

The Genealogy Box



A supplemental newsletter for genealogy and family history research in Harrison County, Kentucky .

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The “Last-Known-To-Be-Living” Date

After filling in the blank with the name of your research subject on a family group sheet one, the next two items are the most important, yet elusive, of all, the individual’s birth and death dates. These two pieces of information are never as forthcoming as one usually thinks they should be.

Soon after beginning my own research, I began to realize that another date became just as important as birth and death dates in research, and that is what I call the “last-known-to-be-living date.” This is the date of the most recent document that you can attribute to your research subject, before you can accurately determine when they died. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it is usually the date of the U.S. Census enumerations, but it can be the date when somebody was listed as

the beneficiary of a will or perhaps when they were mentioned as a survivor in a relative’s obituary. Just about every type of document of interest to a genealogist can be used as a source for this date, but U.S. Census records make for one of the best.

When filling out any family group sheet, whether using a paper form, a word processor, a genealogy program (which may have to be tweaked a little to follow my suggestion) is to insert a row of blanks and numbers after the blank for their birth date that looks like this:

(__/50; __/60; __/70; __/80;
__/1900; __/10; __/20; __/30)

As each research subject is found in the census you can fill in each blank with the age that was recorded for each census year. If you find the person was 18 in 1880, fill in the blank to look like this: “18/80.” This way you know they were last alive on June 1, 1880, the Census Day of that enumeration (See the chart in the next column). It also serves as a checklist to use in finding and building a complete U.S. census record for each individual you are researching. In addition, as you fill in the blanks you have a figure with which to compare the accuracy of any future discoveries regarding a definite date of birth.

If I have no date of death to use to fill in the blank, I simply write, in parentheses, the “last-known-to-be-living” date after the blank, and having that date readily at hand helps in tracking down that final answer. Having a “last-known-to-be-living date” helps to eliminate many possible false matches in looking for an individual’s date of death, especially in communities

where there were several with the same name and age and who may have died around the same time as your research subject.

Census Day Thru the Years:

Technically the date you use for the “last-known-to-be-living” date should be the date of Census Day for that given year, if the census is your record source for this date, even though it may have taken many months for the census taker to come around and knock at your research subject’s door.

The information taken by the census taker was supposed to be accurate for Census Day alone, and not for the day he actually made the visit or the record. Having said this however, I always use the date of the census taker’s visit for my “last-known-to-be-living” dates, keeping in mind the fact that the earlier date is supposed to be the more accurate one. Besides, Census Days through the decades are much easier to remember!

The following table lists Census Days from 1790 thru 1930, and the length of time allowed for officials to complete each census is in parentheses after each date.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Census Day</i>
1790	Aug. 2 (9 mos.)
1800	Aug. 4 (9 mos.)
1810	Aug. 6 (10 mos.)
1820	Aug. 7 (13 mos.)
1830	June 1 (12 mos.)
1840	June 1 (18 mos.)
1850	June 1 (5 mos.)
1860	June 1 (5 mos.)
1870	June 1 (5 mos.)
1880	June 1 (1 mo.)
1890	June 1 (1 mo.)
1900	June 1 (1 mo.)
1910	April 15 (1 mo.)
1920	Jan. 1 (1 mo.)
1930	April 1 (1 mo.)

“Good Luck” with your research!

Breaking News!

Kentucky Death Certificates are now online! Filling in those dates of birth and death just got a lot easier. While microfilm of Kentucky death certificates is widely available at libraries throughout Northern Kentucky, the same images are now available online at Ancestry.com. A paid subscription is required to access them, but free trial memberships are always available. The database is entitled "Kentucky Death Records, 1852-1953." At the Ancestry.com home page click on "Search" at the top of the page, then "Browse by location" on the next page, choosing "Kentucky" from the list of states. Then you will see a list of record types available. Look for the title of the database under "Kentucky Birth, Marriage, & Death" and click. Hopefully, the answers to your questions should flow from there!

An Early Obituary? *Kentucky Ancestors*, quarterly genealogy publication of the Kentucky Historical Society, ceased publication this past spring, according to an article in the January 2008 edition of *Kentucky Monthly*. There the quarterly's fourth and most recent editor, Tom Stephens, bid farewell to the genealogy quarterly, one of the primary benefits of membership in the KHS for decades, and which has been published since 1965. However, Alice Rogers, KHS Director of Public Relations & Marketing, says that the magazine article was "incorrect," and that the magazine is still offered as a benefit of membership with the KHS, as of this writing. Yet I still can't find my summer and fall issues. Stay tuned . . .

Keeping Up with the In-Laws

While not necessarily an important part of every family history research project, it can often prove beneficial to keep track of the parents of every person who marries into the family tree you are researching. If your research subject is suspected or known to have been married and the couple subsequently moves away from their home county or out-of-state, one may lose all trace of them using local or home state records and their indexes, with perhaps one exception, the in-laws, who may have remained behind, "at home."

To locate your married research subject, bride or groom, be sure to examine the same set of vital records for the in-laws, as you would for any other member of the family, at least records such as death certificates, funeral home records, and obituaries.

Oftentimes, the death certificates will give the name and address of the informant, usually a relative, and maybe the one you lost track of and are looking for. Funeral home records and obituaries usually list all the survivors of an individual, where they lived, etc., and so, in this way you may be able to follow the movements of the younger generation by locating the death records and obituaries of the older generation.

In keeping up with the in-laws, you may be able to discover just where your research subjects "disappeared to."

Notable Quote

Try to live your life so that you wouldn't be afraid to sell the family parrot to the town gossip.

Will Rogers (1879-1935)

"Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall, Who is that Knocking at the Door?"

My great-great-grandmother, Emma Clarinton Stewart (1847-1914), daughter of Harrison County native Benoni Stewart and Williamstown, Ky. native Sarah Tully, spent her whole life in Grant and Boone Counties, Kentucky, as well as in Cincinnati, across the river in Hamilton County, Ohio. As far as can be discovered, she never went to Florida like Ponce de Leon, in search of a fountain of youth, but she found a way to cheat "Father Time" for many an instance, in fact, just about every time that the census taker came knocking.

In 1850 her parents couldn't lie, but she was just two years old (b. ca. 1848). As she was just about to hit her teen years, she turned 11 in 1860 (b. ca. 1849). Ten years later she was only eight years older (b. ca. 1851). She basically stuck to her story in the 1880s and in 1900, but by 1910 it would appear she was only seven years old when she married in 1866 (Her age was recorded as 51 in 1910).

In the end, the stone carver had the last word, when he cut "1847-1914" into the cold granite of her tombstone.

This only goes to prove that family's set of U.S. Census statistics are only as good as the knowledge of the informant who answered the door on any given day during a census year. However, one has to be especially careful at times, for when the census taker knocked, vanity sometimes answered!

