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The Genealogy Box

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

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Indiana Jones & the Quest for the Family Jewels

At the beginning of every *Indiana Jones* movie, if Dr. Jones doesn't already have it, he has to go looking for it before he can go any further. What is "it"? After packing his fedora, a bullwhip, a pistol, he has to have a map showing the way to the treasure, of course! If you are planning on fulfilling a genealogical quest this year in Harrison County, then save this article, for it can be the map that will help to put you on the path of discovering skeletons in your closet, uncovering some long-forgotten family secrets, and finding the records which go into filling your own family treasure vault.

Although it may seem the obvious place to go, the court clerk's records aren't kept in the large white 1853 courthouse on Main Street any more. Look for the **Harrison County Court Clerk**'s sign over at 313 Oddville Avenue (US 62). The court clerk's office is the first place you should go, whether you are short on time or are in Harrison County for just a day. The records "vault" is open 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. weekdays (Closed weekends), but if you are an "early bird" they may let you in the Property Valuation Authority (PVA) entrance on the side of the building as early as 8 a.m. The office is also open until 6 p.m. on Thursdays. Two clerks staff the vault at most times, and both are knowledgeable and experienced in finding any record. However, you should remember that the 1700s and 1800s were a pretty long time ago, and so they may not be as familiar with the older records as they are with those with which they deal day-to-day. They will accept brief and specific phone ((859) 235-0513) and e-mail (harrclrk@setel.com) queries as to the availability of particular records, but they will not do genealogical research for you.

"Must see" court records (whether you are in the court clerk's vault or using the public library's microfilm collection) are marriage records (licenses, bonds, consents, and certificates), probate records (wills, inventories, sale bills, divisions, etc.), and deed and mortgage records.

All marriage records have been indexed, and you can use either the original handwritten indexes which are bride and groom indexes, arranged by the first letter of either the bride or goom's surname, then chronologically thereafter, or the corresponding modern transcriptions of these same indexes, which are alphabetical, every name indexes (The latter have become much preferred).

Two series of deed indexes exist, the older general indexes, which cover the first hundred years of recorded deeds, up into the 1890s, and the more modern grantee and grantor indexes. Be aware that there is some overlap between the periods covered by the two sets, and that there are different methods used in compiling each type of index. Each mortgage record volume has its own index.

Probate records and their indexes are situated just in front and to the right of the deputy clerks' desks in the vault. To effectively use these indexes, you need to have an approximate date of death for any research subject, as each volume covers a range of forty to fifty years, and within each the records are then indexed by the first letter of the surname of the deceased, then chronologically thereafter. The first probate record index, which covers the period from 1794 through to the mid-1850s does include an alphabetical index in the front of the volume, but Vol. 1 of the Pease abstracts offers a much better examination of probate records for this period (The abstracts are behind the clerks' desks to the right).

Other types of records which are not so prominently featured in the vault are also available such as guardianship documents, court order books, plats, and selected military records.

For your own future reference be sure to write down or photocopy any and all indexed references that you may find to the surname of your interest. Also be sure to make note of which indexes do not contain any references to that same surname, as well (Knowing where something isn't can prove just as valuable as knowing where something is). After you have a good idea of what exists and what you need you can then start copying the actual documents from the record books.

Copies are "self-serve" and are 25¢ per page (You can bring a supply of coins, inserting one at a time, or pay at the desk for the total sum when you are done).

Of course, you may save some time by checking online indexes before you go by using those at HarrisonCountyKy.US and other online resources, for instance.

From the court clerk's vault it is only a short trip over to the public library.

The Christine Burgan Kentucky Room of the Cynthiana-Harrison County Public Library, one block north of the Harrison County Courthouse on U.S. 25 at 104 North Main Street in Cynthiana ((859) 234-4881), has as many resources as anyone would need to fill out a Harrison County family tree without ever having to venture anywhere else: microfilm of U.S. Census records, microfilmed county court records (marriage, deed and probate records, orders, etc.), statewide vital records indexes (birth, death, marriage and divorce), death certificates, local cemetery and burial records, and indexes of monument transcriptions as well as funeral home records, court record extracts and abstracts (such as the 15-volume set of Pease abstracts), and local publications and county histories. There are also published genealogies, family surname files, and the E.E. Barton Papers. Phew!

The library stays open till 7 p.m. most weekdays (Fridays until 6 p.m. and Saturdays until 5 p.m), so after visiting the courthouse, you can either pick up where you left off using the library's court records on microfilm, or if you are short on time, or just examine those records resources which are unique to this library, such as the E.E. Barton Papers, genealogies, vertical files, yearbooks, microfilmed records, the Pease abstracts, and local funeral home records.

If a book interests you enough to pick it up, be sure to make a note of it and take notes from it. For only a dollar or two you might want to photocopy the title pages of those books you consult and make notes on the backsides to have an accurate and ready reference of the titles you have examined.

A few of the library's genealogical research resources may be available at other libraries, or available for loan or purchase in one format or another, but you can save some time and money by completing your research at the Cynthiana-Harrison County Public Library, where they are open until 7 p.m. and photocopies are still only 10¢!

(For more information about researching at the library, visit www.CynthianaLibrary.org and click on "Family History" or click on "The Kentucky Room" link at the home page of HarrisonCountyKy.US).

Although the **Harrison County Historical Society** (P.O. Box 411, Cynthiana, Ky. 41031) does not occupy a building of its own, many of its members "hang out" on weekends at the **Cynthiana-Harrison County Museum**. If you happen to be researching in Cynthiana on a Friday or Saturday (10 a.m. - 5 p.m.), you can stroll over to the museum from the library to its new digs in the Old Rohs Theatre at 124 South Walnut Street ((859) 234-7179).

The museum has hundreds if not a thousand or more artifacts on hand, which have been donated by those who have lived history, know of its value, and who would like to see it preserved. You may even be able to locate some actual piece of your family's story on display.

One mustn't forget that he real experts on genealogy and family history are all local, and you shouldn't dismiss the value of a well-written query to the genealogy or history society for the locale where your research subjects lived. The *Harrison Heritage News*, the monthly newsletter of the Harrison County Historical Society, for example, welcomes genealogical queries and publishes them at no cost to members and non-members alike. Also, such letters requesting research aid have often been read to those in attendance at the monthly meetings in Cynthiana. With the price of gas these days, the $12 annual membership fee can go a lot farther to bring history to your doorstep and for a lot less.

The publications of the society are also available for purchase at the museum, and you can examine their indexes before you arrive by looking at the publications page online at HarrisonCountyKy.US/Historical-Society/.

The **Harrison County Circuit Court Clerk**'s office, in the Justice Center at 115 Court Street ((859) 234-1914), offers limited resources for the visiting genealogist, but if there was ever any kind of legal dispute among your ancestors, relatives, or neighbors, this is the court they took it to. Most, if not all, of the court's original records have been removed and sent to the Department for Libraries and Archives in Frankfort, Kentucky, however the original multi-volume index of those records has been retained in the office (Hours - M-F: 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.; Sat.: 9 a.m. - noon).

If you are arriving in Cynthiana from afar, you might want to make some inquiries of the **Cynthiana-Harrison County Chamber of Commerce**. While they may not be able to assist you directly with your genealogical research, they can provide a good deal of information about Cynthiana and Harrison County. At their location at 203 West Pike Street ((859) 234-5236) you can pick up copies of the *Cynthiana Democrat's Answer Book*, as well as the annually-updated county maps and calendars also published by the *Democrat*. Local telephone books are also available, to help you discover who in the county shares the same surnames you are researching and who might be your cousins. Brochures detailing the city's architectural and historical sites, such as the Old Jail and points of interest regarding Confederate General J.H. Morgan's two "tours" of the city in 1862 and 1864, just to mention a couple, are also available.