

Naturalization Records

KDLA Naturalization Records:

Court Records: *varies by county

County Court
Order Books 1780s – 1980s

Circuit Court
Order Books 1780s – 1970s

Circuit Court
Case Files 1780s – 1980s

Other courts include Quarterly, Chancery,
and Police. In some cases city records
should also be checked.

USCIS: (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration
Services)

1906 – 1956 C-Files
uscis.gov/records/genealogy

National Archives:

Up to 1991
Archives.gov/research/immigration/naturalization

Counties:

The following counties maintained
separate books documenting
naturalization records for portions of
time.

Barren	Boone	Campbell
Casey	Christian	Daviess
Fayette	Franklin	Fulton
Gallatin	Graves	Grayson
Hardin	Harlan	Jefferson
Jessamine	Laurel	Lawrence
Letcher	Madison	Marion
Martin	Meade	Montgomery
Pendleton	Perry	Pike
Scott	Shelby	Warren
	Whitley	

**consult staff for more information
about the dates each county listed
above maintained separate records.*

Background

Naturalization records document the process by which an immigrant became an American citizen. Naturalization was generally a two-step process undertaken over the course of five or more years. After residing in the United States for at least two years an individual could file a “Declaration of Intent” (First Papers) to become a citizen. Three years after this the person could “petition for naturalization” (Second Papers). Once granted, a Certificate of Citizenship was issued.

Pre 1790: Prior to statehood, Virginia naturalization laws applied to the region. In 1779, the Virginia Assembly granted citizenship to any white individual who was born within the territory of the state and all who had resided there for two years. In 1783, this law was replaced, and aliens were required to appear before a court in order to attain citizenship.

1790 – 1906: The first federal naturalization act was passed in 1790. Though amended many times the law generally made immigrants eligible for naturalization after living in the United State for five years. The process could be undertaken at any court (city, county, state, or federal).

1906 – The federal naturalization act of 1802 was repealed in 1906 and a more uniform system of naturalization was created. Though naturalization could still occur in nonfederal courts, the information collected was more thorough and had to be submitted to the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization for documentation. As of January 1, 1912, United States circuit courts were abolished and since March 1940, only federal district courts can grant citizenship to aliens in Kentucky.

Access

Most immigrants who became citizens were naturalized in the Court of their county of residence. However, any court could file naturalization so all courts should be checked. While records may include first and second, or final, papers not all people filed for both. It is possible for the papers to be filed in separate courts. Men were the primary applicants for naturalization. Children rarely filed for their own naturalization as they inherited the citizenship of their father. This derivative citizenship also applied to women throughout much of this time via their husbands. Women had little incentive to file for citizenship. In 1922 the Married Women's Act (Cable Act) was passed. The act granted a woman a nationality of her own, independent of her husband. It is after this point that naturalization records for women can be found.

Not all immigrants completed the process to become citizens. In order to determine if your ancestor may have naturalized, it is recommended that census records are first consulted. Federal censuses from 1890 onward, contain the year of immigration and the citizenship status. The 1920 census identified the exact year of naturalization.

Because naturalization could occur in any court it is often necessary to check multiple sources. County Courts and Circuit Courts are the best places to begin. As time progressed past 1906 the Federal District Court became increasingly likely to have these records. In some cases, counties maintained separate books documenting naturalization records. These books as well as court order books are kept on microfilm and are available for use in the KDLA Research Room. For remote access, or to place an order for records from this collection refer to our website at kdla.ky.gov.

Other Sources

Consider any of the following institutions for more information when researching Naturalization Records in Kentucky.

- **USCIS:** (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) maintain C-Files or Naturalization Certificate Files which have copies of any naturalization record generated by Federal, State, county, or municipal courts between 1906 and 1956.
- **National Archives:** naturalization records from prior to 1991 created by a Federal court are available through the National Archives.