

*A Goodly Heritage. Earliest Wills on an American Frontier.*

By Ella Chalfant. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1955, pp. xiii, 239. Illustrations, appendices, and index. \$3.00.)

This volume will be of interest to the historian as well as to the genealogist for through these wills the social background of the frontier comes to life. The wills represent a selection from the Register of Wills Office in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, with Pittsburgh as the county seat; the earliest will presented was probated in 1789, the most recent in 1884; the majority are from the early period. The arrangement is according to subject matter or type of will. Examples of intestate proceedings are also given with itemized inventories and valuation of property of persons who died without making a will. There are wills made by men of affluence and some made by persons of little or no wealth, e.g., Jane Watson left her "spectackles" and "staff" to her brothers, and to her daughter, "a quarter of a dollar, in the hope that she will think of Heaven, and amend her ways before it is too late" (pp. 42-43).

The wills illustrate such topics as slavery and the indenture system (slaves were handed down along with pots and pans and cows); the legal status of women (wives could not dispose of property without the consent of their husbands); the currency in use; dress; Indian trade; and the tools and equipment of the different professions. The largest portion of an estate went to the oldest son because he was to support the mother and care for the younger children. Opportunities offered on the frontier for gathering material wealth are vividly portrayed, also the risks involved. Back of the cold and formal phrasing of these legal documents one glimpses the character of these pioneer men and women, their hopes and their fears, their successes and their failures.

The author groups the wills and weaves them together in a manner that makes the volume very readable. There is a complete index and in addition there is an index of the names in the first three will books of Allegheny County.

*Indiana Historical Bureau*

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