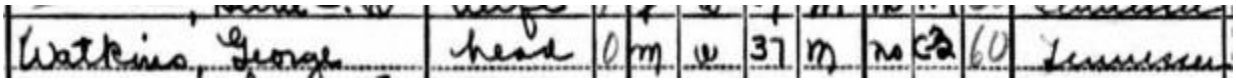
Beginning to Research in Tennessee

The land that became Tennessee was travelled by native populations and early explorers before becoming the sixteenth US state on the 1st of June 1796. It had originally been part of North Carolina. Many of the families who became Tennesseans had moved into the area from Virginia, North Carolina and other colonies. Let's look at a later young Tennessean, and see what records might be helpful.

George Clark Watkins was born in Ripley, Lauderdale County, Tennessee. According to the 1940 US Census, he was born around or circa 1903.



[George Watkins household, line 39, 1940 US Census, Ripley, Lauderdale County, Tennessee, ED 49-2, p 17A, NARA T627, Roll 3911, image available on Archives.com]

Available Birth Records in Tennessee

If George was our ancestor, we would know if he was deceased and could check a death certificate or obituary. But since we are starting our research in Tennessee, let's consider finding a birth certificate for George.

Statewide registration of births began in Tennessee in 1908. The four major cities (Chattanooga from 1879, Knoxville from 1881, Nashville from 1881, and Memphis from 1874) began local registration. These records are available at Ancestry.com

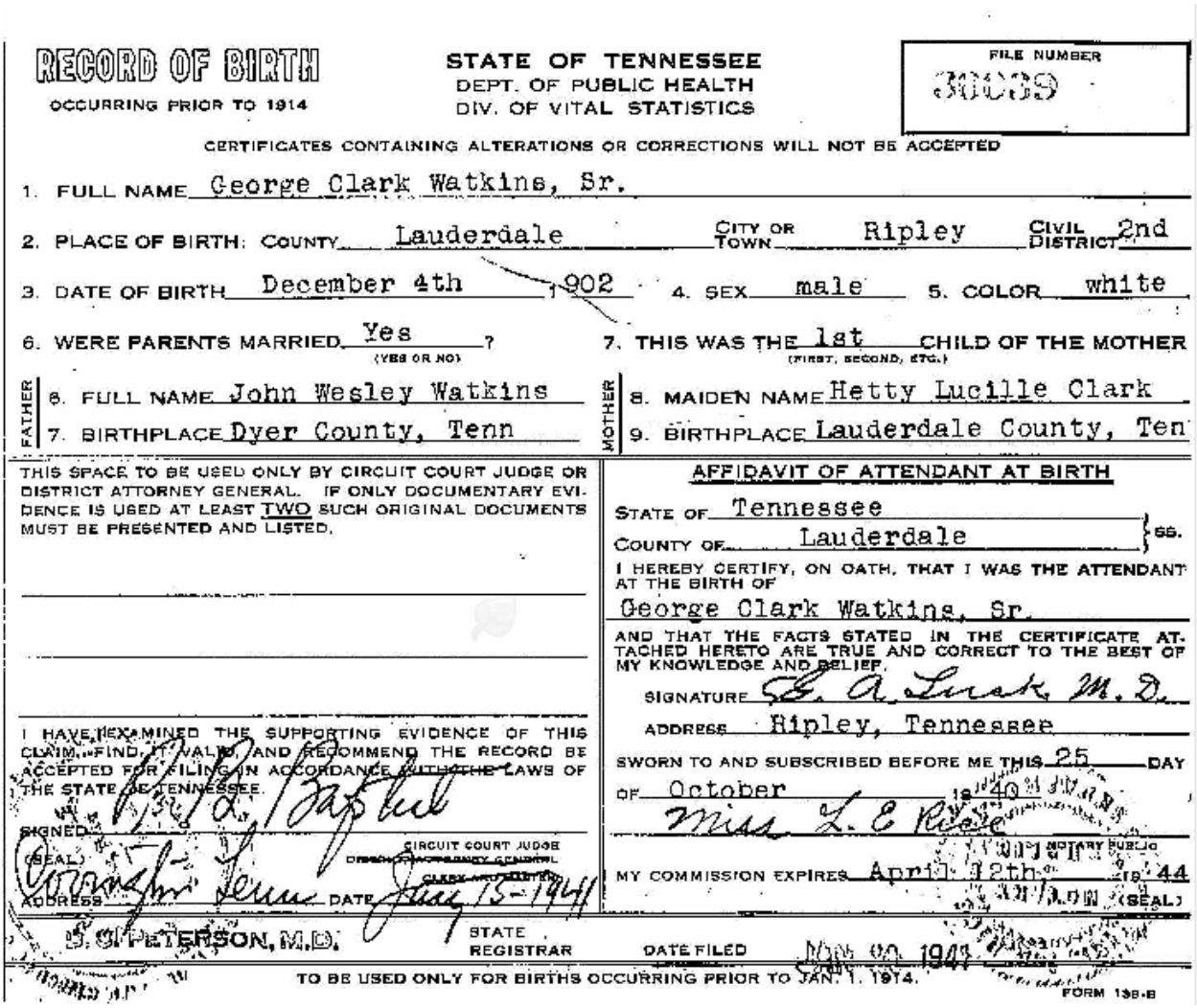
Tennessee, City Birth Records, 1881-1915 http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=2491

From 1908-1912, vital records were maintained by the County Court clerks in each county. These records for most counties have been microfilmed and are available at TSLA. There was no statewide registration law in place in 1913, but birth certificates were created statewide from 1914 until the present. Those birth certificates are available from the Office of Vital Statistics, Tennessee Department of Health. (https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/vital-records.html)

Some individuals (generally born before 1908) would provide evidence of their birth in order to obtain a delayed birth certificate. available. An index and the certificate image of these delayed records in Tennessee for individuals born 1869 through 1909 are available at Ancestry.com

Tennessee, Delayed Birth Records, 1869-1909 http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=2282

Here is the delayed birth record recorded for George Clark Watkins. Note that it contains an affidavit by the attending Physician at the birth of George, Dr. Lusk. It also contains the names of the parents and birth places as reported by Mr. Watkins. We want to record all relevant information, but note that it might not be completely accurate.



RECORD OF BIRTH
OCCURRING PRIOR TO 1914

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPT. OF PUBLIC HEALTH
DIV. OF VITAL STATISTICS

FILE NUMBER 30089

CERTIFICATES CONTAINING ALTERATIONS OR CORRECTIONS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED

1. FULL NAME George Clark Watkins, Sr.
2. PLACE OF BIRTH: COUNTY Lauderdale CITY OR TOWN Ripley CIVIL DISTRICT 2nd
3. DATE OF BIRTH December 4th 1902 4. SEX male 5. COLOR white
6. WERE PARENTS MARRIED Yes (YES OR NO)? 7. THIS WAS THE 1st (FIRST, SECOND, ETC.) CHILD OF THE MOTHER

FATHER
8. FULL NAME John Wesley Watkins
7. BIRTHPLACE Dyer County, Tenn

MOTHER
8. MAIDEN NAME Hetty Lucille Clark
9. BIRTHPLACE Lauderdale County, Ten

THIS SPACE TO BE USED ONLY BY CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE OR DISTRICT ATTORNEY GENERAL. IF ONLY DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE IS USED AT LEAST TWO SUCH ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS MUST BE PRESENTED AND LISTED.

I HAVE EXAMINED THE SUPPORTING EVIDENCE OF THIS CLAIM, FIND IT VALID, AND RECOMMEND THE RECORD BE ACCEPTED FOR FILING IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAWS OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE.

SIGNED ____ CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE / DISTRICT ATTORNEY GENERAL
(SEAL)
ADDRESS ____ DATE June 13-1941

AFFIDAVIT OF ATTENDANT AT BIRTH

STATE OF Tennessee
COUNTY OF Lauderdale } ss.

I HEREBY CERTIFY, ON OATH, THAT I WAS THE ATTENDANT AT THE BIRTH OF
George Clark Watkins, Sr.
AND THAT THE FACTS STATED IN THE CERTIFICATE ATTACHED HERETO ARE TRUE AND CORRECT TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF.

SIGNATURE G. A. Lusk M. D.
ADDRESS Ripley, Tennessee

SWORN TO AND SUBSCRIBED BEFORE ME THIS 25 DAY OF October 1940
Miss L. E Rose
NOTARY PUBLIC
MY COMMISSION EXPIRES April 12th 1944
(SEAL)

S. S. PETERSON, M.D.
STATE REGISTRAR
DATE FILED Nov 20 1941

TO BE USED ONLY FOR BIRTHS OCCURRING PRIOR TO JAN. 1, 1914.
FORM 138-B

Since we know that Mr. Watkins' mother was reported as Hetty Lucille Clark, we might consider locating her death certificate to learn additional information about each parent.

Finding Records of Death

Just like the birth records in Tennessee, the four large cities (Chattanooga from 1872, Knoxville from 1881, Nashville from 1874 and Memphis from 1848) began some registration. This expanded with records from 1908-1912 maintained by the County Court clerks in each county. Both series have been microfilmed. There was no statewide registration law in place in 1913. TSLA has created an index to those records from 1914 through 1933 as well. TSLA Statewide Index (1908-1912, 1914-1931) http://www.tennessee.gov/tsla/history/vital/index.htm

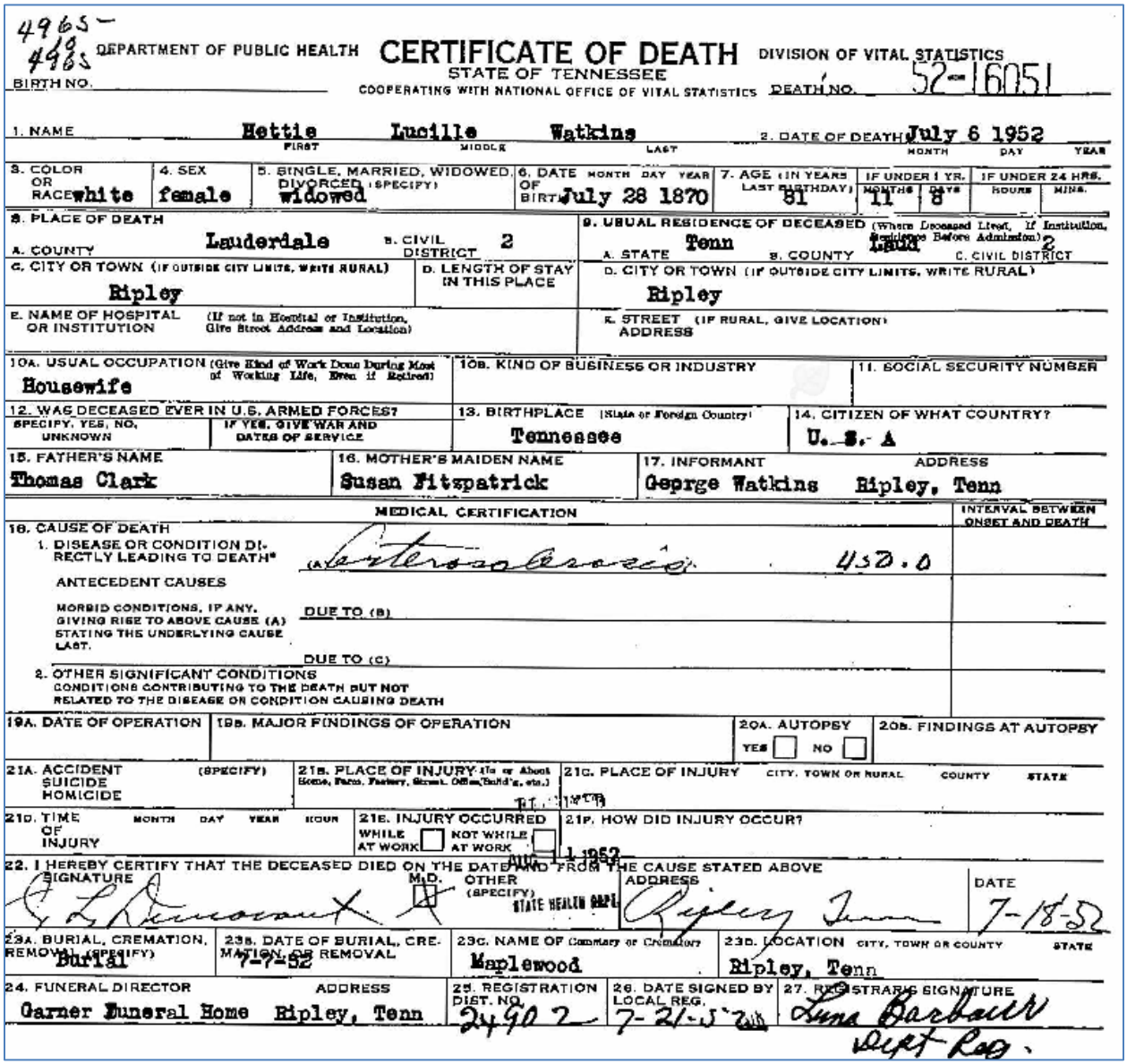
The early City Registration (pre-1908) , the imaged Death Record (1908-1912) or Certificate (1914-1958) available on Ancestry.com (indexed) http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=2376#

The death certificates (1908-1955) are also available at FamilySearch.org (indexed) https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1417505

If the Death Certificate is not yet available or can't be located, use the Death Record Index from Shelby County and request a death certificate from Vital Statistics or use the information to locate an obituary.

Shelby Co. Tenn Archives: Death Records (1949-2009); Shelby Co (1848-1961)
http://register.shelby.tn.us/

Hettie Lucille Watkins passed away on the 6th of July 1952 in Lauderdale County, Tennessee. Note the difference in the spelling of Hettie/Hetty between the two documents. Again, we will extract all information from this document for analysis. Notice that the informant, George Watkins, provided the name of Hettie Watkins' parents and her date of birth.



4965 —
4985

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH **CERTIFICATE OF DEATH** DIVISION OF VITAL STATISTICS
STATE OF TENNESSEE
COOPERATING WITH NATIONAL OFFICE OF VITAL STATISTICS

BIRTH NO. DEATH NO. 52-16051

1. NAME: Hettie (FIRST) Lucille (MIDDLE) Watkins (LAST) 2. DATE OF DEATH: July 6 1952 (MONTH DAY YEAR)

3. COLOR OR RACE: white | 4. SEX: female | 5. SINGLE, MARRIED, WIDOWED, DIVORCED (SPECIFY): widowed | 6. DATE OF BIRTH: July 28 1870 | 7. AGE (IN YEARS LAST BIRTHDAY): 81 | IF UNDER 1 YR. MONTHS: 11 DAYS: 8 | IF UNDER 24 HRS. HOURS: MINS.:

8. PLACE OF DEATH
A. COUNTY: Lauderdale B. CIVIL DISTRICT: 2
C. CITY OR TOWN (IF OUTSIDE CITY LIMITS, WRITE RURAL): Ripley
D. LENGTH OF STAY IN THIS PLACE:
E. NAME OF HOSPITAL OR INSTITUTION (If not in Hospital or Institution, Give Street Address and Location):

9. USUAL RESIDENCE OF DECEASED (Where Deceased Lived, If Institution, Residence Before Admission)
A. STATE: Tenn B. COUNTY: Laud C. CIVIL DISTRICT: 2
D. CITY OR TOWN (IF OUTSIDE CITY LIMITS, WRITE RURAL): Ripley
E. STREET (IF RURAL, GIVE LOCATION) ADDRESS:

10A. USUAL OCCUPATION (Give Kind of Work Done During Most of Working Life, Even if Retired): Housewife
10B. KIND OF BUSINESS OR INDUSTRY:
11. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER:

12. WAS DECEASED EVER IN U.S. ARMED FORCES? (SPECIFY, YES, NO, UNKNOWN):
IF YES, GIVE WAR AND DATES OF SERVICE:
13. BIRTHPLACE (State or Foreign Country): Tennessee
14. CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY?: U. S. A

15. FATHER'S NAME: Thomas Clark
16. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME: Susan Fitzpatrick
17. INFORMANT: George Watkins ADDRESS: Ripley, Tenn

MEDICAL CERTIFICATION

18. CAUSE OF DEATH
1. DISEASE OR CONDITION DIRECTLY LEADING TO DEATH*: Arteriosclerosis 450.0 — INTERVAL BETWEEN ONSET AND DEATH:
ANTECEDENT CAUSES
MORBID CONDITIONS, IF ANY, GIVING RISE TO ABOVE CAUSE (A) STATING THE UNDERLYING CAUSE LAST.
DUE TO (B):
DUE TO (C):
2. OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS
CONDITIONS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DEATH BUT NOT RELATED TO THE DISEASE OR CONDITION CAUSING DEATH

19A. DATE OF OPERATION | 19B. MAJOR FINDINGS OF OPERATION | 20A. AUTOPSY YES ☐ NO ☐ | 20B. FINDINGS AT AUTOPSY

21A. ACCIDENT SUICIDE HOMICIDE (SPECIFY) | 21B. PLACE OF INJURY (In or About Home, Farm, Factory, Street, Office, Bldg., etc.) | 21C. PLACE OF INJURY CITY, TOWN OR RURAL COUNTY STATE

21D. TIME OF INJURY MONTH DAY YEAR HOUR | 21E. INJURY OCCURRED WHILE AT WORK ☐ NOT WHILE AT WORK ☐ | 21F. HOW DID INJURY OCCUR?

22. I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE DECEASED DIED ON THE DATE AND FROM THE CAUSE STATED ABOVE
SIGNATURE: G. L. Dunavant M.D. ☒ OTHER (SPECIFY) STATE HEALTH OFFICER
ADDRESS: Ripley Tenn
DATE: 7-18-52

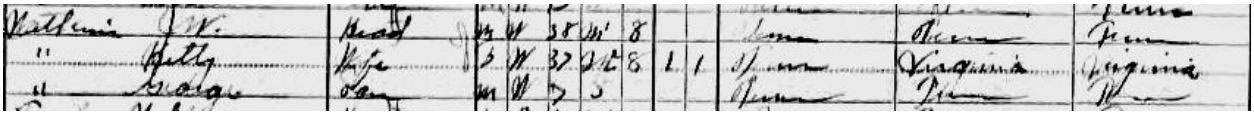
23A. BURIAL, CREMATION, REMOVAL (SPECIFY): Burial
23B. DATE OF BURIAL, CREMATION, OR REMOVAL: 7-7-52
23C. NAME OF Cemetery or Crematory: Maplewood
23D. LOCATION CITY, TOWN OR COUNTY STATE: Ripley, Tenn

24. FUNERAL DIRECTOR ADDRESS: Garner Funeral Home Ripley, Tenn
25. REGISTRATION DIST. NO.: 2490 2
26. DATE SIGNED BY LOCAL REG.: 7-21-52
27. REGISTRAR'S SIGNATURE: Lena Barbault Dept Reg.

As we collect new information, we should review and compare against the information we have. The Mother of our subject, George Clark Watkins, was named Hettie Lucille Clark Watkins. Perhaps, George's middle name was selected because it was his mother's name. We have no record that reports

that information, so we might want to note that as supposition or conjecture. We want to note by citation the source for all information we collect in our research.

Since the delayed birth certificate of George Clark Watkins indicated he was the first child of Hettie Lucille Clark Watkins, let's find this family on the 1910 US Census. They should be living in Lauderdale County, Tennessee. We can try searching for any of the known family members. If we try to specifically look for Hettie or Hetty Watkins, we don't find an exact match. Hetty Watkins is indexed as Betty Watkins. We could look for George Watkins who should be six or seven years old.



[Household of J. W. Watkins, Dwelling/Family 293/317, 1910 US Census, Ripley, Lauderdale County, Tennessee; ED 0096, p 16B, NARA T624, Roll 1509. Image available on Archives.com]

Marriage Records found in Tennessee

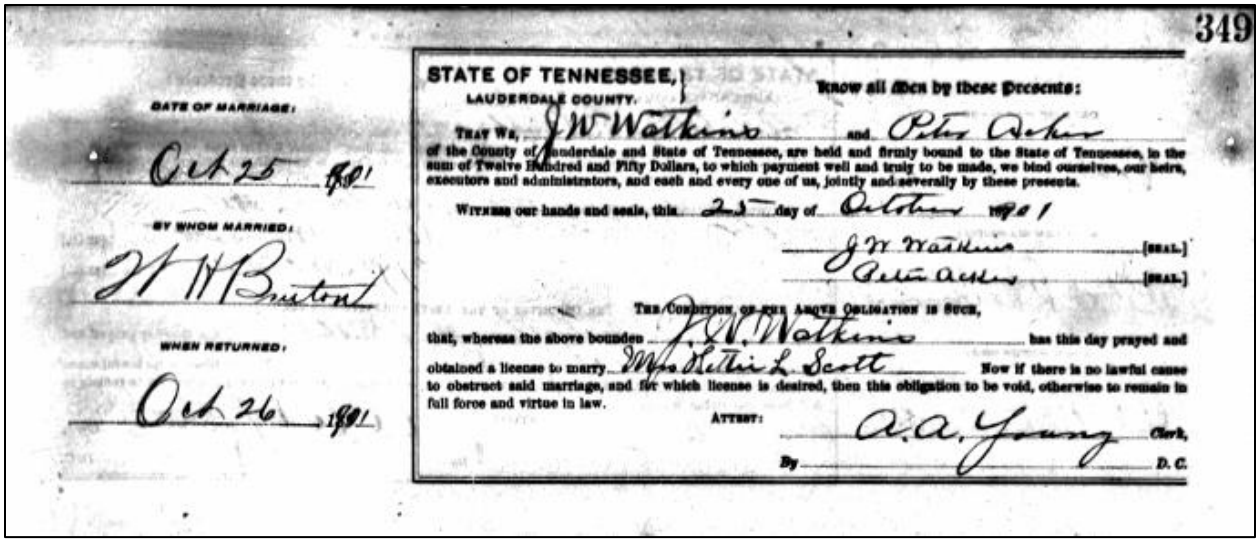
As we examine the details reported in this enumeration, we see that J.W. and Hetty have been married eight years. This would be 1902 by rough calculations. If you look carefully, you will see the little superscript 2 above the M on the line of Hetty. This indicates this was a second marriage for her. This enumeration also reports that George is the only child born of Hetty. They are all born in Tennessee, but Hetty's parents were born in Virginia.

Let's look for the marriage of Hetty Clark and J.W. Watkins about 1902. The process of obtaining a marriage license in Tennessee included a marriage bond (parental approval when required), then a license was issued, this would include a return notice by the officiate indicating marriage ceremony. After 1838, counties were required to bind marriage records in books. This explains why early loose marriage licenses may not be available. Once the use of registers became standard, many counties used printed marriage registers which recorded on one page per couple all the documents created in the steps. Most Tennessee marriages, however, do not supply information about birth locations or parents of the couple.

Although not comprehensive, good Tennessee marriage records may be found on Archives.com, Ancestry.com and FamilySearch. Many counties of the TNGenWeb project (www.tngenweb.org) have created indexes of local marriage records. When using online resources, remember not all database collections are equal. Additional marriage documents might have been filmed/digitized/indexed at different times. The original marriage records are under the jurisdiction of the County Court Clerk and/or local County Archives.

FamilySearch.org (1790-1950) https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1619127

Ancestry.com (1780-2002) http://search.ancestry.com/Browse/list.aspx?dbid=1169&path=



349

DATE OF MARRIAGE: Oct 26 1901

BY WHOM MARRIED: W W Bruton

WHEN RETURNED: Oct 26 1901

STATE OF TENNESSEE, LAUDERDALE COUNTY.

Know all Men by these Presents:

That We, J W Watkins and Peter Acker of the County of Lauderdale and State of Tennessee, are held and firmly bound to the State of Tennessee, in the sum of Twelve Hundred and Fifty Dollars, to which payment well and truly to be made, we bind ourselves, our heirs, executors and administrators, and each and every one of us, jointly and severally by these presents.

Witness our hands and seals, this 25 day of October 1901

J W Watkins [SEAL.]

Peter Acker [SEAL.]

The Condition of the Above Obligation is Such,

that, whereas the above bounden J W Watkins has this day prayed and obtained a license to marry Miss Hettie L Scott Now if there is no lawful cause to obstruct said marriage, and for which license is desired, then this obligation to be void, otherwise to remain in full force and virtue in law.

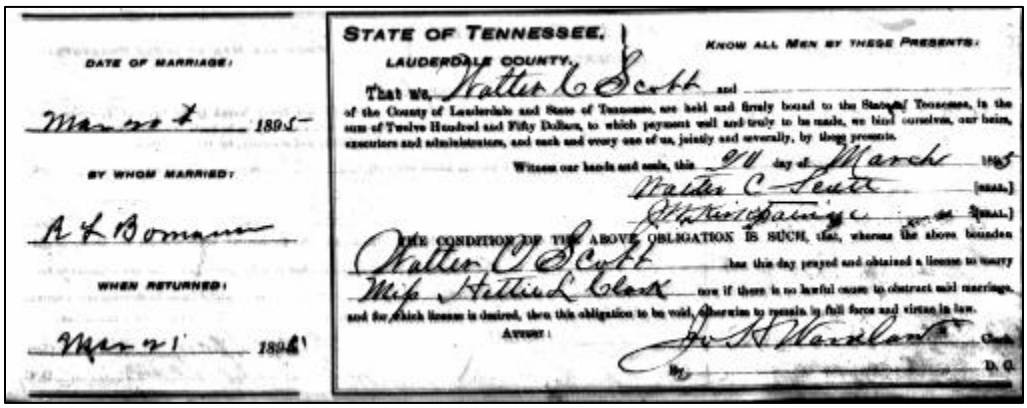
Attest: A A Young Clerk,

By D. C.

[Marriage of J.W. Watkins and Miss Hettie L. Scott, Lauderdale County, Tennessee, County Court Clerk, Marriage Bond Book (Apr 1881 - Jul 1902), p 349. Image available at Ancestry.com]

Since this was the second marriage of Hettie, she was first married to a Mr. Scott. In the registration of marriage bonds, we learn of the bondsman. This individual was usually a close friend or relative of the couple. Agreeing to co-sign a bond, the bondsman would be financially responsible if the marriage conditions were declared invalid and the groom was unable to pay the penalty/damages. We also learn who solemnized or conducted the marriage ceremony. If a minister, we may learn the church or denomination.

Here's a copy of Hettie L. Clark's first marriage in Lauderdale County, Tennessee.



DATE OF MARRIAGE: March 7 1895

BY WHOM MARRIED: A L Bowman

WHEN RETURNED: March 11 1895

STATE OF TENNESSEE, LAUDERDALE COUNTY.

Know all Men by these Presents:

That We, Walter C Scott and _____ of the County of Lauderdale and State of Tennessee, are held and firmly bound to the State of Tennessee, in the sum of Twelve Hundred and Fifty Dollars, to which payment well and truly to be made, we bind ourselves, our heirs, executors and administrators, and each and every one of us, jointly and severally, by these presents.

Witness our hands and seals, this 9th day of March 1895

Walter C Scott [SEAL.]

_____ [SEAL.]

The Condition of the Above Obligation is Such, that, whereas the above bounden Walter C Scott has this day prayed and obtained a license to marry Miss Hettie L Clark now if there is no lawful cause to obstruct said marriage, and for which license is desired, then this obligation to be void, otherwise to remain in full force and virtue in law.

Attest: Jo H Woodard Clerk,

By _____ D. C.

[Marriage of Walter C. Scott and Miss Hettie L. Clark, Lauderdale County, Tennessee, County Court Clerk, Marriage Bond Book (Apr 1881 - Jul 1902), p 133. Image available at Ancestry.com]

Be sure to extract and analyze all the information included in this record. Perhaps you are wondering whether Mr. Scott died or the couple divorced. As researchers, we move from what we know to what we don't know. This couple married in 1895, and should appear as a couple in the 1900 census. Each piece of data may be needed as we connect this family. The 1900 census enumerated Hettie C. Scott as a boarder and a widow. [John B. Keathley household, Dwelling/Family 46/48, 1900 US Census, Lauderdale County, Tennessee Civil District 2, ED 0083, p 3B, NARA T623, Roll 1583]

Biographical Sketches of Tennesseans

One of the great resources available for beginning Tennessee Researchers include the online resources of the Tennessee State Library and Archives. One of my favorite is the index to the published biographical sketches by Goodspeed. They are arranged by name and include the county of publication. However, they only index the subject, not all names within the biography.

http://www.tn.gov/tsla/history/misc/goodspeed.htm

Here is the biographical sketch of William R. Glenn of Lauderdale County, Tennessee:

William R. Glenn is a son of David and Nancy (Rainey) Glenn, who were North Carolinians, born in 1800. They were brought to Middle Tennessee in childhood and there married. Of eleven children born to them -- five sons and six daughters -- six are living. They were Methodists and the father was a Whig and a farmer, and owned 640 acres of land. He died about 1863 and his widow in 1881. Our subject is of Scotch-Irish descent on his father's side of the family. He was born in Williamson County, January 29, 1837, and was reared on a farm. He attended the common schools, and at the age of sixteen engaged as salesman in a dry goods store, continuing about two years. He then turned his attention to farming, and in 1861 enlisted in the Confederate Army in Company J, Ninth Tennessee Infantry, serving nearly four years, and was neither wounded nor taken prisoner. In 1870 he was united in marriage to Mary M. Graves who was born June 7, 1846. They have one child, William E. Both husband and wife are members of the Methodist Episcopal Church South. Mr. Glenn is a Democrat and cast his first vote for Fillmore. He owns 225 acres of good farming land.

[Glenn Sketch, Lauderdale County, *History of Tennessee*, W.A. Goodspeed, Nashville, Tenn., 1884, p 857.]

Next Steps and Learning About Tennessee

Our research should be based on answering a question. Based on the information we have collected from Hettie C. Clark Scott Watkins appearance in the 1910 census of Lauderdale County, and her approximate date of birth, we might have new questions to research. For example, does Hettie appear in other census records? or our interest may lead to learning more about the bondman for Hettie's first marriage, Mr. Fitzpatrick. 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 Tennessee and surrounding states. Here are a few of my favorite online sites to gather these items:

David Rumsey Maps – www.davidrumsey.com

Tennessee Gazetteer - http://tennessee.hometownlocator.com/addedit.cfm

Tennessee Geographic Feature Name Index - https://collections.peabody.yale.edu/cgi-bin/GNIS?ST=Tennessee

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

Tennessee County Highway Maps -

https://www.tn.gov/tdot/driver-how-do-i/look-at-or-order-state-maps/maps/county-maps.html

Looking Forward & Reminders

As you begin your research, it might be helpful to know that most original county records remain in the counties, either an Archives or the Office where they originated. TSLA has a microfilm copy of most county records and maintains an inventory of County Records on Microfilm. Be sure to take a look at this useful tool.

http://www.tn.gov/tsla/preservation/microfilmindex.htm

Tennessee State Library and Archives
1001 Rep. John Lewis Way N, Nashville, TN 37219
615-741-2764
reference.tsla@tn.gov
https://sos.tn.gov/tsla

Remember these points as you work through your Tennessee 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.