

Questions for Analyzing the Will of Joseph Pratt I 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 many children did he have?
4. What were the names of his children?
5. What was his wife's name?
6. What did he leave to his wife? Why do you think he left these items?
7. What did Joseph Pratt grow on his land?
8. What animals did he keep?
9. Who were his friends and neighbors?
10. What do you think his profession or trade was? (Hint: Joseph may have had more than one occupation.)
11. 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: The money Joseph Pratt left to his wife is specified as “lawfull money of Pennsylvania.” Why does Joseph Pratt say it this way?

Bonus Question: Joseph Pratt specifically mentions leaving his wife “all my pewter marked MI which I had with her.” In colonial times, the capital letter I and the capital letter J looked the same. Joseph Pratt's wife's maiden name was Mary Jones, and the way he phrases his bequest means that it was property she brought with her into the marriage. So if she brought it with her, why is Joseph now giving it back to her?

Bonus Question: Joseph Pratt mentions giving his Son in Law Amos Davis “my Dutch Servant Boy (Jacob Trustle)” and orders that he serve Amos for the remainder of his indented time. What does this mean? What is the difference between Cuffy, Peggy and Jacob? How are Cuffy, Peggy and Jacob similar?