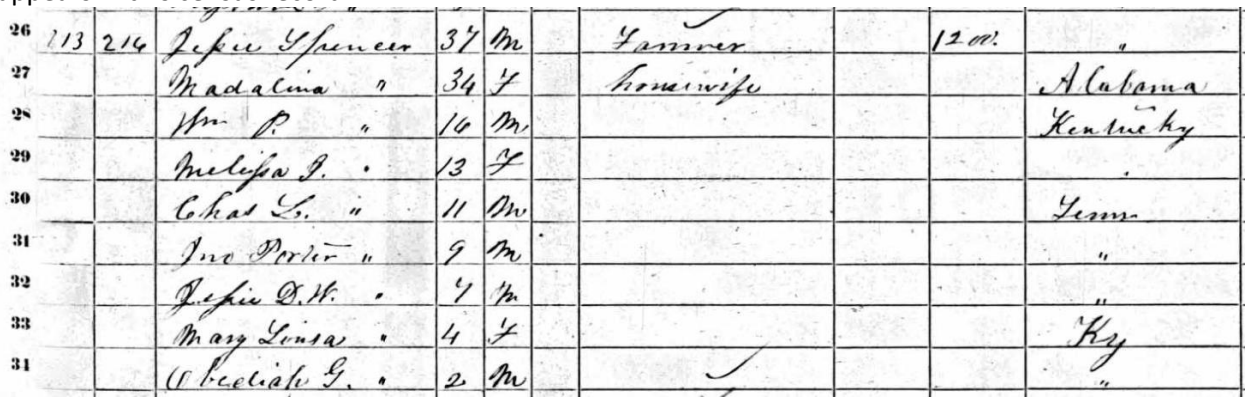
Beginning to Search for Kentucky Ancestors

Kentucky was the 15th state to join the Union. However, before becoming a state in 1792, Harrodsburg was established as the first permanent settlement in 1774. Kentucky County, Virginia was created out of Fincastle County Virginia in 1776. Other counties were soon created and the creation of local records within the area began.

The commonwealth of Kentucky has some of the richest local, county and state public records of any state in the Union. Although most have been microfilmed and are available from a variety of sources, some are still only available to the hardy researcher who is willing to venture into the dark recesses of the courthouse or archives and look for the unusual records that often bring glee to the eyes of family history researchers. Today we will look at some of the helpful records available to genealogists and discuss how to find these for our families.

Extracting & Analyzing Information from Census Schedules

Basic records are more available to researchers than ever before. Let's look at this young man who appears in this census record



26	213	214	Jepie Spencer	37	M		Farmer			1200	"
27			Madalina "	34	F		Home wife				Alabama
28			Wm P. "	16	M						Kentucky
29			Melissa J. "	13	F						"
30			Chas L. "	11	M						Tenn
31			Jno Porter "	9	M						"
32			Jepie D.H. "	7	M						"
33			Mary Louisa "	4	F						Ky
34			Obediah G. "	2	M						"

[Household 213/Dwelling 216, Jessie Spencer Household, 1860 US Census, Free Schedule, Calloway county, KY, New Concord PO, p 31, sheet 211, National Archives Micropublication M653, Roll 359.

The youngest person in this household is Obediah G. Spencer, age two years old. Notice he has several brothers and sisters, which is very helpful when resolving research questions. Obediah and his older sister, Mary, are enumerated with a Kentucky birthplace. Chas., Jno., and Jessie, the next three siblings are enumerated with Tennessee birthplaces, while Wm. And Melissa are recorded with Kentucky birthplaces. This indicates that the family moved from Kentucky to Tennessee between 1847 (when Melissa was born) and 1849 (when Chas. was born.) The family moved from Tennessee to Kentucky between 1853 (when Jessie was born) and 1856 (when Mary was born.) Researcher should note and record all pertinent information from the census schedules. It is interesting to note the "p" letter appearing in the name of the father represents a double s, making his name Jessie, not Jepie. Good research practice includes handwriting a copy of this information on a blank form. This insures a closer read of the information, and a clearer understanding. Blank census forms are available (https://www.ancestry.com/c/census-forms

)

Compiling Family Information with Sources

As we begin this research in Kentucky, compiling a Family Group Sheet for this couple will help us maintain our focus. A Family Group Sheet records the children and information for each couple. There are numerous types available. Here's one from Ancestry.com

(https://www.ancestry.com/c/charts-and-forms)

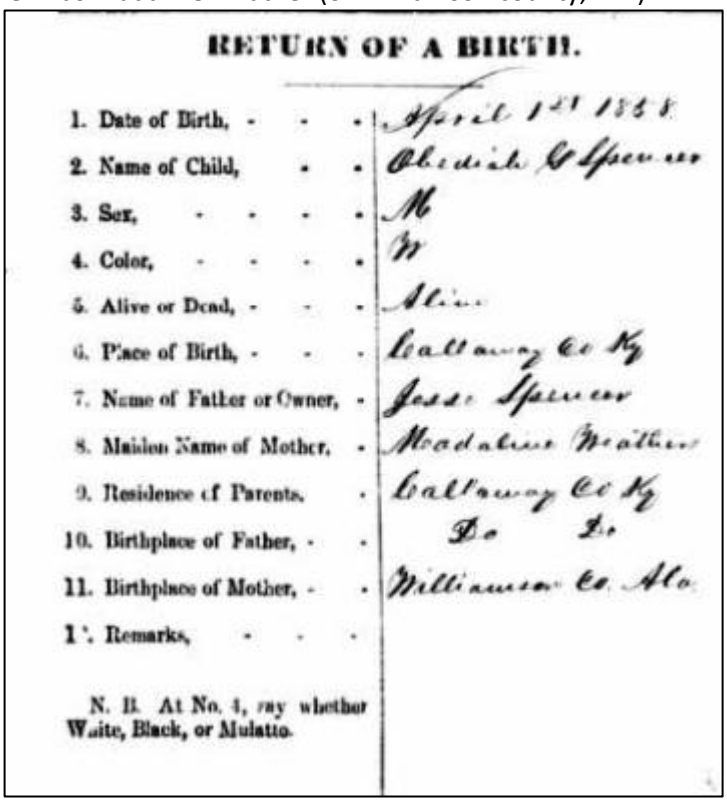
As we record this family on our chart, we note information that will be useful in our research. Providing a proper citation for information that we are recording.

Husband	Jessee SPENCER	Occupation(s)	Farmer
	Date—Day, Month, Year		City
Born	c 1823 [1]		
Christened			

According to this census record, Jessie and Madalina Spencer are the likely parents of Obediah.

Confirming Information With Additional Sources

Kentucky does have recorded birth records beginning in 1852. Called the Sutton Law, these records are not extant for every Kentucky county or year. Some counties continued to create records through 1910, after the requirement of the law had expired. The extant (available) records have been indexed with images are available on Ancestry.com (database 1213)(http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1213&enc=1) Below is the birth record for Obediah G. Spencer. His date of birth is 1 April 1858, and he was born in Calloway county, Kentucky. The information reported should be noted and recorded with the appropriate citation to remind us where it was found. This record indicated Obediah's father was Jesse Spencer (of Calloway county, KY) and mother was Madaline Wrather (of Williamson county, AL.)



RETURN OF A BIRTH.

1. Date of Birth,	April 1st 1858
2. Name of Child,	Obediah G Spencer
3. Sex,	M
4. Color,	W
5. Alive or Dead,	Alive
6. Place of Birth,	Calloway Co Ky
7. Name of Father or Owner,	Jesse Spencer
8. Maiden Name of Mother,	Madaline Wrather
9. Residence of Parents,	Calloway Co Ky
10. Birthplace of Father,	Do Do
11. Birthplace of Mother,	Williamson Co Ala
12. Remarks,	

N. B. At No. 4, say whether White, Black, or Mulatto.

[Birth Return of Obediah C. Spencer, April 1, 1858, Calloway county, Kentucky, p 1. Kentucky, Birth Records, 1852-1910, Ancestry.com (Originals at Kentucky Department of Libraries & Archives, Frankfort, KY)]

Next Steps and Learning About Area

Our research should be based on answering a question. Based on the information we have collected from Obediah C. Spencer's appearance in the 1860 census of Calloway county, and his birth record, we might have new questions to research. For example, does Obediah appear in other census

records? or our interest may lead to learning more about Obediah's father, Jessie. We should be very clear in developing a plan for research by leading with the question we want to answer.

Understanding the county and area where our ancestors lived is important. Many of the important records needed by researchers were created at the county level. Knowing the boundary changes of those counties is very helpful. The Newberry Library in Chicago has compiled these county changes into a wonderful site called the Atlas of Historical County Boundaries. (http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/) This site displays the historical boundaries over the modern boundaries, in a format than can be printed or saved.

Understanding the area might also include maps and gazetteers of Kentucky and surrounding states. Here are a few of my favorite online sites to gather these Kentucky items:

David Rumsey Maps – www.davidrumsey.com

Kentucky Atlas & Gazetteer - uky.edu/KentuckyAtlas/

Kentucky Geographic Feature Name Index - http://peabody.research.yale.edu/cgi-bin/Query.GNIS?ST=Kentucky

The Western Gazetteer; Or Emigrant's Directory… Samuel Brown, 1817. {Google Books) http://tinyurl.com/m8wvfqq

Historic Soil Survey Maps (Univ of Alabama) - http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/historicalmaps/soilsurvey/

Kentucky Co. Highway Maps, Photo, 7.5' Topos - ukcc.uky.edu/~maps/

Kentucky's Death Records

Uniform State-wide Vital Records for Kentucky began in 1911. Although these records are still being created, more recent years are restricted for direct family members only. Death records including certificate images are currently available on Ancestry.com through 1953. (http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1222&enc=1) and FamilySearch.org through 1967. (https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1417491)

COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY
State Board of Health
BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS
CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

File No.
Registered No. 7315

PLACE OF DEATH
County Todd Co.
Vot. Pct. Fairview #1 Registration District No.
Inc. Town Primary Registration District No. 1378
City (No. St. Ward)

(If death occurred in a hospital or institution, give its NAME instead of street and number.)

2 FULL NAME T. J. Camp. DELAY

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS

3 SEX Male | 4 COLOR OR RACE White | 5 Single, Married, Widowed, or Divorced (Write which) Widower

6 DATE OF BIRTH June 15, 1855 (Month) (Day) (Year)

7 AGE 75 yrs. 7 mos. 6 ds. If LESS than 1 day ..... hrs. or ..... min?

8 OCCUPATION
(a) Trade, profession or particular kind of work Farmer
(b) General nature of industry, business or establishment in which employed (or employer)

9 BIRTHPLACE (State or country) Todd Co. Ky.

PARENTS
10 NAME OF FATHER Dont Known.
11 BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (State or country) " "
12 MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER " "
13 BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (State or country) " "

14 I HEREBY CERTIFY, That the above is true to the best of my knowledge.
(Informant) W. H. Camp.
(Address) Elkton Ky. R 1

15 Filed 1/22, 1927 Ruth Croft Registrar

11-3184

MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

16 DATE OF DEATH Jan. 21, 1927 (Month) (Day) (Year)

17 I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from Jan 18, 1927 to Jan 18, 1927, that I last saw him alive on Jan 5, 1927, and that death occurred on the date stated above at 11 P. m.

The CAUSE OF DEATH* was as follows:
Cortis Stenosis
(Duration) 1 yrs. 4 mos. ds.
Contributory (Secondary) Interstial Nephritis
(Duration) mos. 5 ds.

(Signed) M. D.
Jan. 22, 1927. (Address) Hopkinsville Ky

*State the Disease Causing Death, or, in deaths from Violent Causes, state (1) Means of Injury; and (2) whether Accidental, Suicidal or Homicidal.

18 LENGTH OF RESIDENCE (For Hospitals, Institutions, Transients or Recent Residents)
at place of death ..... yrs. ..... mos. ..... ds. In the State ..... yrs. ..... mos. ..... ds.
Where was disease contracted, if not at place of death?
Former or usual residence

19 PLACE OF BURIAL OR REMOVAL Ebenezer Christian | DATE OF BURIAL 1-23 1927
20 UNDERTAKER Wallis & Haston | ADDRESS Hopkinsville Ky

N. B.—Every item of information should be carefully supplied. AGE should be stated EXACTLY. PHYSICIANS should state CAUSE OF DEATH in plain terms, so that it may be properly classified. Exact statement of OCCUPATION is very important. See instructions on back of certificate.

WRITE PLAINLY WITH UNFADING INK—THIS IS A PERMANENT RECORD

MARGIN RESERVED FOR BINDING

[Certificate of Death of T.J. Camp, 21 January 1927. Certificate #7315, Todd county, Kentucky. Vital Statistics Original Death Certificates – Microfilm (1911-1955). Microfilm rolls #7016130-7041803. Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, Kentucky. Image: Ancestry.com

There is a great deal of information found on a death certificate, but much of that evidence is given by an informant. The informant may be a member of the family with a good knowledge of the individual and surroundings or one with scant knowledge about the deceased's situation and family. We should use caution when reviewing this information. In this case, the informant did not report the name of Mr. Camp's parents. This informant, W.H. Camp, is the son of the deceased, but either did not know the parents or could not remember at this moment. The certificate does indicate the place of burial is Ebenezer in Christian county, Kentucky.

As we do with all genealogical research, we work from the known to the unknown. Since Mr. Camp died in Todd county, we should continue our research here, examining census records from 1920

backward noting the family, and changes with each snapshot in time. There are a wealth of other records in the county that could be considered and reviewed.

Considering Biographical Sketches

Some of my favorite records for Kentucky research are the biographical sketches found in the county histories. These may be found at Ancestry.com, Google Books or as a part of the KYGenWeb project. These biographies have been compiled from a variety of historical publications. These types of books called "mug books" because they usually required payment for a better biography or photograph, still provide details and clues that may prove helpful in our research. By searching for our subject, T. J. Camp in Todd county, this sketch was found at Ancestry.com.

THOMAS J. CAMP, farmer, was born June 15, 1851, in Todd County, Ky., and is the third of nine children born to William and Emily (Lewis) Camp, natives respectively of Hart and Todd Counties, Ky., of English descent. His early advantages for an education were poor, never having attended school for more than three months in all. He was reared on a farm and lived with his parents until of age, when he started in life for himself at farming. He was married on May 28, 1873, to Mary Annis McClelland, of Todd County, a native of Christian County, and a daughter of John and Hannah (Donoho) McClelland, natives of Christian County, Ky., and Sumner County, Tenn., respectively, of English descent. To Mr. and Mrs. Camp were born three children—John Thomas, William H. and Tina May. Subject lives with his mother-in-law on 126 acres of land. He and wife are members of the Presbyterian Church. Mrs. Camp's grandparents were David McClelland and Dimos Donoho.

[*Counties of Todd and Christian, Kentucky : historical and biographical*. Chicago: F.A. Battey, 1884. p 265.]

Although we should confirm the information contained in this sketch, it contains a great deal of information missing from his death certificate. Remember that names are often more common that we might expect. Two or more people could bear the same name within the same county or area. It might be tempting to search for the name and accept all results as valid.

Warning About Quick Online Research

We certainly want to use a variety of records, including family sources, governmental records and online resources, all collected with proper analysis and comparison. Be cautious about adopting any information without your thinking skills. Consider the following found in a general internet search:

"The Indiana Hanging. A Letter from One of the Spiritual Advisers of the Late Mr. Camp. Princeton, Nov 23, 1872. To the Editor of the Indianapolis Journal: I visited Thomas Camp, the murderer of John Riley Bilderback, as one of his spiritual advisers, several times during the last two months. Have conversed freely with him and prayed at the door of his cell. He was always ready to receive counsel and

advice, and under it has often given evidence of a degree of feelling; but, like others of his advisers, I had feared that he had never fully repeated, and of course had not been forgiven.

His religious training has evidently been defective, but his mental caliber has not been equal to others of the family to which he belongs. .. He is a young man of twenty-one years of age, but the act of murder of which he is convicted was committed two years ago." [Louisville Courier-Journal, Wed, 27 Nov 1872, Vol XLIII, 1,521, p 3 c3.]

Simple arithmetic will calculate the age of Mr. Thomas Camp from Todd county, KY in 1872 (the date of the article) as being twenty-one, the same age of the subject of the article. Notice the article was published in a Louisville, KY paper, being a reprint of an Indianapolis, IN newspaper. It would be very easy to make these two young men, one man. We must be cautious with our Kentucky records. Thomas Camp of Indiana was executed as the result of a Court Case in 1872. Thomas Camp of Todd county, Kentucky died in 1927 and is buried in Ebenezer Cemetery.

Looking Forward & Reminders

As you begin your research, it might be helpful to know that many county records, both original and microfilm are available at the Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives. Many published works and microfilm are available at the Kentucky Historical Society. Both facilities are located in Frankfort, KY, and their address and website follow:

Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives
Archives Research Room
P.O. Box 537
Frankfort, KY 40602-0537
www.kdla.ky.gov/

Kentucky Historical Society
P.O. Box H
Frankfort, KY 40602-2108
history.ky.gov

Remember these points as you work through your Kentucky Ancestors:

- We work from the known to the unknown.
- Our research should be based on answering a question.
- Family information should have an appropriate citation to remind us where it was found.
- Understanding the county and area where our ancestors lived is important.