1771	Sjælland Provincial Archives, Copenhagen; on (first) microfilm	Sjælland Provincial Archives, Copenhagen; on film (GS)

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<i>Søetatens General-Auditor</i> (military court) (navy's general-auditor)	Naval officers with rank of captain or higher	1683-1647, 1659-1771	National Archives	National Archives, Copenhagen;
<i>Underadmiralitetstrettens Præsident (Auditoren)</i> (military court) (under-admiralty)	Naval noncommis- sioned officers and officers with rank lower than captain	1670-1779		National Archives, Copenhagen; on film (GS)
<i>Universitetets (Konsistoriums) Skiftejurisdiktion</i> (University court)	University faculty, students, and person- nel; their widows and children	-----	-----	Almost all records have been lost; few available at Archives of the Uni- versity of Copenhagen
<i>Den gejstlige Skiftejurisdiktion</i> (Ecclesiastical court)	The clergy, parish clerks, and personnel working with the clergy (including churches at the royal palaces in Hillerød and Fredensborg)	1724-1777		Sjælland Provincial Archives, Copenhagen
<i>Vajsenhusets Skiftejurisdiktion</i> (The orphan-house court)	Personnel at the orphan-house	-----	-----	All records lost
<i>Frederiks Hospitals Skiftejurisdiktion</i> (Frederik's Hospital probate jurisdiction)	Personnel at the hospital	-----	-----	All records lost
<i>Det Asiatiske og det Vestindisk- Guineiske Kompagnis Skifte- jurisdiktion etc.</i> (The Asiatic and the West India- Guinea Company's probate jurisdiction) etc.	Employees of the company in Copen- hagen City and the colonies (check, also, the city court)	1712-1890		National Archives, Copenhagen
<i>Jødernes Skiftejurisdiktion</i> (Jewish probate jurisdiction)	Members of the Jewish faith	1760-1814 (In Hebrew prior to 1805)		Sjælland Provincial Archives, Copenhagen

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C. *Rytterdistrikter* — The probate jurisdictions of the cavalry districts.

Beginning about 1670 the new national cavalry regiments were assigned a number of royal land estates in order to provide necessary financial support. By 1695 there were ten cavalry land estate districts — three in Sjælland, two in Fyn, and five in Jylland. Between 1718 and 1720 the number of these cavalry districts was increased to twelve. Each district was named for the county or province in which it was established. From about 1718 the cavalry districts were as follow:

<i>Sjælland:</i>	Frederiksborg	<i>Lolland, Falster and Møen:</i>	Lolland
	Kronborg		Falster
	København (Copenhagen)	<i>Fyn:</i>	Odense or Fyn
	Vordingborg	<i>Jylland:</i>	Koldinghus
	Ringsted or Tryggevalde		Skanderborg
	Antvorskov		Dronningborg

Between 1760 and 1770 many of the cavalry districts were discontinued and their land estates sold.

D. *Herrederne* — The probate jurisdictions of the districts.

These probate records are mostly for the period 1793 to 1919. They took the place of many of the other rural jurisdictions after the latter were abolished or diminished. In 1919 responsibility for the probate and administration of estates was given to the *underrets dommer* (local judge).

Prior to 5 December 1806 the clergy and those who worked with the clergy and with the schools (plus their wives and families) were under the jurisdiction of special district probate courts called the *Herreds Prousti* (deanery).

There were also subdivisions of probate jurisdictions in the rural areas identified as *birker*. These had basically the same function as the *herreder* and should be considered when there are no probate records for a *herred* jurisdiction.

NATURE AND CONTENT OF PROBATE RECORDS

ADMINISTRATIONS OF ESTATES (*Skifteprotokollerne*)

The Danish Law of King Christian V (*Kong Christian V's Danske Lov*) of 1683 formed the basis for the present Danish probate system. That law provided, among other things, that:

1. Immediately following the death of a person who was survived either by minor children, absent heirs, or no heirs at all, notification of the death was to be given to the authorities.
2. The probate document was to list the debts and assets of the estate and the settlement among the heirs (i.e., the final distribution). This document was to be signed by the heirs (or their guardians) and by the court officials.

OTHER CITIES

Except in Copenhagen, probate jurisdiction of the cities was under the direction of city officials from about 1400 until 1919 when it was made the responsibility of the *underrets dommer* (local judge). Since there is usually only one probate jurisdiction for residents of each city, there is seldom any problem in locating the desired records, but we will discuss that later. Prior to about 1816 the clergy and persons working with the clergy and with the schools (plus their wives and families) had special probate courts in many of the cities under the jurisdiction of the district dean; a handful of cities had some special probate jurisdictions.²

RURAL AREAS

There are four main types of probate jurisdictions in rural areas, depending on the time period and the nature of the jurisdictional control:

A. *Godser* — The probate jurisdictions of the private land estates or manors.

Because of the old system of making feudal land grants only to a favored few, the jurisdiction for probate and administration of estates of the vast majority of the rural populace of Denmark was, for many years, the responsibility of the owners of the manors from whom the tenant farmers leased their lands. Further, the law of 1733 (*Stavnsbaandet*) gave these feudal land owners almost absolute control over their lessees. Within a few years after that law was abolished in 1788, many farmers were brought under the jurisdiction of the *herreder* (or districts) so far as probate and administration of their estates were concerned. Many of the feudal landlords, however, continued to exercise jurisdiction until late as 1817.

After 1817 only owners of the largest feudal estates retained their jurisdiction, and, with a few exceptions, these were discontinued by law on 21 April 1850.³

B. *Amt og Amtstue* — The probate jurisdictions of the counties.

All those persons who were not under the jurisdiction of the *Godser* (the land estates or manors) or the *Rytterdistrikter* (the cavalry districts) fell under the county jurisdiction. This included such people as the feudal landlords themselves, farm owners, etc. By royal decree of 4 September 1793, most of these probate jurisdictions were transferred to the *herreder* (districts).

²Those cities with special probate jurisdiction, and the names of those jurisdictions, were:

- (a) Horsens — the Russian princely court, from 1781
- (b) Helsingør — "Øresund" [the sound] customs office, 1693-1815;
- (c) Fredericia — Jewish, 1736-1814

³Those exceptional land owners who continued to exercise jurisdiction over their leaseholders after 1850 were the university in Copenhagen City and several hospitals, institutions, and cathedrals (such as Roskilde and Aarhu cathedrals) which owned land estates all over Denmark, apparently given to them to provide financial support.

3. The surviving spouse could not remarry before an administration of the deceased spouse's part of the estate had been completed.

4. The authorities responsible for supervising the administration of estates and other probate matters were:

- (a) In the cities: the mayor, city council, city clerks and the *byfoged* (the king's representative).
- (b) In rural areas: the county officials (*amtmand*), the lords of the manors (*godsejerne*), land estate owners, or the district officials (i. e., *herreds fogderne*).
- (c) For the clergy: the dean (*proust*).

The administration process was designed to ensure that those entitled to the property of the deceased (usually his children) actually received it; and further, if these heirs were minors, to protect the property and conserve it until they reached legal age. To accomplish these objectives a type of adversary legal proceeding was instituted. For example, if a man died leaving minor children, his widow could not remarry until an administration had been completed and the interests of the children were safeguarded. The law was concerned about what would happen to the property rightfully belonging to those children if the wife remarried. It was felt that it would be most unfair if the widow remarried and then died leaving the bulk of the property of her deceased husband to husband number two rather than to the children of that first marriage. To protect the interests of the children, the estate was divided giving the widow her portion and the children their portions, with a member of the deceased husband's family being appointed as guardian for the minors and conservator of their portions of the estate.

If the wife had died first, the same procedure would have been followed with the assets of her estate.⁴

In order that the validity of claims against the estate of the deceased could be properly determined, it was necessary to list all persons who had claims against the property. Consequently the records of an administration often contain much information about relatives of the deceased, not only the spouse and children, but also parents, brothers and sisters, and their issue. The following is a list of the types of information usually found in records of probate and administration:

1. The full name of the deceased.
2. The last place of residence or domicile of the deceased.
3. The heirs of the deceased and their places of residence at the time of the administration.
4. The ages of the deceased's children (heirs).
5. The husbands of married female heirs.
6. The guardians of minor children. These were frequently relatives of the deceased, in which case relationships were usually stated.
7. The guardian for the widow (when she was the survivor). This person was usually one of her relatives and the relationship frequently stated.
8. An inventory of the deceased's property with a list of creditors and debtors.

⁴It is interesting to note that just as many women died leaving estates as did men, and many administrations for women give even more genealogical details. The reason that women had property (quite different from the situation in Britain, America, and other Common-law countries) is because of the "community property" system used in the European, Roman/Civil-law countries. Under that system all property acquired by the husband and wife, or either, during marriage (unless acquired as separate property) belonged to the marital community as a kind of marital partnership. The husband was the manager of the community, but each owned half of the property. There were some differences in the operation of the system depending on the period of time involved and the country.

You will not always be able to find an administration for the estate of every ancestor, even when they were made in accordance with the law. Many of these records have been lost or destroyed, and sometimes widows (and widowers) with minor children were given permission by court officials to delay the administration of the deceased spouse's estate. Administration was still required, however, to have the estate administered before the children came of age³ or before the surviving spouse could remarry.

Generally speaking, these records of the administration of estates are the most common and the most important probate records in Denmark. They are the records which cover the great bulk of the population — perhaps 80 percent.

GUARDIAN SUPERVISION RECORDS (*Overformynderi protokollerne*)

The guardian supervision system of Denmark began in the cities with a law of 7 April 1619. The law stipulated that, in each city, two of the most prominent citizens should be public trustees to oversee the activities of guardians appointed for minor children. In the beginning supervision of the inheritances of these orphan children was not the responsibility of these overseers, but in later years this became their chief function. It is questionable if the supervision of the physical welfare of these children was ever carried out as intended, even though this function was given specific emphasis in laws of 1790 and 1827.

In rural areas responsibility for supervising minors' inheritances rested upon the local probate officials. These officials, however, were not given responsibility for supervising the physical welfare of the children. In April 1869 the guardian-supervision officials of Copenhagen City were given responsibility for the entire country.

The records of the supervision of guardians ordinarily contain the following types of information:

1. The name of the deceased person from whom the minors inherited.
2. The names of the minors (wards).
3. The relationship(s) of the minors to the deceased's estate.
5. The amount of the inheritance and accumulated interest.
6. Comment about what happened to the minor wards later in their lives, when the inheritance was paid to them, etc.
7. The names of the guardians and their relationships to the wards.

WILLS (*Testamenter*)

Wills in Denmark have much less importance than other probate records because only a very small percentage of the population left them, because they are difficult to locate, and because they were seldom indexed. Notwithstanding these problems, however, wills are a source which the genealogist should not overlook because they contain information just as valuable as do the records of estate administration.

The persons most likely to leave wills were those who desired their property to go to someone who would not receive it under the normal administration processes. Single persons, those who were married but had no children and who desired to leave everything to the surviving spouse, and those who had step children to whom they desired to leave property were the most likely persons to leave wills, but we stress again that wills were very rare.

³Sometimes these administrations took place on a private basis and there is no record.

A will does not usually contain all the information found in an administration. Ages, places of residence, relationships to others, etc., are much less likely to be stated. Ordinarily the will contains the following types of information:

1. The name of the testator (i.e., the person leaving the will).
2. The testator's residence at the time he drew the will.
3. The names of those who are the object of the testator's bounty (the devisees or *indsat arving*).
4. The relationships or other connections between the testators and the devisees.
5. The date the will was drawn and the date it was probated.
6. The names of subscribing witnesses.

LOCATING THE RECORDS

COPENHAGEN CITY

Many different types of documents have arisen as part of the administration process in Copenhagen City. Of special importance are the *forseglingsprotokollerne* (the official records of administration) in which the heirs are usually mentioned, and *dokumenter til ordinære boer* (miscellaneous documents pertaining to the dead). These records are filed separately, and special master indexes to them are available after 1798. The indexes are arranged by the names of the deceased and an index entry looks like this:

$$\frac{5}{323} \text{Jens Hansen 5—169}$$

The number 5 preceding the name refers to the social classification of the deceased, the books of which contain this administration (5. Artists, tradesmen, journeymen, apprentices, etc.), and 323 is the number of the file in the *dokumenter til ordinære boer*. The numbers following the name refer again to the social classification (5) under which the administration was recorded and the page number (169) in the *forseglingsprotokollerne* where the official records of the administration are recorded.

Both the records and the indexes are on microfilm at the Genealogical Society. They are cataloged under Copenhagen City (København, København, probate records).

The records of guardian supervision (*overformynderi protokollerne*) for the city of Copenhagen were kept in the same jurisdiction as were the administrations. They are also cataloged under Copenhagen City by the Genealogical Society and are available (with indexes) from 1668.

OTHER CITIES

The records of administrations from the cities are nearly all indexed, and the indexes are available at the Genealogical Society. Remember there were no separations by social class outside of Copenhagen, so in other cities all probates are indexed in the same volumes. The indexes are to volume and page. The system was the same in all cities except Copenhagen and the Genealogical Society has cataloged these records according to the names of the cities, under each county.

Some cities have records of guardian supervision (*overformynderi protokollerne*) beginning in the last half of the seventeenth century, but most begin somewhat later. These records were maintained

in the same jurisdictions as the other probate records. After 1869 all guardianship records are in the *underretter* (lower courts). These *underretter* function under the direction of the *overformynderie* (the administrative agency) in Copenhagen.

RURAL AREAS

A. *Godser* — the land estates or manors.

1. *Jylland*: To locate the administration for the estate of a deceased person in Jylland you must know the village or hamlet where he resided at the time of his death. If you know the parish, this information can usually be obtained from the death entry in the parish register. Once the place of residence is ascertained you can determine the estate(s) which had jurisdiction over the administration by referring to the book, *Jens Sørensen og Maren Nielsdatter* by O.M. Hoffman-Bang.⁶ The book has been microfilmed by the Genealogical Society (microfilm number 160,126) and lists every district (*herred*) in northern Jylland (*Nørre Jylland*), except those in the counties of Haderslev, Tønder, and Aabenraa-Sønderborg. Under each district the book lists the land estates or manors which had any probate jurisdiction within the district; then, under each land estate, the names of all parishes, villages, and hamlets over which it had probate jurisdiction are listed. It is often necessary to check the indexes to the administrations in several of these land estates before the specific record you seek can be found.

On the same microfilm (number 160,126) is a handwritten book⁷ containing an alphabetical list of all the parishes in the same area. This list tells the land district(s) in which each parish is situated and gives the page number in Hofman-Bang's book where the district is described. An entry looks something like this:

<u>Dalbyneder.</u>	Demstrup 45	Overgaard 45	Løvenholm 48
	Sodringholm 45		

It is important to use this second book before you use the Hofman-Bang book because it is a guide to the use of Hofman-Bang. Once you have gone to this handwritten book and have determined the name of the land estate and the page on which it is listed in Hofman-Bang, it is an easy matter to go to that book and get the information you need. Hofman-Bang lists all places within each land estate and tells the time period covered by the records. You will note from our sample entry that the administrations of persons from a particular parish might be in one of several different land estates, perhaps even in different districts.

Both of these guidebooks (Hofman-Bang and Jørgensen), together with the guidebook for Fyn, Langeland, Taasinge, and Ærø discussed under No. 3 below have been reprinted in J. Grant Stevenson's *Danish Genealogical Research*, vol. 3 (Provo, Utah: the author, 1965, call number: ref 929.1489, S48d, vol. 3).

2. *Sjælland (and Møen)*: There is an excellent guide book to assist you in determining which land estates had jurisdiction over which parishes. The book is Alex Nørli's *Skifteprotokoller i Landsarkivet for Sjælland m.m.* (Copenhagen: Ege Forlag, 1948, GS call number: 948.91, S2n). The book has two sections — the first being a list of land estates and the second being an alphabetical index/list of parishes, villages, and hamlets. You should use the second section first to look up the name of the place where your ancestor resided at his death, then use the information found there to locate the proper land estate in the first section.

⁶O.M. Hofman-Bang, *Jens Sørensen og Maren Nielsdatter* (Viborg: Aug. D. Ekstrands Bogtrykkeri, 1927).

⁷John Jørgensen, *Sogneregister til Hofman-Bang's Bog* (no date or place of publication).

We should note here that in some parishes of Sjælland the county and the cavalry districts were the only probate jurisdictions for many years.

3. *Fyn, Langeland, Taasinge, and Ærø*: There is a handwritten guide book for these islands available on microfilm at the Genealogical Society* (GS microfilm number: 050,125) containing the following information:

First section: An alphabetical list of land estates (giving the time periods which the records cover).

Second section: An alphabetical list/index of towns, hamlets, and parishes telling in which land estate each place is located and referring to the first section.

Note that there is a table of the abbreviations used in this book located between the two sections.

4. *Bornholm*: Only a few land estates, as we know them in the other areas of Denmark, existed on this island. For the vast majority of the people we must look to other jurisdictions for the records. The probate jurisdiction was under the country until 1761, after which the records will be found in the *herreder*.

6. *Sønderjylland*: There is no guidebook available, but the few land estates and the years which the records cover are as follow:

Haderslev County:

Gram, *Gammel* and *Ny* (old and new) (1719-1779)

Nybøl (1761-1781)

Slotsgrundens Herredsfogderi (1812, 1815, 1820)

Aabenraa-Sønderborg County:

Ballegaard (1737-1837)

Ballegaard and Bøgeskov (1850)

Blansgaard (1792-1815)

Bøgeskov (1784-1867)

Graasten (1640-1852)

Ladegaard (1779-1848)

Reventlov (1788-1825, 1844-1853)

Skovbølgård (Felsted Parish) (1829-1862)

Søgaard and Æretoft (1734-1857)

Rumohrsgaard and Gammelgaard, Als District (1747-1865)

Varnæs (1847)

Tønder County:

Frederikskov (Højer District) (1698-1736, 1765-1852)

Trojborg (1698-1706, 1743-1746, 1748-1750, 1764-1775, 1816-1860)

6. *Lolland-Falster*: A guidebook listing all probate records available for these islands has been prepared by the Research Department of the Genealogical Society. It is entitled *Index to Probate Records of Maribo County* (GS call number: Reg., 948.921, S2p). Under each parish the probate courts having jurisdiction in the area are listed.

**Stedregister til Skifteprotokoller* (no date or place of publication). Note that this book, together with the books described under No. 1, were reprinted in Stevenson's *Danish Genealogical Research*, vol. 3.

The Genealogical Society has cataloged the probate records of the Danish *godser* under the names of the estates.

B. *Amter og Amtstuer* — the counties:

Before 1793 the counties of Denmark were based primarily on the large land estates and were different than they are today. Because of changes in county names and boundaries, and because of the tendency of some of the old counties to continue jurisdiction even after 1793, the county probate records are often difficult to locate. In the Genealogical Society library catalog you should look for the name of the old county under the name of that modern county created to cover most of the same geographical area. Thus you should be aware that county probate records for some of the areas now in one modern county are cataloged under another modern county. An example of this is the ancient county of Aalborghus. Parts of what once comprised that county are now in both Hjørring and Thisted counties, as well as in Aalborg County; but all the old Aalborghus County probate records are cataloged under Aalborg.

A list of parishes of Denmark before 1890 with the names of both the old and the new counties is found in Frank Smith and Finn A. Thomsen's *Genealogical Guidebook & Atlas of Denmark* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), pp. 20-52. The same list also gives other data of value to the genealogist such as the name of the *herred* (district) in which each parish is located. This is important since most rural probate records between 1793 and 1919 were kept within this jurisdiction.

C. *Rytterdistrikter* — the cavalry districts.

In the catalog of the Genealogical Society, the *rytterdistrikter* probate records are identified by the name of the county in which each district is located. You should note that these records may also contain some administrations from the county jurisdiction. A general (alphabetical) index to all *rytterdistrikter* probate records (except those for Copenhagen and Lolland-Falster) has been prepared by the Genealogical Society. It is found on microfilm as follows:

A—J	Film number 537,265
K—R	Film number 537,266
S—Z	Film number 537,267

D. *Herreder* — the districts.

Locating the *herreder* records of probate and administration is very important because between 1793 and 1919 most estates were administered under this jurisdiction. (Many, however, do not begin that early and earlier jurisdictions should be consulted). In the catalog at the Genealogical Society these records are found by looking in the catalog under the name of the county in which the particular *herred* (district) is located. You will find them cataloged as follows:

Country	County	District	Type of record
Denmark,	Odense,	Hindsgavl Herred,	Probate records

To determine the name of the *herred* in which a particular parish (*Sogn*) is located use Smith and Thomsen's *Genealogical Guidebook & Atlas of Denmark*, mentioned earlier.

The vast majority of the probate records in the *herreder* are indexed at the end of each book, but the indexes seem to follow no universal pattern in their form. Most are indexed according to given names, while only a few are indexed according to patronymics and surnames.

WILLS (*Testamenter*)

Not only are wills rare, but they are often quite difficult to locate. The most likely place to find them is among the notarial records (*Notarial protokollerne*), mingled with the other records of the notaries. These records are seldom indexed and are very time-consuming to use. Some wills are also found among records pertaining to court procedures, passports, pension funds, etc.

USING THE RECORDS

Once you have learned how to find the records you want, you must learn how to derive full benefit from them. Sometimes the records of probate and administration are the only source of information available and thus offer the only opportunity for extending an ancestral line. When other sources are available, the probate records frequently provide additional information not found in the other sources. The genealogist who makes a practice of checking for probate records for every family on his pedigree will soon come to appreciate the full value of these records.

The main value of probate and administration records lies in the details which they contain on family relationships, places, and residences. Due to the patronymic naming system and the fact that the total number of surnames used in Denmark prior to 1900 was relatively small, these records are perhaps even more valuable than they are in many other countries since there is often more need to specifically identify persons in ways that other records may not provide. Frequently the patronymic naming system compounds the problem of deciding which one of two or three persons with the same name was the ancestor being sought. In these circumstances the probate record is often the only source that can provide the evidence needed to solve the problem. And it is significant that they cover such a large segment of the populace—both male and female.

Note the examples that follow:

EXAMPLE 1:

Søren Hansen (blacksmith) and Anne Jensdatter, his wife, have been located in the 1845 census of the city of Thisted. Anne Jensdatter is listed in this census as being thirty-eight years of age, and her place of birth is stated as Østerild parish in Thisted County. The parish registers of Østerild show the following christenings:

Anne Jensdatter, born 15 March 1807, daughter of Jens Larsen
and Mette Pedersdatter.

Anne Jensdatter, born 8 July 1808, daughter of Jens Jensen
and Maren Sørensdatter.

Since the age stated in the census (38—making her born in 1807) could easily be in error and either entry could be the one we seek, further research is required.

The father of Anne Jensdatter, born 1808 (Jens Jensen), died at Østerild in 1836. His administration was found and shows, among other things, "*a daughter, Anne, who is married to Søren Hansen, blacksmith in Thisted.*" The proper identification was thus established and the ancestral line extended.

EXAMPLE 2:

Probate records also provide clues which lead to the determination of a correct birthplace. If a person died before 1845 (the year of the first census to list birthplaces) it is often necessary to use

probate records to help make that determination. Consider the following case and the importance of clues found in the probate record:

Svend Pedersen and Karen Thomasdatter lived in the parish of Græse, Frederiksborg County. The parish registers list six children born between 1781 and 1798, but the marriage of Svend and Karen is not recorded in this parish nor in any adjacent parish. Svend Pedersen died in Græse in 1799 (age 50), and his administration contained the following information:

The guardian for the widow was her brother Peder Thomasen, a farmer in the parish of Lynge. The children's guardian was their father's brother Jørgen Pedersen, a farmer in Torup.

Having obtained this information, the parish registers of Lynge were searched. The marriage of Svend Pedersen and Karen Thomasdatter was found recorded there in 1780.

The parish registers of Græse, Lynge, and Torup were all searched for the christening (birth) of Svend Pedersen, but the search was unsuccessful. The military levying rolls⁹ of Græse, which are available from about 1791, do not list Svend Pedersen since he was too old to be listed when the rolls began, but searches in the parish registers of Torup revealed the marriage of Jørgen Pedersen (Svend's brother) to Anne Kirstine Jacobsdatter in 1795. The 1801 census of Torup show Jørgen Pedersen as thirty-six years old, and the military levying rolls of 1797 for Torup lists a Jørgen Pedersen, aged thirty-two, born in Nøddebo, the son of Peder Sørensen. On the basis of this information a search of the parish registers of Nøddebo was made, producing the birth records of both Svend and Jørgen Pedersen.

EXAMPLE 3:

Probate records are extremely valuable when parish registers are lost or destroyed, even though it may be necessary to check the administrations of all persons within a certain geographical area who have the same given name. Consider:

The marriage record of Christen Marcussen and Kirsten Clausdatter was recorded in the registers of Sejerslev Parish in 1768. It showed they were both from that parish. Also listed in the registers of that parish were the christenings of their seven children, 1770-1795. The 1787 census gave the age of Christen Marcussen as forty-seven and that of Kirsten Clausdatter as thirty-eight. The 1801 census gave their ages as sixty-one and fifty-two, respectively.

According to this information, Christen should have been born about 1740 and Kirsten about 1749. Both died at advanced ages, and their administrations gave no information about any relatives besides their children.

The parish registers of Sejerslev begin in 1760 so they cannot be checked for these births; however, since the marriage entry at Sejerslev mentioned that both came from that parish, there is a good possibility they were also born there, and other facts known about them should be considered. Facts such as:

1. The witnesses at the marriage were Jens Marcussen and Søren Clausen, both from Sejerslev.
2. The names of their children were: Claus, Karen, Ingeborg, Marcus, Jens, Peder, and Anne Marie.
3. Among the witnesses to the christenings of these children were Jens Marcussen, Søren Clausen, Anne Clausdatter, and Johanne Marcusdatter. All of these persons, according to the Christening records, lived in Sejerslev.

⁹For further discussions of military levying rolls and their application to Danish genealogical research, see the research paper, *Military Levying Rolls of Denmark*, Series D, No. 8.

The 1787 census of Sejerslev showed a Jens Marcussen, aged fifty-one years, with his wife and two children. There was also an Anne Clausdatter, aged thirty-six, with her husband Laurs Olsen and five children. A search of the parish registers of Sejerslev for the christenings of the children of these two couples showed that Christen Marcussen and his wife Kirsten Clausdatter appeared as witnesses for some of the children in both families.

With this foundation, the probate records were again considered. A search was made of the indexes (calendars) for all persons with the given names of Marcus and Claus for the fathers of Christen Marcussen and Kirsten Clausdatter. (Note again that most probate records are indexed by given names.) Among the many persons found with these names was a Claus Sørensen of Sejerslev whose estate was administered in 1781. In that record, mention was made of a daughter Kirsten, married to a farmer named Christen Marcussen in Sejerslev. Among the man's other children were a Søren Clausen and an Anne Clausdatter, married to Laurs Olsen in Sejerslev. Thus through the use of probate records, the ancestral connection was made.

EXAMPLE 4:

Since approximately 95 percent of the Danish administrations are indexed, the indexes can often be used as a shortcut to finding where a person was born and the names of his relatives. This shortcut procedure works especially well in areas like Frederiksborg County where probate jurisdiction for most parishes is under *Frederiksborg Amtstue* (Frederiksborg County Office) or *Kronborg Amtstue* (Kronborg County Office). Let us illustrate:

Christian Nielsen and Karen Christophersdatter of Hammersholt, the parish of Herlev, Frederiksborg County, were married at Herlev in 1736. They had six children born there, namely:

Inger	born 1737	Berthe	born 1746
Berte	born 1741	Margrethe	born 1750
Kirsten	born 1742	Niels	born 1752

Witnesses at the christenings of some of these children were a Jens Christophersen and a Jørgen Christophersen, both of Hammersholt. The 1787 census gave the age of Karen Christophersdatter as seventy-nine, indicating she was born about 1708. Her husband, Christian Nielsen, died in 1803, aged ninety years, and she died on 2 February 1794, aged eighty-six years. (i.e. born about 1708) No administration was found for either of them.

The general index of *Frederiksborg Amtstue* probate records was searched for the name Christopher (the given name of Karen Christophersdatter's father), and, among others, the administration of one Christopher Jensen from Kollerød was found in the parish of Lyngby:

5 May 1724, probate of Christopher Jensen, farmer of Kollerød. Division of property between the widow Inger Jørgensdatter and their children:

- (1) Jens Age 22
- (2) Jørgen Age 8
- (3) Kirsten Age 17
- (4) Karen Age 14
- (5) Karen Age 6

An analysis of this record indicates that child number four, Karen, is probably the same Karen Christophersdatter who married Christian Nielsen in 1736. The following reasoning is used to make that determination:

1. The age of this Karen (by which we calculate her year of birth as 1710) would make her age only two years off the age calculated for our other Karen Christophersdatter on the basis of the 1787 census and her death entry.

2. This Karen has brothers named Jens and Jørgen, and Jens Christophersen and Jørgen Christopherson were witnesses at the christenings of the children of Karen Christophersdatter and Christian Nielsen.

3. The mother's (the widow of Christopher Jensen) name was Inger and the name of the first daughter of Christian Nielsen and Karen Christophersdatter was also named Inger.

Additional evidence to substantiate this conclusion was found later, but without this administration it would have been very difficult and time-consuming to solve the problem.

Another observation might also be made from the record of the administration of Christopher Jensen's estate. Note that he had two living daughters named Karen. This happened occasionally in Denmark, so you should never assume automatically that the first child died when a later child was given the same name.

CONCLUSION

FILLING PARISH REGISTER GAPS

For several years the Genealogical Society has had a project designed to facilitate research in areas of Denmark where there are no early parish registers. There are many Danish parishes the records of which do not begin until around 1785 to 1815. The project workers have extracted the genealogical and family relationship data from the *skifteprotokoller* of the land estates prior to the start of the registers, and then typed them, indexed them, and placed them in Registers, according to county, for easy reference. All administrations found within a particular land estate probate jurisdiction were not extracted, but only those pertaining to parishes without early parish registers. The *Danish Genealogical Helper*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1968), pp. 26-30 (Ref., 929.1489, D228d), lists those probate jurisdictions which had been extracted to that time. You should also check the Register for the county of your interest to determine whether a particular probate jurisdiction has been covered by the project. These Registers are available to the public at the Genealogical Society (cataloged according to county) where they are called *Registers of Estate Probates*. They are indexed according to patronymics and surnames and are indexes to deceased persons only, not to surviving heirs or others named in the records.

CORRELATION WITH OTHER SOURCES

In genealogical research you cannot limit yourself to one particular type of record; you must use whatever records are necessary to solve your problem. The necessity of obtaining a working knowledge of all available sources is clear, but it is equally important that you learn to correlate the use of the various records with each other. Information found in one record when viewed in connection with evidence found in another source may provide the proof you seek.

You should especially note here, in connection with the subject discussed in this paper, that guardianship supervision records (*overformynderi protokollerne*) are a valuable supplement to administrations (*skifteprotokollerne*). In some cases where the administrations have been lost or destroyed the guardianship supervision records provide the same information. So, not only must we correlate the various existing records, we must also learn how to proceed when important records — records we would ordinarily rely upon—do not exist.