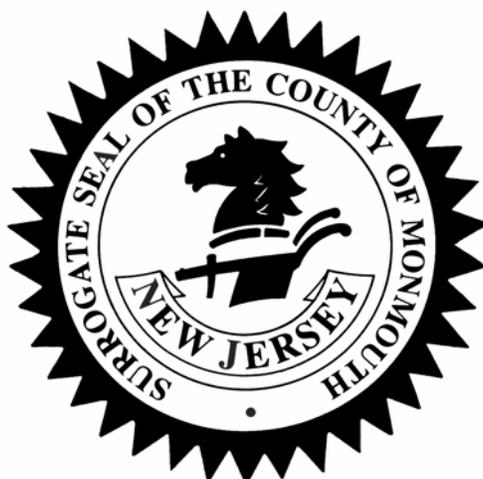


MONMOUTH COUNTY
SURROGATE'S OFFICE



2013

Annual Report

MONMOUTH COUNTY SURROGATE'S OFFICE

2013 Annual Report

Probate Section

Estate and Probate Matters - During 2013, this office processed the following:

Wills	2,364
Administrations (no will)	533
Administrations Ad Prosequendum	46
Affidavits of Surviving Spouse or Next of Kin (for small estates)	692
Caveats	53
Testamentary Trusteeships	158
Guardianships of Minors	133
Guardianships of Incapacitated Persons	156

The number of **estates** handled was **up slightly** over last year, with the greatest increase in the Affidavits of Surviving Spouse or Next of Kin involving small estates.

Guardianships of minors rose by 22 percent, while **guardianships of incapacitated persons declined slightly** from the year before.

In addition, **3,490 searches, miscellaneous filings, and requests for updated certificates and certified and exemplified copies of documents** were handled.

Satellite Offices – In February, 2013, we **added a fourth satellite location at the County Connection in Neptune**. Our four satellite locations in the public libraries in **Middletown, Ocean, and Wall Townships** and in the **County Connection** continue to offer many of our services to county residents close to where they live. We served **887 families** at these locations, which represents **20% of our total visits**, the remainder being at our Freehold office. We served **283 families** at the **Middletown Township** satellite, **305 families** in **Wall Township**, **157** in **Ocean Township**, and **132** at the **County Connection**. These totals don't include individuals who used the locations to drop off documents or to inquire about our procedures.

Because there is no charge to us for the use of these public facilities, and because we use existing personnel to staff each location once a week, we are able to provide improved access to our services at no additional cost to taxpayers.

Superior Court Section

Probate Court – In our role as deputy clerk for the NJ Superior Court, Chancery Division, Probate Part, our busy Court Section handled the filing and processing of **427 new probate cases, 203 motions, and 9 miscellaneous filings**, up 3.7 percent over the year before. These cases include: challenges to wills and to the appointments and duties of executors and administrators; appointments of conservators; applications to have persons declared incapacitated and to have guardians appointed to handle their affairs; and actions to compel accountings in estate and guardianship matters.

During 2013, **61 formal accountings in both guardianship and estate matters** were filed in Superior Court and audited by the Surrogate's Office. A total of 315 **inventories and accountings** were ordered by the court in 2013, a 21% **increase** over the prior year. In addition, 230 **Annual Well Being Reports** were filed by Guardians and reviewed by this office.

Guardianships of Incapacitated Persons - The aging of our population, along with increased longevity, has continued to generate a sizable number of applications for this type of guardianship. **156 filings were processed by this office in 2013** for declarations of incapacitation and appointments of guardians in the Superior Court. The total includes both incapacitated (primarily elderly) and developmentally disabled adults. Given projected demographic trends, the numbers for incapacitated elderly persons are likely to continue to increase. There are currently about **1,600 active guardianships** under the supervision of the court in Monmouth County.

Improved Follow-Up System - Because of the growing numbers of guardianships and the reporting requirements imposed on guardians by the Superior Court, we have instituted an **improved follow-up system for guardianship inventories, accountings and annual well-being reports** to better track the handling of the assets and care of incapacitated persons.

Pro-Se Packets - We continue to distribute copies of the **Pro Se Packet for Guardianship Applications** developed by this office to assist those applicants who wish to proceed without an attorney. The packet includes background information on the statutes and court rules governing such matters and sample court pleadings. The packet is also available through the Monmouth County Court House Law Library.

Adoptions - In the last court year, which extends from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013, our office handled the **adoption of 108 children**, of which 32 were adopted through the

NJ Department of Children and Families, Division of Child Protection and Permanency. There were also **11 adoptions of adults**.

Adoption Day - We worked cooperatively with the Family Division of Superior Court and various other agencies on preparations for the very successful **Adoption Day** event in November, at which **20 children were adopted**.

Adoption Records Scanning - Our Adoptions Clerk continues to scan all adoption case file documents at her desk as soon as an adoption is concluded. The digital images can then be transferred easily onto microfilm by our Monmouth County Archives staff for permanent retention, as required by the courts and the Division of Archives and Records Management. This procedure saves untold hours for the Archives staff, who previously had to microfilm accumulated records from hard copy files.

Statewide Adoption Computer System - Enhancements have continued to be made by the NJ Administrative Office of the Courts to their statewide computer system for adoptions, and training in these changes was provided to our staff.

Surrogates Intermingled Trust Fund – Our Minors Clerk oversaw the administration of **nearly 600 bank accounts** of minors and incapacitated persons totaling **\$23,721,742**. This money is deposited with the Surrogate’s Office as a result of bequests to minors or incapacitated persons or monies awarded through judgments or settlements of lawsuits.

There were **133 guardianships of minors** added during 2013, a 22 percent increase. Our office handled **126 orders for final withdrawal of funds** by persons turning 18 and **98 petitions** to Superior Court for partial use of funds from minors’ accounts.

Records Section

Electronic Scanning - The staff in our Records Section performed the **electronic scanning of thousands of pages of documents** related to all of the above matters as part of the mandated permanent retention of these court records. They also **worked with title searchers and genealogists** who visit our office to review various probate records on our computers and obtain copies. These records date back to the late 1700’s.

Microfilming Old Records - We continue to work cooperatively with the staff of the **Monmouth County Archives** to **microfilm various records** for permanent retention, as required by the NJ Supreme Court and NJ Division of Archives and Records Management.

Administration

Finance – Our **annual audit** was successful, with no recommendations for improvements offered by the auditors. Our revenue rose by 7.6 percent over the prior year.

Total fees brought in by Surrogate’s Office during 2013: \$996,146.

Personnel –The number of employees in the Surrogate’s Office during the year has dropped by one to 19 as a result of a position not being filled after a retirement. The Deputy Surrogate and I designed and presented several seminars for our probate staff.

Professional Activities – I have continued to serve as a member of the **New Jersey Supreme Court’s Judiciary-Surrogate Liaison Committee, and their Advisory Committee on Public Access to Court Records**. I continue to serve as a member of the Executive Board of the **Constitutional Officers Association of New Jersey (COANJ)**, an organization which includes County Clerks and Registers, Sheriffs and Surrogates from the state’s twenty-one counties. I am also a member of the National Conference of Probate Judges.

I participated in presentations sponsored by the **Monmouth County Bar Association’s Probate and Elder Law Committees**, and the **Elder Law Committee of the Monmouth/Ocean Chapter, NJ Society of Certified Public Accountants**.

Speaking Engagements - I spoke to many groups all over the county regarding wills and estates. These included senior clubs and communities, retiree groups, fraternal and business organizations, financial planners, bankers, attorneys, and at the Monmouth County Connection. My Deputy Surrogate and I attended various **senior health fairs** to distribute information and respond to questions.

Publications – We continue to distribute copies of our two publications, “**A Citizen’s Guide to Wills, Trusts and Estates**” and “**A Personal Record.**” Printing of these booklets is done by our in-house county print shop, at a substantial saving over having them printed commercially. We also distribute copies of a one-page checklist of “**Probate Do’s and Don’ts**”.

Submitted by

Rosemarie D. Peters, Esq.
Monmouth County Surrogate

March, 2014

