

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

- § 1:1 In general
- § 1:2 Nature of a will contest
- § 1:3 Organization of the book: Substantive law of will contests
- § 1:4 Organization of the book: Practical handbook on will Contests
- § 1:5 Organization of the book: Appendices
- § 1:6 Conclusion

CHAPTER 2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- § 2:1 Ancient and medieval law of wills
- § 2:2 English testamentary doctrine
- § 2:3 American developments in the law of wills
- § 2:4 Historical development of the law of capacity and undue influence
- § 2:5 The common law and the power to devise property
- § 2:6 The common law development of testamentary capacity in England
- § 2:7 The insane delusion rule
- § 2:8 Common law doctrine of undue influence
- § 2:9 Early American cases on testamentary capacity
- § 2:10 Early American cases on undue influence
- § 2:11 Conclusion

CHAPTER 3. PARTIES

- § 3:1 In general
- § 3:2 Standing to bring will contest
- § 3:3 —Uniform Probate Code jurisdictions
- § 3:4 —Intestate successors to decedent
- § 3:5 —Devisees and legatees under prior wills
- § 3:6 —Testamentary trustees under prior wills
- § 3:7 —Surviving spouse
- § 3:8 —Contracts with decedent contrary to will
- § 3:9 —Creditors
- § 3:10 —The state
- § 3:11 —Assignees of heirs or beneficiaries
- § 3:12 —No-contest clause

- § 3:13 Standing to challenge inter vivos transactions
- § 3:14 Waiver of right to contest will and estoppel to contest will
- § 3:15 —Acts constituting acceptance of benefits under will
- § 3:16 —Acts not constituting acceptance of benefits under will
- § 3:17 Necessary parties to will contest
- § 3:18 —Beneficiaries under will attacked
- § 3:19 —Executor or administrator with will annexed
- § 3:20 —Persons not beneficiaries who are alleged to have fraudulently procured the will
- § 3:21 —Heirs
- § 3:22 Permissive parties to will contest
- § 3:23 —Beneficiaries under former revoked wills
- § 3:24 —Others
- § 3:25 Conclusion

CHAPTER 4. JURISDICTION

- § 4:1 In general
- § 4:2 Subject matter jurisdiction
- § 4:3 Will contests before probate
- § 4:4 Time for filing pre-probate objections
- § 4:5 New York practice
- § 4:6 Informal probate proceedings under the Uniform Probate Code
- § 4:7 Post-probate will contests
- § 4:8 Formal testacy proceedings under the Uniform Probate Code
- § 4:9 Jury trial jurisdiction
- § 4:10 Federal jurisdiction—The probate exception to diversity of citizenship jurisdiction
- § 4:11 Personal jurisdiction—In rem jurisdiction
- § 4:12 —Quasi in rem jurisdiction
- § 4:13 Choice of law rules in multistate will contests
- § 4:14 Joinder of parties and claims
- § 4:15 Conclusion

CHAPTER 5. LACK OF FORMALITIES

- § 5:1 In general
- § 5:2 Improper execution
- § 5:3 —Signature
- § 5:4 —Attestation
- § 5:5 —Failure to integrate into one document
- § 5:6 Failure to comply with the substantive law of wills

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- § 5:7 —Failure to devise a complete estate
- § 5:8 —Failure to comply with class gift rules
- § 5:9 —Noncompliance with technical rules
- § 5:10 —The rule against perpetuities
- § 5:11 — —Special application rules
- § 5:12 — —Modern attempts to revise the rule
- § 5:13 — —Consequences of invalidating a devise under the rule against perpetuities
- § 5:14 — —Class gifts and powers of appointment
- § 5:15 Revocation
- § 5:16 —Revocation by physical act
- § 5:17 —Revocation by operation of law
- § 5:18 —Dependent relative revocation
- § 5:19 Lost wills
- § 5:20 Conclusion

CHAPTER 6. TESTAMENTARY CAPACITY

- § 6:1 In general
- § 6:2 Knowledge of natural objects of bounty
- § 6:3 Knowledge of nature and extent of property
- § 6:4 Ability to form a rational plan for disposition of property
- § 6:5 Organically impaired testators—The testator with intellectual disability.
- § 6:6 Organically impaired testator—The testator with disability
- § 6:7 Organically impaired testators—The testator suffering from dementia
- § 6:8 Organically impaired decedents—Drug and alcohol abusers
- § 6:9 Functionally impaired testators—the testator suffering from mental disease
- § 6:10 The insane delusion rule
- § 6:11 —The crank cases
- § 6:12 The presumption of capacity
- § 6:13 Burden of proof of lack of capacity
- § 6:14 Conclusion

CHAPTER 7. UNDUE INFLUENCE

- § 7:1 In general
- § 7:2 Elements of undue influence
- § 7:3 —Condition of the testator
- § 7:4 —Existence of a confidential relationship
- § 7:5 —Procurement of the will

- § 7:6 —Change in testator’s post-death distribution plan
- § 7:7 —Change in testator’s post-death distribution was “unnatural”
- § 7:8 Presumptions regarding undue influence
- § 7:9 —Presumption of validity and freedom from undue influence
- § 7:10 —Presumptions of undue influence
- § 7:11 Burden of proof on ultimate issue of undue influence
- § 7:12 Burden of proof to overcome presumption of undue influence
- § 7:13 Taxonomic classification of undue influence cases
- § 7:14 “David and Bathsheba” will contests
- § 7:15 “Esau and Jacob” will contests
- § 7:16 “Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon” will contests
- § 7:17 “Uriah Heep” will contests
- § 7:18 “Mary Worth” will contests
- § 7:19 Conclusion

CHAPTER 8. OTHER GROUNDS FOR CONTEST AND EXTRA-PROBATE REMEDIES

- § 8:1 In general
- § 8:2 Mistake in general
- § 8:3 Mistake in execution
- § 8:4 —Mistake as to legal effect of document
- § 8:5 —Mistake as to whole contents
- § 8:6 —Part of contents
- § 8:7 Mistake in inducement
- § 8:8 Proof of mistake
- § 8:9 Fraud—Remedies in general
- § 8:10 The elements of fraud
- § 8:11 Fraud in execution
- § 8:12 Fraud in the inducement
- § 8:13 Fraud in the probate procedure
- § 8:14 Scierter
- § 8:15 Proof of fraud
- § 8:16 Duress in general
- § 8:17 Duress as a form of undue influence
- § 8:18 Proof of duress
- § 8:19 Positive disposition of assets
- § 8:20 Specific confidential relationships
- § 8:21 Chronic post-traumatic stress syndrome of beneficiary
- § 8:22 Ante mortem probate
- § 8:23 Slayer’s statutes

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- § 8:24 Collateral attack on will
- § 8:25 Alternatives to will contests
- § 8:26 Elder abuse laws
- § 8:27 Wrongful use of civil proceedings action against contestants
- § 8:28 Electronic wills
- § 8:29 Tort for suppressing a will
- § 8:30 Conclusion

CHAPTER 9. CHALLENGING POST-DEATH DISTRIBUTION PLANS INVOLVING LIFETIME CONTRACTS, DEEDS AND TRUST INSTRUMENTS

- § 9:1 In general
- § 9:2 Capacity and lifetime instruments
- § 9:3 —Capacity to execute a contract
- § 9:4 —Capacity to execute a deed
- § 9:5 —Capacity to make a gift
- § 9:6 —Capacity to execute a trust
- § 9:7 —Presumptions
- § 9:8 —Evidence
- § 9:9 Undue influence and lifetime transfers
- § 9:10 —Elements
- § 9:11 — —Susceptibility to influence
- § 9:12 — —Existence of a confidential relationship between influencer and donor
- § 9:13 — —Use of confidential relationship to secure a change in the donor's post-death distribution plan
- § 9:14 — —Donor changed post-death distribution plan
- § 9:15 — —Unconscionable gift
- § 9:16 —Presumption of validity
- § 9:17 —Presumption of undue influence
- § 9:18 —Burden of proof
- § 9:19 —Tortious interference with expectancy from lifetime transfer
- § 9:20 —Evidence
- § 9:21 Lifetime gift theory
- § 9:22 TOD deeds
- § 9:23 TOD Accounts
- § 9:24 Gifts causa mortis
- § 9:25 Statute of limitations
- § 9:26 Conclusion

CHAPTER 10. MULTI-PARTY BANK ACCOUNTS

- § 10:1 Introduction
- § 10:2 Types of multi-party accounts
- § 10:3 Capacity to make a multi-party account
- § 10:4 Burden of proof on capacity of account donor
- § 10:5 Judicial declaration of incompetency of joint account customer
- § 10:6 Undue influence and multi-party accounts
- § 10:7 —Elements
- § 10:8 Undue influence and multi-party—Elements—Susceptibility to undue influence
- § 10:9 Undue influence and multi-party account—Elements—Existence of a confidential relationship between donor and influencer
- § 10:10 — —Use of confidential relationship to secure a change in the donor’s post-death distribution plan
- § 10:11 — —Donor changed the post-death distribution plan
- § 10:12 Undue influence and multi-party accounts—Elements—Change of distribution plan was unconscionable
- § 10:13 —Presumption of freedom from undue influence
- § 10:14 Undue influence and multi-Party accounts—Presumption of undue influence
- § 10:15 Undue influence and multi-party accounts—Burden of proof
- § 10:16 Bank liability to heirs, legatees or joint account customers
- § 10:17 Conflict between testamentary disposition and contract transfer at death
- § 10:18 Ownership of bank account between multi-party account customers—Joint accounts
- § 10:19 Ownership of bank accounts between multi-party account customers—Lifetime transfers of account balances
- § 10:20 Ownership of bank account between multi-party account customers—Statutory abolition of common law joint tenancy and joint bank accounts
- § 10:21 —POD accounts
- § 10:22 —Totten trust accounts
- § 10:23 —Burden of proof and presumptions
- § 10:24 Gift law and multi-party accounts
- § 10:25 Evidence of donative intent
- § 10:26 Burden of proof on party asserting gift of a bank account

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- § 10:27 Effect of killing joint account customer
- § 10:28 Conclusion

CHAPTER 11. PRETRIAL PLANNING

- § 11:1 In general
- § 11:2 Comprehensive review of will
- § 11:3 Client interviewing and counseling considerations:
Contestant
- § 11:4 Client interviewing and counseling considerations:
Proponent
- § 11:5 Developing the game plan for contestant
- § 11:6 —Experts in the planning stage
- § 11:7 —Lay witnesses
- § 11:8 Developing the game plan for proponent
- § 11:9 —Experts in the planning stage
- § 11:10 —Lay witnesses
- § 11:11 Conclusion

**CHAPTER 12. PRE-TRIAL PRACTICE,
PLEADINGS AND MOTIONS**

- § 12:1 In general
- § 12:2 Pre-probate objections in California
- § 12:3 Post-probate objections in California
- § 12:4 Pre-probate objections in Delaware
- § 12:5 Post-probate objections in Delaware
- § 12:6 Objections to probate in Georgia
- § 12:7 Objections to probate in Indiana
- § 12:8 Pre-probate objections in Maryland
- § 12:9 Post-probate objections in Maryland
- § 12:10 Pre-probate objections in Massachusetts
- § 12:11 Post-probate objections in Massachusetts
- § 12:12 Objections to probate in New York
- § 12:13 Pre-probate objections in Pennsylvania
- § 12:14 Post-probate objections in Pennsylvania
- § 12:15 Objections to probate in Texas
- § 12:16 Pre-probate objections under the Uniform Probate
Code
- § 12:17 Post-probate objections under the Uniform Probate
Code
- § 12:18 Answering the complaint, objections or caveat
- § 12:19 Motions directed to sufficiency of objections or
complaint
- § 12:20 Summary judgment and judgment on the pleadings
- § 12:21 Settlement agreements

CHAPTER 13. DISCOVERY

- § 13:1 In general
- § 13:2 Making a discovery plan
- § 13:3 Client interviews
- § 13:4 Witness interviews
- § 13:5 Public records as a source of information
- § 13:6 Other sources of informal discovery
- § 13:7 Applicability of civil discovery rules in formal discovery
- § 13:8 Mandatory initial disclosures
- § 13:9 Advance disclosure
- § 13:10 Interrogatories
- § 13:11 Requests for production of tangible items
- § 13:12 Interrogatories from petitioners to respondents in a will contest
- § 13:13 Interrogatories from respondent to petitioner in a will contest
- § 13:14 Depositions
- § 13:15 —Checklist—petitioner
- § 13:16 Depositions Checklist—Respondent
- § 13:17 —Medical expert witness
- § 13:18 Requests for admission
- § 13:19 Electronic discovery in will contests
- § 13:20 Forms of discovery unique to probate practice
- § 13:21 Discovery sanctions in will contests

CHAPTER 14. TRIAL

- § 14:1 In general
- § 14:2 Pre-trial motions in limine
- § 14:3 Pre-trial sequestration of witnesses
- § 14:4 Other pre-trial motions
- § 14:5 Jury or non-jury trial
- § 14:6 Trial court review of probate adjudication
- § 14:7 Conduct of voir dire and jury challenges
- § 14:8 Jury demographics and psychology
- § 14:9 Order of presentation
- § 14:10 Establishing rapport for case
- § 14:11 Other pre-trial matters
- § 14:12 Demonstrative evidence
- § 14:13 —Charts and models
- § 14:14 —Video and audio evidence
- § 14:15 —Other demonstrative evidence
- § 14:16 Motions during trial
- § 14:17 Functions of court and jury

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- § 14:18 Instructions to the jury
- § 14:19 Specific jury instructions
- § 14:20 —Testamentary capacity
- § 14:21 — —Presumptions, inferences and burden of proof
- § 14:22 —Undue influence
- § 14:23 —Other grounds
- § 14:24 Inconsistent verdict
- § 14:25 Testimony or discovery during lifetime of testator
- § 14:26 Juror misconduct

CHAPTER 15. EVIDENCE

- § 15:1 In general
- § 15:2 Relevance in will contests
- § 15:3 Acts and conduct of the testator
- § 15:4 Acts and conduct of undue influencer
- § 15:5 Acts and statements of third persons
- § 15:6 Hearsay
- § 15:7 —Testator's declarations of mental and physical state
- § 15:8 —Admissions of beneficiaries
- § 15:9 —Declarations by undue influencer
- § 15:10 —Medical and hospital records
- § 15:11 —Other business records
- § 15:12 —Spontaneous utterances
- § 15:13 —Declarations against interest
- § 15:14 —Other
- § 15:15 Attorney-client privilege
- § 15:16 Physician-patient privilege
- § 15:17 Other privileged communications
- § 15:18 Lay opinion evidence
- § 15:19 Expert opinion evidence
- § 15:20 —Basis
- § 15:21 Competence
- § 15:22 Authentication problems
- § 15:23 Best evidence rule
- § 15:24 Character evidence in will contests
- § 15:25 —Character of undue influencers
- § 15:26 Conclusion
- § 15:27 Spoliation

CHAPTER 16. POST-TRIAL PRACTICE

- § 16:1 In general
- § 16:2 Exceptions
- § 16:3 Motion for judgment N.O.V
- § 16:4 Motion for new trial

- § 16:5 Taking an appeal in general
- § 16:6 Required notice of appeal
- § 16:7 Jurisdictional time limits
- § 16:8 Perfecting an appeal
- § 16:9 Reduced forms of record
- § 16:10 The reproduced record
- § 16:11 Bond and supersedeas
- § 16:12 The brief
- § 16:13 Oral argument
- § 16:14 Motion practice on appeal
- § 16:15 Extraordinary writ practice

APPENDICES

- Appendix 1. Forms
- Appendix 2. Trial Book
- Appendix 3. Interviews
- Appendix 4. Checklists
- Appendix 5. Instructions

Table of Laws and Rules

Table of Cases

Index