

KENTUCKY

GUIDE STATE RESEARCH

BY NANCY HENDRICKSON

ALTHOUGH IT'S KNOWN for the genteel world of thoroughbred horses and mint juleps, America's 15th state has a more rough-and-tumble legacy than you might think. Frontiersmen including George Rogers Clark and Daniel Boone blazed paths over the Appalachians into the Kentucky wilderness, and legions of Americans followed them. Whether your Bluegrass State ancestors arrived with these early birds or later on, our guide will have you galloping up your family tree.

Out of the gates

Before white settlement, Shawnee Indians from north of the Ohio River, and Cherokee and Chickasaw from south of the Cumberland River fought for control over the rich Kentucky hunting grounds. But when settlers came from the East, drawn by rich game and richer soil, Indian attacks turned on the new outposts. In 1763, England tried to stabilize relations with the Indians by forbidding colonists from settling west of the Appalachians.

Treaties eventually opened Kentucky to settlement, and in 1775, Boone and the Transylvania Co. blazed Boone's Trace (later the Wilderness Road) from western Virginia through the Cumberland Gap. Once word about the "Kentucky Paradise" got out, a land rush was on, despite numerous Indian raids on Boonesborough, Harrodsburg and other early settlements. Boone himself was captured in 1778, but he escaped a few months later, in time to warn the Transylvania Fort of an impending attack.

The Virginia legislature annexed Kentucky in 1772, stashing it in Fincastle County. In 1776, it became Kentucky County. You may need to extend your records search into those areas, as well as Virginia's Montgomery County, one of three counties to succeed Fincastle in 1777. Another point to keep in mind: since Virginia at the time encompassed

everything west of its modern boundaries, your early "Kentucky" ancestors may have lived in what's now Indiana, Illinois, West Virginia or Ohio.

Race for land

Kentucky finally became a state in 1792. All the hand-changing makes land records there somewhat complicated. It's mostly a state-land state with a small bit of public land, and early land patents could list Virginia or Kentucky as the grantor. You'll find plenty of land title litigation in the Bluegrass State due to a proclivity for do-it-yourself surveying, settlers' tendency to move in and out during the Indian wars and Virginia's granting land so far away from its central government. Even after Kentucky statehood, Virginia gave away Kentucky land in the form of military bounty warrants.

Start your Kentucky land record research at the excellent Land Office website <sos.ky.gov/land/search>, which offers a wealth of online records, indexes and even background on property laws. Among these are records on military and nonmilitary land patents awarded by Virginia and Kentucky, and a database and scanned images of the "West of Tennessee River" patents (a portion of western Kentucky acquired in 1818). You also might consult the Library of Virginia website, which has pre-1779 Virginia land patents <www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/opac/lonnabout.htm>, and Ancestry.com <ancestry.com>, which has a database of Kentucky land records spanning 1782 to 1924.

The Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives (KDLA) <kdla.ky.gov> has microfilmed deed books; see below for information on submitting a research request. The Family History Library (FHL) <www.familysearch.org> has microfilmed copies for some counties; rent them through a branch FamilySearch Center near you.

FAST FACTS

- **STATEHOOD:** 1792
- **FIRST MOSTLY EXTANT FEDERAL CENSUS:** 1810
- **STATEWIDE BIRTH AND DEATH RECORDS BEGIN:** 1911
- **STATEWIDE MARRIAGE RECORDS BEGIN:** 1958
- **STATE-LAND STATE,** with a section of public land
- **COUNTIES:** 120
- **CONTACT FOR VITAL RECORDS:** Office of Vital Statistics, 275 E. Main St. 1E-A, Frankfort, KY 40621, (502) 564-4212, <chfs.ky.gov/dph/vital>



Contested finish

The issue of slavery carried less weight in Kentucky, where small farms weren't part of the plantation economy, than in big cotton states further south. The Bluegrass State remained in the Union during the Civil War, but loyalties were torn in this border state. Confederate forces moved into southern Kentucky, while Union troops occupied Paducah. More than 30,000 Kentuckians fought for the Confederacy; about 64,000 served the Union.

Names of soldiers from both sides are in the Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System <www.itd.nps.gov/cwss>. KDLA has more Civil War resources, such as military prison registers, Confederate veterans' home papers and micro-filmed service records for those in state units, as well as records for Kentucky militia members from earlier wars. Service records for soldiers from federal units are available through the National Archives and Records Administration <archives.gov/research/order>. Fold3.com <fold3.com> has abstracted records of Confederate and Union soldiers; search a free index to these at FamilySearch.org.

The Civil War and other events resulted in a number of "burned" courthouses. See a list at <kdla.ky.gov> (find it under the Researchers tab). Don't give up if your ancestor

lived in one of those counties. Some records might have been spared, and you can use substitute sources such as newspapers, church records and military records. Look for records in parent and neighboring counties—sometimes a courthouse in another county was closer to your relative.

Running the numbers

Kentucky didn't take any state censuses, but US censuses for the state are available starting in 1810. (Learn more in the Record Reference section.) Use tax lists, on microfilm at KDLA and the FHL, to substitute for the 1790 and 1800 censuses. Indexes to these are on Ancestry.com as a 1790 census reconstruction and "Second Census of Kentucky 1800." Some are in *Early Kentucky Tax Records* (Genealogical Publishing Co.). Depending on the county, tax lists may be available up to 1840.

Kentucky mandated that its counties record births and deaths beginning in 1911. Request post-1911 records from the state vital records office (these include delayed birth records filed in 1911 or later). KDLA holds pre-1911 birth and death records from the cities of Louisville, Lexington, Covington and Newport, and the whole state's 1911-to-1960 death records (you can buy these record sets on microfilm

TOOLKIT

WEBSITES

- **Cyndi's List: Kentucky**
<cyndislist.com/us/ky>
- **The First American West: The Ohio River Valley, 1750-1820**
<memory.loc.gov/ammem/award99/icuhtml/fawhome.html>
- **Kentuckiana Digital Library**
<kdl.kyvl.org>
- **Kentucky Digital Library**
<eris.uky.edu>
- **Kentucky GenWeb Project**
<www.kygenweb.net>
- **Kentucky Historical Society Digital Collection** <www.kyhistory.com/cdm>
- **Kentucky Land Records**
<sos.ky.gov/land/search>
- **Kentucky Searchable Atlas**
<www.uky.edu/kentuckyatlas>
- **Kentucky Virtual Library**
<www.kyvl.org>
- **University of Louisville Digital Collections** <digital.library.louisville.edu/cdm/collections>

PUBLICATIONS

- *Contested Borderland: The Civil War in Appalachian Kentucky and Virginia* by Brian D. McKnight (University Press of Kentucky)
- *The History of Kentucky* by Thomas D. Clark (Jesse Stuart Foundation)
- *The Hunters of Kentucky: A Narrative History of America's First Far West, 1750-1792* by Ted Franklin Belue (Stackpole Books)
- *Index to the 1810 Census of Kentucky* by Ann T. Wagstaff (Clearfield Co.)
- *Kentucky Ancestry: A Guide to Genealogical and Historical Research* by Roseann Reinemuth Hogan (Ancestry)
- *The Kentucky Encyclopedia* by John E. Kleber (University Press of Kentucky)
- *The Life of Daniel Boone* by Lyman Copeland Draper (Stackpole Books)
- *A New History of Kentucky* by Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter (University Press of Kentucky)
- *Pioneer Families of Eastern and Southeastern Kentucky* by William C. Kozee (Genealogical Publishing Co.)

ARCHIVES & ORGANIZATIONS

- **The Filson Historical Society**
1310 S. Third St., Louisville, KY, 40208, (502) 635-5083,
<www.filsonhistorical.org>
- **Harrodsburg Historical Society**
220 S. Chiles St., Harrodsburg, KY 40330, (859) 734-5985,
<www.harrodsburghistorical.org>
- **Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives**
300 Coffee Tree Road, Frankfort, KY 40602, (502) 564-8300
<www.kdla.ky.gov>
- **Kentucky Genealogical Society**
Box 153, Frankfort, KY 40602
<www.kygs.org>
- **Kentucky Historical Society**
100 W. Broadway, Frankfort, KY 40601, (502) 564-1792,
<history.ky.gov>
- **National Archives and Records Administration at Atlanta**
5780 Jonesboro Rd., Morrow GA 30260, (770) 968-2547,
<www.archives.gov/southeast>

for a reasonable fee on the KDLA website). There are overlapping Kentucky vital records collections at Ancestry.com (births, 1911-1999 and deaths, 1852-2000) and FamilySearch.org (births, 1839-1960 and deaths, 1843-1970).

Statewide registration of marriages and divorces in Kentucky began in June 1958. For earlier records, contact the county clerk where your ancestors married. Find multiple Kentucky marriage indexes on Ancestry.com (1802-1914, 1973-1999) and FamilySearch.org (1785-1979). Divorce records are with the county circuit court clerk's offices.

Finally, you can submit research requests to KDLA in census schedules, vital records, court and property documents, and military records. Fill out a request at <kdla.ky.gov/researchers/Pages/recordsrequestforms.aspx>.

Digital derby

Several websites (see the Toolkit, above) offer faraway researchers the inside track to Bluegrass state knowledge.

The Kentuckiana Digital Library offers an instant sampling of important documents, photographs, Sanborn maps, and newspapers in the collections of the Kentucky state archives. The Kentucky Digital Library, a digital repository for several regional archives, is worth browsing for historic newspapers, yearbooks, directories, photographs, oral histories, maps and more. (Check out its collection of Lexington city directories!) The Historical Society of Kentucky Digital Collection has maps, postcards, community history collections and more. The University of Louisville Digital Collections emphasize Louisville-area history. Finally, the Kenton County Library in Covington has a Local History File and records you can search online <www.kentonlibrary.org/genealogy/index.cfm>.

This inside track gives you an edge, whether you're at the starter's gate or near the finish line of your research. Go ahead and bet on your own success in filling out your Kentucky family tree. ■

TOP 5 HISTORIC SITES

1 Cumberland Gap National Historic Park

91 Bartlett Park Road, Middlesboro, KY 40965, (606) 248-2817,
<nps.gov/cuga>

Attractions at this first gateway to the West, set in the southern Appalachian Mountains, include the Hensley Settlement, Gap Cave and Wilderness Road.

2 Fort Boonesborough State Park

4375 Boonesborough Road, Richmond, KY 40475, (859) 527-3131,
<parks.ky.gov/parks/recreationparks/fort-boonesborough>

Events here include living history weekends and re-enactments of the 1778 Siege of Boonesborough.

3 Historic Locust Grove

561 Blankenbaker Lane, Louisville, KY 40207, (502) 897-9845,
<www.locustgrove.org>

Louisville founder George Rogers Clark spent the last nine years of his life on this farm, a stopping point for the Louis and Clark expedition and three US presidents, home to enslaved African Americans, and a window into everyday life on the Kentucky frontier.

4 Kentucky Horse Park

4089 Iron Works Pkwy, Lexington, KY 40511, (800) 678-8813,
<www.kyhorsepark.com>

In the center of Thoroughbred Country, this working horse farm showcases up to 50 breeds in exhibits such as Hall of Champions and Carriage Horse Barn.

5 Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill

3501 Lexington Rd., Harrodsburg, KY 40330, (800) 734-5611,
<www.shakervillageky.org>

Founded in 1805, this is America's largest restored Shaker community. Stay in one of 14 original buildings, take tours with historic interpreters, and dine on goods from the garden.

TIMELINE

- **1750**
Thomas Walker explores Kentucky through the Cumberland Gap
- **1769**
From a distance, Daniel Boone and John Finley see bluegrass atop Pilot Knob
- **1774**
James Harrod founds a permanent settlement at Harrodsburg
- **1794**
Gen. "Mad Anthony" Wayne's victory at Fallen Timbers, Ohio, ends Indian attacks in Kentucky
- **1796**
The Wilderness Road opens to wagons
- **1811**
First steamboat on Ohio River stops at Louisville
- **1875**
Aristides wins the inaugural Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs
- **1944**
Tennessee Valley Authority completes the Kentucky Dam on the Tennessee River
- **1987**
Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* tells the story of Kentucky slave Margaret Garner
- **1998**
University of Kentucky wins its seventh men's basketball championship
- **2005**
US Supreme Court rules against displaying Ten Commandments in Kentucky courtrooms

VISITOR INFO

Kentucky Department of Tourism

Capital Plaza Tower, 22nd Floor, 500 Mero St., Frankfort, KY 40601,
(800) 225-8747, <www.kentuckytourism.com>

STATE RESEARCH GUIDES: RECORD REFERENCE

No matter where in the United States your ancestor lived, you'll use the same strategies to obtain federal records including censuses, land patents, military service and pension records, immigration passenger lists and naturalizations. Here, you'll find instructions for accessing these records. You can rent the Family History Library's microfilmed records for viewing at your local branch FamilySearch Center; see <www.familysearch.org/films> for rental instructions.

■ **FEDERAL CENSUSES:** The US government began taking censuses every 10 years starting in 1790 (check the Fast Facts box in each state research guide for the state's first federal census with surviving records). The most recent census available for research is 1940. Although fire destroyed almost all of the 1890 census, a few schedules survive; check the guide for your ancestor's state for information on surviving fragments.

Extant records for US censuses are online at subscription sites Ancestry.com <ancestry.com> (free at subscribing libraries), findmypast.com <findmypast.com> and MyHeritage.com. HeritageQuest Online <heritagequestonline.com> (free through some libraries) has records through 1930; not all are indexed. The free FamilySearch.org <www.familysearch.org> has indexes for most censuses and record images for some, including the 1940 census.

Find census records on microfilm at the Family History Library (FHL) <www.familysearch.org>, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) <archives.gov> and many large libraries.

■ **FEDERAL LAND PATENTS:** An ancestor may have received federal land under the Homestead Act, in exchange for military service or for another reason. Visit the Bureau of Land Management General Land Office website <www.gloreCORDS.blm.gov> to search patents for lands the federal government distributed in public-land states (the Fast Facts box in each state research guide tells you if the state is a public-land state). These patents granted

the recipient ownership of the land. You can request copies of land entry case files—applications for federal land—from NARA. See <archives.gov/research/land> for information.

■ **FEDERAL MILITARY RECORDS:** NARA holds surviving federal service, pension and other military records from the American Revolution going forward. (Each State Research Guide covers important military record collections at the state archives and elsewhere.) Note that in general, pension records of Confederate Civil War soldiers are with the state archives where the pension request was filed. Copies of records from WWII and later are subject to privacy restrictions. See <archives.gov/research/military/genealogy.html> for more on military research at NARA.

Check genealogy websites such as Ancestry.com, Fold3.com and FamilySearch.org for indexes and images of military records from wars in which the United States participated. Online records are most plentiful for the American Revolution, War of 1812, Civil War and World Wars. You can search a free index to Union and Confederate Civil War soldiers and sailors at <www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm>.

Even if your ancestor didn't serve, he may be named in WWI and/or WWII military draft cards if he was of draft age. Available cards are on Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org.

■ **IMMIGRATION PASSENGER LISTS:** The US government mandated ships to keep passenger lists starting in 1820. Early lists contain little passenger information, with more details added as time went on. Lists were created at the port of departure and

given to US officials upon arrival; they checked names on the lists against the arriving passengers.

You can search and view lists for nearly all US ports and northern/southern border entry points on Ancestry.com. New York was the nation's busiest immigration port; search its arrivals free at <www.castlegarden.org> (1820-1892; index only) and <www.ellisland.org>. Port of New York passenger indexes also are free at FamilySearch.org.

Microfilmed passenger lists are available through NARA and the FHL, as well as some major libraries. The film is organized by port, date and ship name. For pre-1820 immigrants, check *Passenger and Immigration Lists Index, 1500s-1900s* by P. William Filby, digitized on Ancestry.com and in print in many libraries. It compiles information about immigrants collected from a variety of records.

■ **NATURALIZATION RECORDS:** Naturalization wasn't legally required, and until 1922, a husband's citizenship status was conferred upon his wife. Before 1906, immigrants could file for naturalization in any court—local, state or federal. After 1906, naturalization records were forwarded to the US government. Naturalizations filed in US District Courts for many areas of the country are online (in indexes or as digital records) at Ancestry.com, Fold3.com or FamilySearch.org. Pre-1906 records filed in other courts would be among records for those courts. Order post-1906 records from the Citizenship and Immigration Service at <www.uscis.gov/genealogy>.