

Kentucky Marriage Records

Marriage Records:

County Records

*varies by county

1780s – Early 2000s

Vital Records Registration Lists

*varies by county

1852 – 1862

1874 – 1878

1892 – 1910

Office of Vital Statistics

1958 – Present

Contact: (502) 564-4212

Background:

Marriages have been documented by the County Clerk beginning at the onset of each county. Marriage records consist of several separately filed documents including bonds, consents or permissions, licenses, certificates, ministers' returns, and registers. The issuance of a bond or license or filing of consent does not serve as evidence that the marriage took place. The certificate does, as it is only completed after the marriage by the minister or judge. Depending on the documents found, marriage records can provide insight on the ages of the bride and groom, places of birth of both and their parents, the parents' names, place of marriage, witnesses, and the name of the performing minister.

The first legislation requiring the registration of marriages on a state level was passed in 1852. Registration of vital events was assigned to the Auditor's Office whose tax assessors were to record reports of those events submitted to them by clergy who had been in attendance, as well as information gathered from each head of the household. Compliance with the law was minimal, and often proved incomplete or inaccurate in the details reported. The law was repealed in 1862 and was not revisited until 1874. Records were kept intermittently through 1878 and a few counties kept scattered records between 1891 – 1910. The Office of Vital Statistics was created in 1911 and keeps on file marriage records from 1958 to present.

Access

Records can include bonds, consents or permissions, licenses, certificates, ministers' returns, and registers. These may be together or filed separately and not all documents will likely be available for all marriages. These are sometimes available on Family Search. No statewide index exists for marriages. Marriages are recorded and searched for at the County level, with availability and holdings by county varying. 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. Marriage records at

KDLA are kept on microfilm and are available for use in the Research Room. For remote access, or to place an order for records from this collection refer to our website at kdla.ky.gov.

Discovering marriage records comes with an assortment of challenges. Determining the county where a license was issued, or certificate filed is difficult. While often issued in the county of residence of the bride or groom, this is not always the case. Officials often failed to report a marriage, or documentation was never completed for many other reasons. As late as 1980, the registrar of vital statistics estimated that 20% of all marriages recorded in Kentucky's counties were not reported to the state. Earlier records were likely far worse off than even this estimate. Records are thus often incomplete or inaccurate. In the cases they exist, indexing has not always been completed making searching them an imposing task.

Other Sources

Consider any of the following institutions for more information when researching Marriage 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 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 marriage in Kentucky from 1958 to present. *Contact: (502) 564-4212*