

The Genealogy Box



A supplemental newsletter for genealogy and family history research in Harrison County, Kentucky .

About “The Box”

In the beginning there was . . . the box. Just about every family has such a box, what you might call a genealogy box, where all the old family photos, letters and notes, and all the little treasured bits and pieces of past times and family history are kept. The type of storage ranges in type from the old standby, the trusty shoebox, stored in a dark closet somewhere, to the rustic old trunk or chest found in a lot of attics and basements.

The modern genealogist or family historian might at first replace the old shoebox with a Tupperware container or a spiral notebook or two, maybe even a three-ring-binder. But the effectiveness of these methods won't last for long. Soon a file box or two will become necessary and even more and more, until visits to your local office supply store will seem to be as numerous as those to the local grocery!

As I have visits to Kentucky over the years I have sought out,

collected, and saved all the information I could that would make my own research go a little more smoothly from home, information that I only wish I had only known about or had access to from the beginning of my research.

And so the genesis of the title of this little newsletter, a little place to tell of and put all the research tools and methods I have learned about in climbing my own family tree and building a family history with Harrison County records. Good luck to you with your own research!

THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

What is a marriage record?

There is hardly a person who didn't hear the knock of the census taker at least once in their lifetime in the 18th and 19th centuries, and it seems that just about everybody back then got married. While census records are the preeminent record source used in reconstructing family relationships, they are usually only found at the federal level, but the glue which connects the families together can only be found in marriage records, records which exist almost exclusively at the county level.

For the purposes of making clear what exists or does not exist regarding the documentation of a marriage in Harrison County, I define a *marriage record* as being the set of individual documents which recorded each stage of the process of becoming legally married in Kentucky.

At the most a marriage record will consist of a consent (when necessary), a marriage bond, a license, and a (minister's) return or certificate. There may be multiples of certain documents, depending

on the period and the method used by the clerk in recording a marriage, as at various times the clerk kept a separate set of records for reference and stored the loose documents away from easy access.

However, whether or not all of the individual documents which might have originally been a part of a particular couple's *marriage record* have survived the decades and centuries is another matter, and so today a *marriage record* may actually only consist of one document, and in extremely rare circumstances, perhaps only the reference in the index to a record or document which no longer can be found in the court clerk's vault.

In the end, each marriage record which can be found in the court clerk's vault will consist of all, some, or just one of the following documents:

A **consent** to a marriage by the parent or legal guardian, if the bride or groom was considered underage by the laws of the time, usually under the age of twenty-one, was necessary beginning in 1799 before the any other documentation could be obtained from the court clerk.

There never seems to have been a standardized form for a consent, and so these, like most early marriage records, take the form of scraps of paper, but in later years can be found to have been written on stationary, voided checks, and even on blank areas of a newspaper page! Some consents are found with other loose documents, but many were pasted into the bound record books, and can still be found there. Time and wear has loosened the glue on some consents, and so they are just tucked in-between other marriage records for the couple or in a fold at the front of the volume.

If a consent is signed by the mother, it can usually be assumed that the father was deceased at the time her consent was given. If neither parent signs, the consent will usually indicate that the bride or groom is the "infant son or daughter of" and then name the deceased parent.

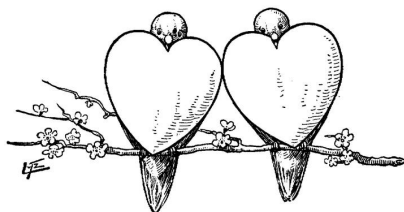
The **bond** documented that the bride and groom were legally eligible to be married and that the family or families were backing this claim, under the threat of a financial and legal penalties should it be later proved that either was legally ineligible. A **license** was then issued and given to the couple so that a minister or other authorized official could perform the rites of matrimony. Usually, there is at least a bond and/or license that is a part of any marriage record indexed in *General Index to Marriages 1 (1794-1893)*.

A (**minister's**) **return** in earlier days, later replaced by a **certificate**, provided documentation to the clerk that the marriage had actually taken place. There are quite a few records for which no return or certificate exists, at least in the court clerk's files, but this should not be taken as proof that the marriage did not take place; it most likely means that the no one completed the process and saw to it that the court clerk was properly notified with documentation of the marriage. There actually are some marriage documents on file which record that no marriage ever did take place. Other resources should be examined to be able to prove that the marriage did, indeed, take place.

An additional record, occasionally labeled in the Harrison County Court Clerk's record books as an **affidavit** or **marriage register**, also exists, and it is almost always

found in the bound record books, opposing the bond or on the backside of the bond. It is a bonus in that it records such biographical data as parents' names and birthplaces and those of the bride and groom, as well their current marital status (single, widowed, or divorced) and other data. More often than not this portion of the page does not have an identifying label attached to it at all, and may be considered to be more properly a part of the marriage bond.

Now that you know what you are looking for, where do you go to get it. One can find marriage records in a variety of places, but the **original records** are all in the Harrison County Court Clerk's vault at 313 Oddville Road,



Cynthiana, Ky. 41031 ((859) 235-0513; hrs: 8:30-4:30 Mon.-Wed. & Fri., open until 6:00 p.m. on Thurs.). Photocopies of each record may be ordered by mail for \$3.00 each, or photocopied in person for only 25¢ per page. The original index volumes are there as well.

Images of the original marriage indexes and records are also available on **microfilm** and **microfiche** and can be viewed using the microfilm reader/printers (copies 10¢) at the **Cynthiana-Harrison County Public Library** (www.CynthianaLibrary.org), 104 N. Main Street in Cynthiana ((859) 234-4881; hrs. 8:00 - 7:00 Mon.-Thurs., 8:00 - 6:00 p.m. Fri., and 9:00 - 5:00 p.m. Sat.) at the **Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives** (www.kdla.ky.gov),

300 Coffee Tree Drive, Frankfort, Ky. 40601 ((502) 564-8300; Library hrs.: 8:00 - 4:30, Mon. - Fri. Archives Research Room: 8:00 - 4:00, Mon. - Fri.

The archives also sells a 3-CD set of vital statistics indexes, which includes a marriage index for 1973-2000 (Available at their website).

The Kentucky Historical Society also has a limited set of marriage records on microfilm.

Published abstracts of Harrison County marriage records for 1794-1859 also exist. Volumes 6 thru 12 of *Abstracted Court Records - Grant, Harrison, and Pendleton Counties* by Janet K. Pease are sold by the Grant County Historical Society (P.O. Box 33, Mason, Ky. 41054) for \$50.00 each. The Cynthiana-Harrison County Library also has a set, as does the Harrison County Court Clerk's office. These same volumes are also available on microfiche for viewing at any LDS (Mormon) Family History Center around the United States (www.FamilySearch.org).

Online indexes are also available. Just go to www.HarrisonCountyKy.US and click on "Marriage Indexes." There an alphabetical every name bride and groom marriage records index lists every marriage record that exists on file in the county up to 1947 for those of European descent and up to 1949 for African Americans. Ancestry.com also has a selection of three 19th century marriage indexes for Kentucky, but a subscription may be required.

Published indexes are also available. Visit TheGenealogyGuy.com to purchase indexes from 1794 thru to the present. Ye Olde Genealogie Shoppe (www.yogs.com) also sells an index compiled by Charles Franklin for the years 1794-1832.