

Questions to guide my research of the probate record

Probate records are an important primary source used by historians to identify the rituals and routines of property owners. Inventories of possessions recorded after a death can reveal important information about family life and social activities. This type of information gives a historian more information about the lives of women, children, and servants or slaves. The probate record of Sarah Green of York County, Virginia provides clues about the life of one colonial family. By studying her probate record, and using other records, such as her will (a legal paper in which a person discusses how to distribute their possessions after death) historians can make assumptions about life in colonial America

- What things are listed first? Are they more important?
- What things are most expensive? Would they be the most expensive in a modern household?
- What kind of work do you think was done in the house? How do you know?
- Do you know where the items are made? Are they homemade or bought? Would they be made in America or imported?
- How might guests be entertained?
- What types of artwork did they have? What does this tell you about them?
- Did they read? Do we know what interested them?
- Why are the names of people listed on the inventory? What do you suppose their responsibilities were?
- What is missing that you expected to be in a list of household items from this time period? What do you think happened to them?