

Kentucky Divorce Records

Marriage Records:

Acts of the General Assembly
1792 – 1849

Court Records *varies by county
1792 – 1802 Quarterly
1797 – 1800s Chancery / Equity
1809 - 1977 Circuit

Office of Vital Statistics
1958 – Present
Contact: (502) 564-4212

Background:

Prior to 1809, a divorce in Kentucky could only be granted by the Kentucky General Assembly. Circuit Courts were established in 1802 but were not given authority to rule on divorce petitions until 1809. Divorces would continue to be granted by legislative act until 1849 when the state's third constitution was created. The new constitution prohibited the legislative body from issuing such special acts. Between 1809 and 1849 reference to divorces might be found in court records and/or among the Acts of the General Assembly.

Court records were not limited to the Circuit Court during this period. Several different courts operated in concert and had been, in some cases, since as early as the 1790s. These courts included Quarterly, Chancery, Equity, Common, and General. Though not technically given jurisdiction over divorces they should not be ruled out entirely for early divorce record searches. After 1850 divorce cases were limited to the Circuit Courts, which ruled on them as Civil cases. Divorced parties could not legally remarry while the other party lived. This remained the case until 1873. The Office of Vital Statistics was created in 1911 and keeps on file divorce records from 1958 to present.

Access

Records may be limited to the brief statement made by the legislature when issuing the act to divorce two parties, could be found in Court Order books as brief statements noting judgements, or may include more comprehensive case files documenting the course of the proceedings of the court. Other than those issued by the state legislature, divorces were recorded at the County level and are searchable for by county. Availability and holdings by county vary. To determine what years records are available for a given county refer to our online resources at kdla.ky.gov or contact staff at 502-564-1770. Court records at KDLA are often in their original format and may require more time to search and handle. Call ahead and plan accordingly. 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 Divorce Records in Kentucky.

- **Kentucky Historical Society:** resources include printed biographies and family histories, access to unique genealogical materials including Bible records, surname collections, and cemetery and church records. *Contact: (502) 564-1792*
- **Regional Historical and Genealogical Groups:** valuable organizations for their familiarity with local history. Can find collections or records of local families, churches, or other institutions that can facilitate the discovery of genealogical information.
- **Local Library:** often include a reference or special collection of local history or interest. Knowledgeable staff can direct research inquiries or lead to discoveries in local newspapers or records preserved as part of their collections.
- **Office of Vital Statistics:** Founded in 1911, the Office of Vital Statistics maintains records of divorce in Kentucky from 1958 to present. *Contact: (502) 564-4212*