



# Kentucky Resources

## Family History Sources in the Bluegrass State



### Kentucky History

Prior to the completion of the western portion of the border survey between Virginia and North Carolina in 1748, few American settlers had moved into the region of present-day Kentucky. When the French and Indian War ended, the Ohio River was designated as the boundary between settlers and native inhabitants.

The city of Harrodsburg, founded in 1774, was the first permanent English settlement west of the Allegheny Mountains.

The Wilderness Road, blazed by Daniel Boone in 1775, was the primary route through the Cumberland Gap into central Kentucky. It eventually connected the Potomac in Virginia, with the falls of the Ohio River. Although it was a narrow hazardous trail, it was used by many settlers making their way into Kentucky and beyond.



During the Revolutionary War, the Virginia government virtually ignored the settlements in Kentucky. The resulting lack of military assistance and isolation from the eastern portion of Virginia led to troubles with native tribes and precipitated a desire among the settlers for Kentucky to achieve statehood. Between 1784 and 1790, nine conventions met at Danville demanding separation from Virginia; however, none of these attained success in gaining a division.

Congress admitted the Commonwealth of Kentucky to the Union as the fifteenth state on 1 June 1792 after the first constitution was drafted on 3 April of that year. Established as a commonwealth state, Danville became its first capital. Early settlers included Revolutionary War veterans staking claims to bounty-land grants. Scots-Irish, German, and English individuals and families from Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee soon joined the veterans in Kentucky.

During the Civil War, Kentucky was a slaveholding state, but also boasted a large abolitionist population and Kentuckians served in both the Union and Confederate forces. Coincidentally both President Abraham Lincoln and Confederate President Jefferson Davis were born in Kentucky.

Following the Civil War, tobacco and coal became leading commodities in Kentucky's economy. Kentucky's bluegrass pastures have produced an exceptional number of thoroughbred horses, leading to worldwide recognition in horse racing. Fort Knox, originally Camp Knox, began as a permanent military post and later became an official U.S. gold depository. In the twentieth century Fort Campbell served as a major training center for military recruits.

*This section is based on [History of Kentucky](#) in the Ancestry.com Wiki, and was originally published in [Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources](#).*



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### Significant Dates (through 1937)

- 1654** – Kentucky was surveyed by Colonel Abram Wood.
- 1720s** – The French established trading posts with the help of local Indians.
- 1739** – Charles de Longueuil, a Frenchman, discovered Big Bone Lick.
- 1750** – Before 1750, Kentucky was primarily populated by the Cherokee, Chickasaw and Shawnee. Dr. Thomas Walker explored the area through the Cumberland Gap; he was the first recorded person of European descent to discover and use coal in Kentucky.
- 1754** – The French and Indian War began.
- 1763** – The French and Indian War ended. The area that includes Kentucky was transferred from the French to the British and included as part of Virginia.
- 1767** – Daniel Boone traveled into Kentucky went as far as what is now Floyd County.
- 1769** – John Finley and Daniel Boone were hired to find the Cherokees' Warriors Path through a gap in the Cumberland Mountains. Their party cleared a trail through the Cumberland Gap and some of them stayed for several years inspiring other to follow.
- 1774** – Fort Harrod was established in what is now Mercer County, as the first permanent settlement. Indians later forced these settlers to leave about a month later. They returned later with a larger group to establish a successful frontier town at Old Fort Hill.
- 1775** – The Cherokee Nation and the Transylvania Land Company signed the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals allowing the purchase of land between the Ohio and Cumberland Rivers.
- 1776** – Virginia declared the Transylvania Land Company illegal; Kentucky County was formed from Fincastle County, Virginia.
- 1778** – The Shawnee Indians set siege to Boonesborough for 13 days.
- 1780** – Kentucky County was split into 3 counties: Fayette, Jefferson, and Lincoln.
- 1782** – On 19 August 1782 in what is now Roberson County, the Battle of Blue Licks was the last major conflict in the American Revolutionary War.
- 1783** – There were not many ordained ministers in Kentucky and civil marriages were allowed. The first commercial distillery was opened in Kentucky.
- 1785** – A minister or clerk was required to file a certificate for all marriages. Marriage bonds needed a male relative or guardian to sign for the female since women were not allowed to enter into contracts.
- 1792** – Kentucky was admitted to the Union as the 15th state on 1 June 1792.
- 1795** – The Beam family produced the first barrel of "old Jake Beam Sour."
- 1796** – The Wilderness Road opened for wagons.
- 1809** – Even if a couple was divorced, neither former spouse was allowed to remarry until the former spouse died.
- 1811-1812** – A series of massive earthquakes occurred, causing the Mississippi River to run backwards for a time.
- 1818** – The Western portion of Kentucky was purchased by President Andrew Jackson.
- 1822** – If a man died intestate, the widow inherited one-third of her husband's real and personal property.
- 1830** – The Louisville and Portland Canal opened.



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**1838** – A married woman could have an estate separate from her husband's and not subjected to his debts. She could also write a will as long as she had the permission of her husband.

**1843** – A married woman was allowed to have a separate estate and was allowed to manage the estate herself.

**1846** – A husband was not entitled to real or personal property acquired by a wife after her marriage except in a very limited way.

**1852** – Registration of vital records was first required, but compliance was sporadic. Dower rights were first recognized which entitled a wife to one-third of her deceased husband's estate and gave her the ability to dispose of it as she saw fit.

**1861** – Kentucky declared itself a neutral state during the Civil War requesting both sides stay out of the state, although its governor was in favor of secession. 86,000 troops served the Union; 40,000 served the Confederacy.

**1863** – When Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves in January 1863 with the Emancipation Proclamation, slaves in Confederate states were set free. Because Kentucky was a Union state, slaves in Kentucky were not set free.

**1865** – With the ratification of the 13th Amendment slaves in Kentucky were set free. Kentucky did not ratify the 13th amendment until 1976.

**1870** – Jugs of bourbon began shipping from ports along the Ohio River.

**1875** – The first Kentucky Derby was run at Churchill Downs.

**1883** – County clerks were required to issue marriage licenses.

**1891** – A new state constitution was adopted and is still being used today.

**1894** – If a woman had a separate estate apart from her husband, she could make contracts, sue or be sued and write a will with no restrictions.

**1900** – Fifteen hundred armed civilians took over the Capitol for two weeks. Governor William Goebel activated the Kentucky militia and declared martial law. He was later assassinated.

**1905 – 1909** – Farmers burned barns and fields that belonged to a large tobacco interest, in an effort to end their tobacco monopoly in what was known as the Black Patch War.

**1911** – Mandatory registration of births and deaths was required by legislation.

**1920** – Women in Kentucky were allowed to vote when the 19th Amendment was ratified as part of the U.S. Constitution.

**1920 – 1933** – Prohibition began with the passage of the 18th amendment. Hundreds of businesses and distilleries were forced to close. The government issued 10 licenses to produce whiskey for medicinal purposes.

**1921** – Women were allowed to serve on juries.

**1926** – Mammoth Cave National Park was established.

**1933** – The Tennessee Valley Authority began building dams in Kentucky.

**1936** – The last legal public hanging happened in Kentucky.

**1937** – The U.S. Gold Depository was established at Fort Knox.



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### Kentucky Censuses

Federal census records for Kentucky are available from 1810, except for the destroyed 1890 census. The 1890 Special Schedule of Union Veterans and Widows still exists for the eastern half of Kentucky; some Confederate veterans are also listed on this census schedule.

Earlier censuses taken in 1790 and 1800 were destroyed, but were been partially reconstructed with the use of tax lists. These reconstructions are available wherever copies of the censuses are also found.

There are no official state censuses for Kentucky, although those living in Kentucky before 1790 were often included with Virginia records. Tax lists for Kentucky are some of the best found in the U.S., and can substitute as a census of mature male inhabitants for almost any early year.

Kentucky infrequently enumerated public school students beginning in 1888. Scattered records are at the office of the respective county Board of Health or Board of Education. Some are maintained by the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives and the Kentucky Historical Society.

#### Kentucky Census Records on Ancestry.com

- [U.S. Census Reconstructed Records, 1660-1820](#)
- [Kentucky, Compiled Census and Census Substitutes Index, 1810-1890](#)
- [Third census of the United States \(1810 census\), Clark County, Kentucky](#)
- [Census of 1810, Jessamine County, Kentucky](#)
- [Third census of the United States \(1810 census\), Lincoln County, Kentucky](#)
- [1890 Veterans Schedules](#) (includes the eastern half of Kentucky)

<i>Population</i>	
1790	73,677
1800	220,955
1810	406,511
1820	564,317
1830	687,917
1840	779,828
1850	982,405
1860	1,155,684
1870	1,321,011
1880	1,648,690
1890	1,858,635
1900	2,147,174
1910	2,289,905
1920	2,416,630
1930	2,614,589
1940	2,845,627
1950	2,944,806

### Kentucky Vital Records

Statewide vital records registration was first enacted in 1852, but compliance was minimal and the legislation was only in place for ten years. Sporadic registration was also performed between 1872 and 1910. Mandatory registration of births and deaths was again enacted as of 1 January 1911.

Marriage records have been kept on a county-level basis since the formation of each county, with some records pre-dating official formation. In 1958, marriage registration began at the state level. An every name index to births and deaths after 1911 exists at the Office of Vital Statistics.



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## Kentucky Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- [Kentucky Birth Records, 1852-1910](#)
- [Kentucky Birth Index, 1911-1999](#)
- [Kentucky Marriages, 1797-1865](#)
- [Kentucky Marriages, 1802-1850](#)
- [Kentucky Marriages, 1851-1900](#)
- [Kentucky Marriage Records, 1852-1914](#)
- [Kentucky Marriage Index, 1973-1999](#)
- [Kentucky Marriage Records](#)
- [Kentucky Death Records, 1852-1953](#)
- [Kentucky Death Index, 1911-2000](#)
- [Web: Kentucky, Find A Grave Index, 1776-2012](#) *Free*

## Other Kentucky Vital Records Resources

- [Kentucky Office of Vital Statistics](#): Holds records of births and deaths from 1911 and marriages after 1958.
- [Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives \(KDLA\)](#): The KDLA online records ordering system allows researchers to submit electronic requests for a range of records, including pre-1911 vital records, deeds, military, tax, and probate records. Be sure to check the links which show available years of coverage for each record type.

## Kentucky Military Records

- [U.S., Confederate Soldiers Compiled Service Records, 1861-1865](#) *Free*
- [U.S., Union Soldiers Compiled Service Records, 1861-1865](#) *Free*
- [Kentucky, Confederate Pension Applications, 1912-1950](#)
- [U.S., Descriptive Lists of Colored Volunteer Army Soldiers, 1864](#) *Free*
- [Kentucky, Confederate Pension Records, 1912-1930](#)

## Kentucky Immigration & Travel

- [Kentucky, Naturalization Records, 1906-1991](#)

## Kentucky Land & Wills

- [Kentucky, Land Grants, 1782-1924](#)
- [Kentucky, Tax Lists, 1799-1801](#) *Free*
- [Kentucky Will Index](#)
- [Petitions of Kentucky Inhabitants to the General Assembly of Virginia, 1769-1792](#)
- [Kentucky Will Index, Vol. 2](#)



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### Other Collections

#### City Directories

Use the browse box in the upper right corner to determine what directories are available for your ancestor's area. If they lived in a rural area, check to see if that area was included with a larger city in the vicinity.

#### **Other Resources**

In addition to the following state-level resources, many counties and towns maintain important genealogical collections in local libraries, genealogical societies, or historical societies, so check for a local resource when researching.

#### **Statewide Research Resources**

- [Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives \(KDLA\)](#): Use the online records ordering system to request vital, military, census, deed, tax, will, or court records held in KDLA's collection.
- [Kentucky Historical Society](#)
- [Kentucky Genealogical Society](#)
- [Kentucky GenWeb](#)
- [Kentuckiana Digital Library](#): Selected collections from the Kentucky Archives include oral histories and a collection of newspapers from across Kentucky.
- [National Archives at Atlanta](#): This facility maintains records from Federal agencies and courts in Kentucky, including census, military, court, naturalization, and immigration records.  
[Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\) General Land Office Records](#): The BLM administers Federal Land for public land states including Kentucky and maintains records of land patents which granted land from the Federal Government to individuals.

#### **Specialty and Regional Research**

- [Chronicling America](#): Online newspapers: Provides searchable online versions of selected Kentucky newspapers.
- [The Filson Historical Society Library](#): see the Collections page for information on the Filson's genealogy holdings at the Library in Louisville.
- [KYOWA Genealogical Society](#): Serves the tri-state area of northeastern Kentucky, southern Ohio, and western West Virginia.

#### **Help and Advice**

- [Kentucky Family History Research](#)
- [Counties of Kentucky](#)
- [Westward Movement: The Kentucky Microcosm](#)
- [Cumberland and Atlantic States Research](#)

[View all Kentucky collections on Ancestry.com](#)



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### Important Dates for Kentucky Counties

This section is from [Kentucky County Resources](#), part of the [Ancestry.com Wiki](#), and was originally published in [Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources](#).

County	Date Formed	Parent County(ies)	Birth	Marriage	Death	Land	Probate	Court
Adair	1802	Green	1852	1802	1852	1801	1804	1802
Allen	1815	Barren/Warren	1852	1815	1852	1816	1815	1826
Anderson	1827	Franklin/Mercer/Washington	1852	1827	1852	1827	1827	1827
Ballard	1842	Hickman/McCracken	1853	1853	1853	1842	1842	1842
Barren	1799	Green/Warren	1852	1799	1852	1798	1798	1798
Bath	1811	Montgomery	1852	1811	1852	1811	1811	1811
Bell	1867	Knox/Harlan	1874	1867	1874	1867	1869	1867
Boone	1799	Campbell	1852	1799	1852	1799	1800	1799
Bourbon	1786	Fayette	1852	1786	1852	1786	1786 (wills)	1780
Boyd	1860	Carter/Lawrence/Greenup	1859	1860	1859	1860	1860 (wills)	1860
Boyle	1842	Mercer/Lincoln	1852	1852	1852	1842	1842	1800
Bracken	1797	Campbell/Mason	1852	1797	1852	1797	1797	1797
Breathitt	1839	Clay/Estill/Perry	1852	1852	1852	1873	1873	1838
Breckinridge	1800	Hardin	1852	1860	1852	1800	1800 (wills)	1803
Bullitt	1797	Jefferson/Nelson	1854	1797	1854	1797	1797	1797
Butler	1810	Logan/Ohio	1853	1810	1853	1810	1810	1811
Caldwell	1809	Livingston	1852	1808	1852	1809	1809	1809
Calloway	1821	Hickman	1852	1823	1852	1822	1836	1856
Campbell	1795	Harrison/Mason/Scott	1852	1795	1852	1795	1795	1791
Carlisle	1886	Ballard	1911	1886	1904	1886	1886	1886
Carroll	1838	Gallatin/Henry/Trimble	1852	1836	1852	1795	1838	1838
Carter	1838	Greenup/Lawrence	1852	1838	1852	1838	1835	1838
Casey	1807	Lincoln	1852	1807	1852	1807	1806	1807
Christian	1797	Logan	1852	1797	1852	1797	1797	1797
Clark	1793	Bourbon/Fayette	1852	1793	1852	1793	1793	1793
Clay	1807	Madison/Floyd/Knox	1852	1807	1852	1799	1830	1809
Clinton	1836	Wayne/Cumberland	1852	1852	1852	1848	1863	1864
Crittenden	1842	Livingston	1852	1842	1852	1842	1833	1842



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Cumberland	1799	Green	1852	1799	1852	1799	1815	1820
Daviess	1815	Ohio	1853	1815	1853	1815	1812	1822
Edmonson	1825	Grayson/Hart/Warren	1852	1843	1852	1825	1824	1824
Elliott	1869	Carter/Lawrence/Morgan	1874	1874	1874	1869	1966	1958
Estill	1808	Clark/Madison	1852	1808	1852	1808	1808	1808
Fayette	1780	Kentucky (Va.)	1852	1803	1852	1787	1789	1787
Fleming	1798	Mason	1852	1798	1852	1798	1798	1798
Floyd	1800	Fleming/Mason/Montgomery	1852	1803	1854	1806	1812	1808
Franklin	1795	Woodford/Mercer/Shelby	1852	1795	1852	1795	1795	1795
Fulton	1845	Hickman	1852	1845	1852	1845	1845	1845
Gallatin	1799	Franklin/Shelby	1852	1799	1852	1799	1799	1799
Garrard	1797	Madison/Lincoln/Mercer	1789	1797	1852	1797	1797	1797
Grant	1820	Pendleton	1852	1820	1852	1820	1820	1820
Graves	1824	Hickman	1852	1887	1852	1887	1882	1858
Grayson	1810	Hardin/Ohio	1852	1852	1852	1896	1856 (wills)	1906
Green	1793	Lincoln/Nelson	1852	1793	1852	1793	1793	1794
Greenup	1804	Mason	1852	1803	1852	1811	1822	1807
Hancock	1829	Daviess/Ohio/Breckinridge	1852	1829	1852	1829	1820 (wills)	1834
Hardin	1793	Nelson	1852	1793	1852	1793	1793	1793
Harlan	1819	Knox	1852	1820	1852	1820	1829	1821
Harrison	1794	Bourbon/Scott	1852	1794	1852	1794	1794	1794
Hart	1819	Hardin/Barren	1852	1852	1852	1783		1819
Henderson	1799	Christian	1852	1806	1852	1797	1799 (wills)	1816
Henry	1799	Shelby	1852	1800	1852	1799	1765	1803
Hickman	1821 (1822)	Caldwell/Livingston	1852	1822	1852	1822	1822	1822
Hopkins	1807	Henderson	1852	1806	1852	1807	1800 (wills)	1808
Jackson	1858	Rockcastle/Owsley/Madison/ Clay/Estill/Laurel	1858	1858	1858	1858	1859	1858
Jefferson	1780	Kentucky (Va.)	1852	1781	1852	1783	1784	1780
Jessamine	1799	Fayette	1852	1799	1852	1799	1799	1799
Johnson	1843	Floyd/Morgan/Lawrence	1852	1843	1852	1843	1843	1843
Kenton	1840	Campbell	1852	1840	1852	1840	1840	1840
Knott	1884	Perry/Breathitt/Floyd/Letcher	1911	1884	1911	1883	1891	1888
Knox	1800	Lincoln	1852	1800	1852	1800	1803	1800





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Larue	1843	Hardin	1852	1843	1852	1843	1843	1843
Larue	1826	Whitley/Clay/Knox/Rockcastle	1852	1826	1852	1826	1817	1826
Lawrence	1822	Floyd/Greenup	1852	1822	1852	1822	1821	1822
Lee	1870	Owsley/Breathitt/Wolfe/Estill	1874	1870	1874	1870	1870	1870
Leslie	1878	Clay/Harlan/Perry	1878	1878	1878	1879	1873	1866
Letcher	1842	Perry/Harlan	1852	1842	1852	1842	1866	1866
Lewis	1807	Mason	1852	1807	1852	1807	1807	1807
Lincoln	1780	Kentucky (Va.)	1852	1781	1852	1780	1781	1780
Livingston	1798/1799	Christian	1852	1799	1852	1800	1799	1798
Logan	1792	Lincoln	1852	1790	1853	1792	1795	1793
Lyon	1854	Caldwell	1853	1854	1853	1854	1847	1854
Madison	1786	Lincoln	1852	1786	1852	1787	1787	1786
Magoffin	1860	Floyd/Johnson/Morgan	1860	1860	1860	1860	1860	1860
Marion	1834	Washington	1852	1852	1852	1863	1863	1863
Marshall	1842	Calloway	1852	1848	1852	1848	1848	1848
Martin	1870	Lawrence/Floyd/Pike/Johnson	1903	1871	1905	1870	1861	1870
Mason	1789	Bourbon	1852	1789	1852	1789	1791	1789
McCracken	1825	Hickman	1852	1825	1852	1825	1825	1825
McCreary	1912	Wayne/Pulaski/Whitley	1912	1912	1912	1915	1912	1912
McLean	1854	Muhlenberg/Daviess/Ohio	1854	1854	1854	1854	1847	1854
Meade	1824	Hardin/Breckinridge	1852	1824	1852	1824	1824	1824
Menifee	1869	Powell/Wolfe/Bath/Morgan/ Montgomery	1874	1869	1874	1869	1870	1869
Mercer	1786	Lincoln	1852	1774	1852	1779	1779	1786
Metcalfe	1860	Monroe/Adair/Barren/ Cumberland/Green	1860	1867	1861	1868	1865	1868
Monroe	1820	Barren/Cumberland	1852	1863	1852	1863	1861	1862
Montgomery	1797	Clark	1852	1852	1852	1797	1797	1841
Morgan	1823	Floyd/Bath	1852	1823	1852	1823	1823	1823
Muhlenberg	1799	Christian/Logan	1852	1802	1852	1798	1801	1799
Nelson	1785	Jefferson	1852	1785	1852	1784	1785	1785
Nicholas	1800	Bourbon/Mason	1852	1800	1852	1800	1800	1796
Ohio	1799	Hardin	1852	1799	1852	1798	1799	1799
Oldham	1824	Henry/Shelby/Jefferson	1852	1824	1852	1824	1824	1823
Owen	1819	Scott/Franklin/Gallatin/	1852	1819	1852	1819	1819	1819



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		Pendleton						
Owsley	1843	Clay/Estill/Breathitt	1843	1852	1852	1844	1930	1923*
Pendleton	1799	Bracken/Campbell	1852	1799	1852	1798	1799	1799
Perry	1821	Clay/Floyd	1852	1821	1852	1821	1901	1831
Pike	1822	Floyd	1852	1822	1852	1788	1839	1822
Powell	1852	Clark/Estill/Montgomery	1852	1852	1852	1864	1864	1864
Pulaski	1799	Green/Lincoln	1852	1799	1852	1799	1801	1799
Robertson	1867	Bracken/Nicholas/Harrison/ Mason	1874	1867	1874	1868	1864	1867
Rockcastle	1810	Pulaski/Lincoln/Knox/Madison	1852	1852	1852	1865	1855	1873
Rowan	1856	Fleming/Morgan	1856	1880	1856	1866	1853	1880
Russell	1826	Cumberland/Adair/Wayne	1852	1826	1852	1825	1826	1826
Scott	1792	Woodford	1852	1837	1852	1793	1796	1792
Shelby	1792	Jefferson	1852	1792	1852	1792	1794	1804
Simpson	1819	Allen/Logan/Warren	1852	1852	1852	1819	1882	1816
Spencer	1824	Shelby/Bullitt/Nelson	1852	1824	1852	1824	1824	1824
Taylor	1848	Green	1852	1848	1852	1848	1848	1848
Todd	1820	Christian/Logan	1852	1820	1852	1820	1820	1820
Trigg	1820	Christian/Caldwell	1852	1820	1852	1820	1820	1820
Trimble	1837	Henry/Oldham/Gallatin	1852	1837	1852	1837	1837	1837
Union	1811	Henderson	1852	1811	1852	1811	1811	1823
Warren	1797	Logan	1852	1797	1852	1797	1796	1796
Washington	1792	Nelson	1852	1792	1852	1792	1792	1792
Wayne	1801	Pulaski/Cumberland	1852	1801	1852	1800	1801	1802
Webster	1860	Hopkins/Union/Henderson	1874	1860	1874	1860	1860	1860
Whitley	1818	Knox	1852	1818	1852	1818	1818	1818
Wolfe	1860	Owsley/Breathitt/Powell/ Morgan	1861	1861	1861	1860	1885	1818
Woodford	1789	Fayette	1852	1789	1852	1789	1789	1789