

## Kentucky Circuit Court Records

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### Court Records:

Circuit (*Civil and Criminal*) Court      1809 - 1978

Circuit Court Records:  
Order Books / Minute Books  
Civil Case Files  
Criminal Case Files

*\*Availability varies by county, though typically begins with the creation of the county and runs to the 1970s*

### Background:

Kentucky's court system has been organized in multiple ways under the state's various constitutions. Civil, common, and criminal cases have primarily been within the jurisdiction of Kentucky's Circuit courts, though may have fallen under earlier courts such as those of the Quarter Sessions or District Courts. These court records are sometimes rolled into those of the Circuit Courts that inherited their responsibilities. For a more thorough review of the courts, the records they've created, and their navigation consult the Court Records Research Guide.

### Civil and Criminal Courts:

Circuit Courts have presided over civil and criminal cases for most of Kentucky's history. Cases are sometimes referred to as Ordinary or Common law (dealing with property), Equity and Chancery (dealing with rights), and Criminal or Commonwealth.

Civil lawsuits may include valuable depositions, exhibits, and divorces as well as legal disputes related to property, estates, and mental inquests. Criminal cases track the proceedings against those charged with serious crimes (felonies) by the grand jury. Documents created while trying a case are available as are the decisions, or actions of the court which were recorded in civil and criminal order books. Naturalizations may also be found in civil order books.

### Access

Circuit Court records at KDLA include Order Books as well as case files.

**Order Books:** The proceedings of the court are documented in the order books. Order Books are often indexed individually, though some counties created indexes that covered multiple years and books. Civil and criminal court records were often kept in separate books. Where available the indexes are the best place to begin a search of the order books. They are indexed by name of the individual associated with the order. The indexes are not comprehensive or always available. Order Books are arranged chronologically. If a date of the record in question is known they can

be browsed by date to attempt to find the reference. The order books are also a good source to use to learn more about a case and the dates it was heard in court when a case file is unknown. With a date range search parameters can be further defined to locate a case file.

**Case Files:** Case files can be an invaluable resource for their unique insight into the parties involved in the case. They often give context to an individual otherwise unknown from their historical facts. The files can include complaints and answers, summons, depositions, evidence, case histories, judgments, indictments, pleadings, motions, orders, transcripts, verdicts, etc.

- **Prior to 1977:** For cases prior to 1977 researchers can use a combination of indexes, electronic databases, microfilm indexes, or print lists to attempt to find a case number, drawer number, or docket number associated with the case in question. Indexes are searchable by defendant or plaintiff (civil) or by defendant (criminal).
- **1978 and after:** To locate a specific case file for any case after 1978 the Circuit Court clerk must be consulted. KDLA does not have indexes for these cases and cannot otherwise locate them without the information provided by the clerk's office.

No statewide index exists for the cases or books. The books are either in the original format or on microfilm, while the cases are only available as originals and 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](http://kdla.ky.gov).

## Other Sources

Consider any of the following institutions for more information when researching Circuit Court records in Kentucky.

- **Circuit Court Clerk:** Clerks should be contacted for any case after 1978. Files are housed at the State Records Center but require the approval of the creating court to access. The clerk also maintains the information to navigate and request the record which includes the case number, location, and accession number. Use this website to find the contact information of the appropriate circuit clerk: <https://kycourts.gov>
- **State Law Library:** The State Law Library of Kentucky has a long tradition of meeting the legal research and reference needs of Kentucky judges, state legislators, public officials and citizens. The library offers access to electronic legal services and houses an extensive collection of print materials and historical documents. *Contact: (502) 564-4848*