

Ethel Lilian Voynich's Will

(From [Voynichiana](#): documents, images, and research illuminating the lives of Wilfrid and Ethel Voynich and of Anne M. Nill, Wilfrid Voynich's assistant and Ethel's life-long companion after Voynich's death.)

Ethel Lilian Voynich's Will

The following documents are a copy of Ethel Voynich's will (pp. 2-5) and its notice of probate (p. 6). (A transcription of the main text of the will is appended, pp. 7-8.) The documents were released on September 6, 2011 by the Library of Congress under the Library's equivalent of the Freedom of Information Act. The two documents are part of a file at the Library pertaining to Anne Nill's bequest to that institution of Ethel's music and other memorabilia (see [Anne Nill's Will and Her Bequest to the Library of Congress Of Ethel Voynich's Unpublished Music](#)). Ethel's will was probably sent to the Library to confirm that Anne owned the rights to her music, published and unpublished, and could leave it to that institution. Where the original of Ethel's will is, or if it still exists, is unknown. The will is dated December 24, 1943. The notice of probate was filed December 8, 1960 (Ethel died July 27 of that year).

Ethel named Anne Nill executor of her will or, if for some reason Anne could not serve, Hans Thacher Clarke. Clarke, a native of Harrow, England, was a well-known chemist and amateur musician. In 1928 he moved from Rochester, New York, where he had been working for the Eastman Kodak Company since 1914, to New York City to work at Columbia University's 168th Street medical complex. It is not known how Ethel and Clarke happened to become acquainted, but Clarke's musical interests may have brought them together.

Witnesses to the will were Alys Sutcliffe and Elizabeth Preble, who lived together at 138 E 36th Street in Manhattan. Sutcliffe, born around 1895, achieved some reknown as a botanist (she has a variety of heather named after her) and ultimately became Horticulturalist of the Brooklyn Botanical Garden. Late in life she wrote a popular gardening book, *House Plants for City Dwellers* (1964). She died in 1969. Ethel may have consulted Sutcliffe on the plant illustrations in the Voynich Manuscript and so struck up a friendship. Elizabeth Preble remains obscure.

The copies of both documents, will and notice of probate, are poor. They were probably made shortly after Anne's death in September, 1961. It is not known who penned in the scholia in the margins of Ethel's will.

Voynich,
Ethel

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, ETHEL L. VOYNICH, of the City of New York, do hereby make, publish and declare the following to be my Will and Testament:

FIRST: I give and bequeath to ANNE M. NILL my clothing, furniture, books, jewelry and other personal effects, together with my literary and musical copyrights and all of my unpublished or uncopyrighted works, both musical and literary.

I likewise give and bequeath to ANNE M. NILL any and all monies accrued at the time of my death hereafter to accrue from or in connection with the sale or disposition of any and all of my literary works.

I likewise give and bequeath to ANNE M. NILL the monies, if any, which at the time of my death are on deposit to my credit in the Bowery Savings Bank.

I make these bequests as unconditional and without limitation or restriction as I am confident that ANNE M. NILL, knowing my desires with respect to my unpublished music, will exert her best efforts towards the carrying out of said desires.

SECOND: In the event that said ANNE M. NILL should predecease me, then I revoke all of the bequests made in the preceding paragraph "FIRST" of this Will and in place and stead thereof, I give and bequeath my said unpublished music to the Library of Congress of the United States, and I direct that all of the other assets referred to in said paragraph "FIRST" of this Will shall be added to and form a part of my residuary estate to be disposed of as hereinafter set forth.

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THIRD: All the rest, residue and remainder of my property of every nature and wheresoever situated, I devise and bequeath to WINIFRED GAYE, heretofore named WINIFRED EISENHARDT of Cranbrook, Kent, England, who though not legally adopted by me has always been considered by me as my daughter.

In the event that the said WINIFRED GAYE shall predecease me, then I revoke the devise and bequest immediately hereinabove made to her in this paragraph "THIRD" of this Will, and in place and stead thereof, I do hereby devise and bequeath all the rest, residue and remainder of my property of every nature and wheresoever situated, to my son GEOFFREY INGRAM TAYLOR, of Cambridge, England.

I make all of these devises and bequests as unconditional gifts without limitation or restriction, and I trust that said beneficiaries are aware of my desires with respect to my residuary estate, and I am confident that they will exert their best efforts towards the carrying out of said desires.

FOURTH: I direct that my body be cremated and that my ashes be disposed of in such manner as the Executors named in this Will shall indicate.

FIFTH: I hereby nominate, constitute and appoint ANNE M. NILL to be the Executrix of and under this my Last Will and Testament. In the event that said ANNE M. NILL fails to qualify as such Executrix or ceases to remain as such, then I hereby nominate and appoint DR. HANS CLARKE of New York City to be the Executor of and under this my Last Will and Testament. I direct that no bond or other security shall be required of my said Executors.

SLATH: I hereby revoke any and all other Wills and Codicils heretofore executed by me.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal at the City of New York this 24th day of December, in the year One thousand nine hundred and forty-three.

WITNESSES:

Ethel Lillian Voynich (L.S.)

Alys Sulcliffe

Elizabeth Preble

The foregoing instrument was on the 24th day of December, 1943, signed, sealed, published and declared by the above named Testatrix, ETHEL L. VOYNICH, to be her Last Will and Testament in the presence of us, who thereupon at her request and in her presence and in the presence of each other have subscribed our names as witnesses thereto; this attestation clause having been read over to said Testatrix in an audible voice in her and our presence and hearing and she thereupon signifying her assent thereto immediately before our subscription thereto.

Alys Sulcliffe 138 E 36 N.Y.C.

Elizabeth Preble 138 E. 36 New York

Transcription of Ethel Voynich's Will

I, Ethel Voynich of the City of New York do hereby make, publish and declare the following to be my last Will and Testament:

FIRST: I give and bequeath to ANNE M. NILL my clothing, furniture, books, jewelry and other personal effects together with my literary and musical copyrights and all of my unpublished and uncopyrighted works, both musical and literary.

I likewise give and bequeath to ANNE M. NILL any and all monies accrued at the time of my death or [unclear] to accrue from or in connection with the sale or [unclear] disposition of all or any of my literary works.

I likewise give and bequeath to ANNE M. NILL the monies, if any, which at the time of my death may be in deposit to my credit in the Bowery Savings Bank.

I make these bequests as unconditional gifts without limitation or restriction as I am confident that [unclear] ANNE M. NILL, knowing my desires with respect to my unpublished music, will exert her best efforts towards the carrying out of said desires.

SECOND: In the event that said ANNE M. NILL should predecease me, then I revoke all the bequests made in the preceding paragraph "FIRST" of this Will and in place and stead thereof, I give and bequeath my said unpublished music to the Library of Congress of the United States, and I direct that all of the other assets referred to in said paragraph "FIRST" of this Will shall be added to and form a part of my residuary estate to be disposed of as hereinafter set forth.

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THIRD: All the rest, residue and remainder of my property of every nature and wheresoever situated I give, devise and bequeath to WINIFRED GAYE, heretofore named WINIFRED EISENHARDT of Cranbrook, Kent, England, who though not legally adopted by me has always been considered by me as a daughter.

In the event the said WINIFRED GAYE shall predecease me, then I revoke the devises and bequests [unclear] immediately hereinabove made to her in this paragraph "THIRD" of this Will, and in place and stead thereof, I devise and bequeath all the rest, residue and remainder of my property of every nature and wheresoever situated, to my nephew GEOFFREY INGRAM TAYLOR, of Cambridge, England.

I make all of these devises and bequests as unconditional gifts without limitation or restriction [unclear] said beneficiaries are aware of my desires with respect to my residuary estate, and I am confident that they will exert their best efforts toward the carrying out of said desires.

FOURTH: I direct that my body be cremated and direct that my ashes be disposed of in such manner as the Executrix of this Will shall indicate.

FIFTH: I hereby nominate, constitute and appoint ANNE M. NILL to be the Executrix of and under this my last Will and Testament. In the event that said ANNE M. NILL fails to qualify as said Executrix or ceases to remain as such, I hereby nominate and appoint DR. HANS CLARKE of New York [to be?] Executor of and under this my last Will and Testament. I further direct that no bond or other security be required of my said Executors.

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SIXTH: I hereby revoke any and all other wills and codicils heretofore executed by me.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal at the city of New York this 24th day of December in the year One thousand nine hundred and forty-three.