

The Genealogy Box



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

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Just Passing Through

With genealogical research, one of the ultimate goals for the researcher of an American pedigree is to *simply* determine just which individual was the immigrant ancestor of each line in the family tree. For some, to have an answer to the questions of “where did they come from and when?” is about as close to heaven on earth as you can get!

Just as the National Archives’ collections serve as the preeminent resource for immigration records research, so too are they the depository for passport records issued to American citizens traveling abroad in the past. The recent release of a new database at Ancestry.com based on those records raises the possibility of easily finding answers to a similar line of inquiry almost as interesting as the immigrant question. That question is “where did they go, when, and why?”

The Ancestry database is entitled “U.S. Passport Applications, 1795-1925.” A link to the database is featured at Ancestry’s home page.

The query page cites the four microfilm “publications” on which it was based, i.e.: Passport Applications, 1795-1905 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1372, 694 rolls), Passport Applications, January 2, 1906 - March 31, 1925 (M1490, 2740 rolls), Registers and Indexes for Passport Applications, 1810-1906 (M1371, rolls 1-3, 13), and Emergency Passport Applications (Passports Issued Abroad), 1877-1907; (M1834, 56 rolls), all of which are a part of Record Group 59, the “General Records of the Department of State”.

You can search the database by first name, last name, birth year, birthplace, residence, father’s given name and surname, the date the passport was issued, or any combination of the above. Another search category is entitled “other” and has proven the most useful in identifying those applicants from Harrison County.

Headings which will appear in the initial table of results include entries for the following categories: Name, birth date, birthplace, residence, passport issue date, father’s name, father’s birth location, father’s residence, whether or not the passport includes a photograph, and the name of the original record source on microfilm. Additional categories are included for the father’s name, his birthplace, and his residence (There are a few differences in the terms for which you can search and in the search results).

How to Search: Now, in locating the record of an immigrant, the simple knowledge that he or she was born abroad is enough for you to know you should begin a search in immigration records. But how do you know if someone ever left the United States? A search by an individual’s name might yield results, but if your family tree is large and unless you know of an instance of or reason for foreign

travel in your research subject’s background, then searching the database can be a very disappointing hit-and-miss project.

The list of surnames below is but a sampling of the surnames of individuals with Cynthiana or Harrison County roots or ties in the database:. This list is simply the result of performing a search by location (using the “other” search box), in this case Cynthiana, but the “trick” will work by typing in the names of other Harrison County towns and communities. However, the following list does contain a majority of those from Harrison County who can be found using this method. The families found include: Allen, Anderson, Ashbrook, Bangs, Bland, Bowman, Boyd, Breeden, Breiner, Brewsaugh, Brown, Caldwell, Chinn, Cleary, Coleman, Conner, Cromwell, Dalzelle, Day, Desha, Dickey, Dills, Elsey, Evans, Flynn, Fowler, Frazer, Givens, Goldberg, Gray, Griffith, Henry, Howard, Hudson, Lebus, Lewis, Long, McAdams, McDowell, Midden, Montgomery, Morton, Nichols, Packard, Peck, Peckover, Perrin, Rawlings, Ray, Scharwath, Shawhan, Shuff, Smith, Smith, Sneed, Stakelin, Stewart, Taylor, Thorn, Trimble, Victor, Waits, Wallingford, Walsh, Ward, Williamson, Wilson, Withers, Woolsey, Yancey, and Young.

Clues to discovering foreign travel may be found in referencing an individual’s obituary, biography, and in other documents. An indication of an occupation which required overseas travel would be one clue, a census record indicating children of foreign birth may be another.

For Business and Pleasure: Why would anyone want to leave the county? The reasons were varied. Cynthiana native Henry M. Boyd’s application recorded that he was to be employed in Guatemala City in Spanish Honduras. At the time he was a train dispatcher in

Galveston, Texas and was taking his wife and child to be with him. The passport record notes that this was not his first application, which is also evidenced by the reference to the 1911 birth of his son in Guatemala City.

As the passports lasted for only a brief period compared to ten years passports today, they were usually issued with one trip in mind. Miss Lela Yancey was taking a "pleasure trip," a cruise, to Panama.

Cynthiana native Mrs. Kathryn Scharwath was traveling to Italy, Germany, France, and Austria to "visit friends" as were several others. Cynthiana mayor and columnist John M. Cromwell and wife applied so that they could visit their daughter in Cuba, traveling there via Key West, Florida.

En Route to One's Roots: In 1922 Cynthiana resident Miss Celestine Breiner, who was born in 1870 in Alsace (France) but who had lived, along with her father, Fred Breiner, in Mason County since 1872 and in Cynthiana since 1882, was returning to France and traveling on to the British Isles, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and Belgium, no doubt to visit the home of her ancestors as well as to do a little sightseeing (Her application contains an interesting affidavit by a friend of the family, detailing the family's origins and movements since their departure from the "Old Country").

Even more can be done to flesh out the details of the journey abroad, beyond that information provided by the applications themselves. For example, using other resources available to the public, such as local city or county newspapers, the itineraries of two Harrison County natives can be filled in.

Stamp of Approval: They certainly weren't going as tourists to see the sights, but sights to be seen there were for the million-plus soldiers of the American

Expeditionary Force of World War I. None of the doughboys had to bother with applying for a passport, "Uncle Sam" made all the arrangements, but quite a few civilians who went "over there" to serve their government did need to. Among them was Cynthiana native Orié M. Howard (1885-1957), whose term of service abroad was "indeterminate," as no one knew when the war would end, and so a passport of 18-months was issued.

Orié had already worked "for a number of years as the expert dispatching clerk at the Cynthiana Post Office." Arriving in France in late May, 1918 he wrote that "work is very hard, hours long, conditions and equipment poor, but I am enjoying it. Had a wonderful trip over, no excitement, [and] fine weather. Feeling fine but lonely."

Just a few days later he revealed that he was in Bordeaux ("the whole city smells like wine") and wrote of the voyage, that "there were 29 of us postal clerks aboard, and Mr. Knox, the superintendent of [the] P.O. here, selected 3 to remain here, and I was one of them. I didn't want to stay here at all as I wanted to go on to Paris with the gang . . . The War Dept. on June 1st, takes over the delivery of all incoming mail to France, that is the mail for the A.E.F.[.] and we will have charge of the mail going to the States, the money order and stamp business."

The citations above are from his letters published in *The Log Cabin* in 1918. Not only did Orié get to see a lot of history made in France, a lot of the documentation of it passed through his hands in the form of letters to "home folks," which are treasured keepsakes for many a family up to this day.

The "Foreign Devil": Of all the applicant's intended destinations, perhaps the most exotic recorded up to that time for any Harrison County native was that of Miss Kathryn Blair (1898-1977),

daughter of undertaker Roger P. Blair and wife of Colemansville, Kathryn was among the second graduating class of Berry High in 1917, earning a degree from Transylvania College in 1920 and later entered Columbia University to earn her masters. It was shortly thereafter, when she was teaching at a college in Evansville, Indiana that she was asked to take an appointment in the University of Nanking to teach English. Just a few months later she arrived in Shanghai aboard the *The Empress of Asia* on October 12, 1924.

After her return the following year *The Cynthiana Democrat* published excerpts from her letters home, forming a 7,000-word virtual journal of her year abroad. Her stories of the sights she saw in China and Japan ranged from funny to the sadly bizarre. There was the story of a missionary in China who "went to the postoffice [sic], laid down a dollar and said, 'Give me some stamps[.]' The clerk said, 'What denomination, Madam?' She replied, 'Consecrated Methodist, Sir.'" Arriving in Asia a year after the magnitude 8.3 earthquake that hit Yokohama, Japan in 1923, Kathryn witnessed the devastation and wrote that it "is a sad looking place. The big earthquake of last September laid it low. Everybody said it was the most beautiful place in Japan, but it is a pitiful sight now . . . The people are queer. It rained yesterday and they went clamping around in wooden shoes with little stilts on them, 3 inches high and keep the feet out of the mud."

In later years her journal of letters was augmented by a full telling of her Asian adventures in a small 109-page imprint entitled *Yang Kwei-Tze ("Foreign Devil")*.

Bon Voyage!: As you have seen the passport application database can be the beginning of your own genealogical journey of discovery, if you are patient and learn how to use it. "Good Luck" & "Bon Voyage!"