

Key Points to Remember

- The federal government does not issue land patents in Kentucky. Kentucky patents are authorized by Acts of the Virginia General Assembly (prior to June 1792) or the Kentucky General Assembly (after June 1792).
- Warrants do not identify a certain tract or location.
- There is no master patent map that depicts tract location. (This resulted in overlapping or shingling of land patents and disputes over land and mineral ownership.) Patent Maps can be constructed, however, once an "anchor patent" is identified and placed on a topographical map. Many Kentucky surveyors and engineers are willing to work with genealogists/historians to identify ancestors' landholdings. Computer software is also available for plotting land records.
- Neither warrants nor surveys convey title. Every step in the patent process must be followed. The Governor's Grant finalizes the patenting transaction.
- Military grants comprise a small portion of Kentucky land patents. Most patents were authorized by purchasing treasury, state, or county warrants/certificates.
- The only military warrants honored in Kentucky were for service in the French and Indian War, Lord Dunmore's War, and the Revolutionary War.
- Kentucky did not honor warrants for service in the War of 1812, the Mexican War, or subsequent conflicts. Those warrants had to be used in federal public domain states, such as Missouri or Illinois. (This partially explains the move westward by some Kentucky veterans or assignees; they had to relocate to a state that honored federal bounty land warrants.) Contact the Central Reference Division, National Archives, Pennsylvania Avenue, 8th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20408 for information regarding military service, federal bounty land, and pension applications.
- The Secretary of State's Office is the repository for over 100,000 patent files containing warrants, surveys, and grants. Researchers do not have to travel to Virginia to research Kentucky land patents prior to 1792. Those records were sent to Frankfort shortly after Kentucky became a state.
- Kentucky county formation must be considered when researching any facet of Kentucky history.
- There is no central registration of deeds in Kentucky. Deeds are filed on the county level with the county clerk along with wills and marriages. Courthouse disasters, such as fires or thievery, are just that -- disasters. Records not previously microfilmed or removed for preservation are lost.

- County tax lists from 1795 to the mid 1830's, available from the Kentucky Historical Society and the Department for Libraries and Archives, both in Frankfort, may provide critical information regarding original land patent recipients.
- Be creative when researching land patents! Names were spelled phonetically in many instances.
- Research all land grant series for your ancestor. If you have established that he or she settled in northern Kentucky in 1798, it is possible the patent was filed with the South of Green River or Tellico Series. From 1795 to 1815, the Land Office issued patents under three separate series -- Old Kentucky, Tellico & South of Green River. Mistakes in assigning patents to the correct patent series were occasionally made.
- Patents were issued to women as early as the 1700s. In some instances, they were heirs finishing patents initiated by their husband or a family member. In 1820, the Kentucky General Assembly allowed "poor widows" to patent up to 100 acres of land without fee payment.
- African-Americans patented land in Kentucky prior to the Civil War.
- Land Office holdings are limited to land patents only. Although applications listing parents, family history, etc., were not required, there are instances in which wills, or other affidavits of descent, are part of the patent file.