

KENTUCKY BEFORE STATEHOOD

Genealogy records and county timeline, based on Episode 1, Kentucky Statehood. Part of Brick Walls Beyond Ohio.

THE DIVIDING LINE JUNE 1, 1792: VIRGINIA → KENTUCKY

Before June 1, 1792, Kentucky was part of Virginia. That boundary change affects where genealogists should look for court, land, tax, estate, and other records. Use this guide to identify the jurisdiction that existed on the date of your ancestor's event, then trace that county through its parent counties.

WHERE TO SEARCH BY DATE

EVENT DATE	PRIMARY JURISDICTION TO SEARCH
Before 1777	Fincastle County, Virginia
1777 to 1780	Kentucky County, Virginia
November 1, 1780 to June 1, 1792	The Kentucky county then in existence, still under Virginia
After June 1, 1792	The Kentucky county then in existence

Key rule: Search the county that existed on the date of the event, not merely the modern county where the place is located. Then trace that county backward through its parent counties.

KEY DATES

DATE	WHAT HAPPENED
Dec 31, 1776	Virginia divides Fincastle County and creates Kentucky County; seat at Harrodstown (Harrodsburg)
Nov 1, 1780	Kentucky County divided into Fayette, Jefferson, and Lincoln
1782	Kentucky District created, a special judicial district
1784 onward	Separation conventions meet at Danville
June 1, 1792	Kentucky becomes the 15th state, the first west of the Appalachians; Isaac Shelby first governor; government organized in Lexington
1793	General Assembly first meets in Frankfort, the permanent capital

NINE COUNTIES AT STATEHOOD (effective dates)

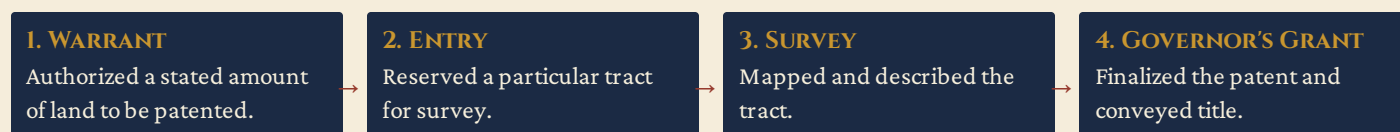
NOV 1, 1780 Fayette, Jefferson, Lincoln	JAN 1, 1785 Nelson	MAY 1, 1786 Bourbon	AUG 1, 1786 Madison, Mercer	MAY 1, 1789 Mason, Woodford
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These are effective dates, which matter because they determine which courthouse held jurisdiction. Kentucky has 120 counties today, so a family could remain on the same land while the county name changed several times.

EARLY KENTUCKY RESEARCH WORKFLOW

- 1 Identify the date and location of the event you are researching.
- 2 Determine which county existed on that date.
- 3 Trace that county backward through its parent counties.
- 4 Search county court order books, deeds, tax lists, estate records, guardianships, and apprenticeships.
- 5 Search Virginia patents for grants issued before June 1, 1792, and Old Kentucky patents for grants issued after that date.
- 6 Record every person, watercourse, adjoining landowner, witness, assignee, and geographic clue.
- 7 Follow associates into neighboring counties and, when appropriate, across the Ohio River.

HOW THE LAND-PATENT PROCESS WORKED



Title was not complete until the governor's grant was issued. Entries could be amended or withdrawn, and warrants and surveys could be assigned. Treat every assignee, witness, adjoining landowner, and associated name as a clue to investigate rather than proof of a relationship.

COMMON RESEARCH TRAPS

"Born in Virginia" before 1792: The birthplace may have been in present-day Kentucky.

Lost federal censuses: Kentucky's 1790 and 1800 federal census schedules did not survive. Use county tax lists and other substitutes.

Reconstructed censuses: Published 1790 or 1800 Kentucky "censuses" are generally reconstructions, not original federal enumerations.

Modern boundaries: Do not assume today's county held the earlier record.

Unindexed order books: Check the collection's available search tools, but be prepared to read page by page.

Generated visuals: Illustrations help explain the process but are not evidence. Use verified maps and record images for specific claims.

WHERE TO SEARCH

Kentucky Land Office (Secretary of State) · Virginia & Old Kentucky patents, free	sos.ky.gov/land
Kentucky Genealogical Society · How the Kentucky counties formed	kygs.org/brief-history-of-kentucky-genealogists
FamilySearch Wiki · Kentucky Land and Property	familysearch.org/en/wiki/Kentucky_Land_and_Property
Newberry Library · Atlas of Historical County Boundaries, Kentucky	publications.newberry.org/ahcb

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Keep pushing past your brick walls.