

Early African American Marriages in Laurel County, Kentucky

This document contains the contents of a ledger book housed at the Laurel County History Museum and Genealogy Center which supplies information about the earliest legal marriages of African Americans in Laurel County, Kentucky.

Originally labeled “Negro Marriage Register,” it was identified as “Marriage Register - Negro 1866-1875, Microfilm #L1235” when it was microfilmed by the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives. It is currently labeled “Black Marriages 1866-1875.”

Enslaved people were not allowed to legally marry in Kentucky and most other states. Even after the end of the Civil War, Kentucky did not allow African Americans to legally marry until after the 13th Amendment, which granted freedom to enslaved people in the United States, was ratified in December 1865 and made federal law. It should be noted that the Kentucky General Assembly did **not** ratify the 13th Amendment for another 111 years, finally doing so in 1976. *That’s not a typo.* It was 1976 when Kentucky ratified the 13th Amendment.

After the 13th Amendment became federal law in December 1865, the Kentucky General Assembly began amending state laws to conform with the newly granted civil rights of the now free African Americans. Finally, on February 14, 1866, Kentucky passed a law allowing former slaves to legally marry:

*“Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky: [Section 1.] That all negroes and mulattoes may intermarry with each other in the same manner and under the same regulations that are provided by law for white persons: *Provided*, That the clerk of the county circuit court shall keep separate records of the same.”*

And Section 2 provided that:

“All negroes and mulattoes who have heretofore lived and cohabited, and do now live together as husband and wife, shall be taken and held in law as legally married, and the issue held as legitimate for all purposes.”

They were required to declare their intention to remain as husband and wife at the County Clerk’s office and pay a fee.

[NOTE: The passages in quotation marks are transcribed exactly as printed in the Act of the General Assembly. The language is a product of the time in which it was written. An image of the Act in its entirety is on the following page. Please read it for yourself to see all the information it contains. The pages following the Act contain the records for Laurel County.]

Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky,
Passed at the Session of the General Assembly Which was Begun and Held in the
City of Frankfort, on Monday, the Fourth Day of December, 1865.

Published by Authority.

Frankfort, KY.

Printed at the State Printing Office.

George D. Prentice, State Printer.

1866

LAWS OF KENTUCKY.

37

CHAPTER 556.

1866.

AN ACT in relation to the marriage of negroes and mulattoes.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky:

§ 1. That all negroes and mulattoes may intermarry with each other in the same manner and under the same regulations that are provided by law for white persons: *Provided*, That the clerk of the county court shall keep separate records of the same. In addition to the persons now authorized by law to solemnize marriage, marriages between negroes and mulattoes may be solemnized by any minister in good standing of any recognized church of colored persons.

Marriage of negroes regulated by general law. But to be separately registered.

Who may solemnize.

§ 2. All negroes and mulattoes who have heretofore lived and cohabited, and do now live together as husband and wife, shall be taken and held in law as legally married, and the issue held as legitimate for all purposes: *Provided*, Such persons shall appear before the clerk of the county court of their then residence, and declare that they have been, and desire to continue, living together as husband and wife, when, upon the receipt of a fee of fifty cents, the clerk shall make a record of such declaration, and, for an additional fee of twenty-five cents, shall furnish the parties with a certificate of said declaration. Said record or certificate shall be evidence of the existence of the marriage and the legitimacy of the issue born or to be born to said parties: *Provided*, The issue of customary marriages of negroes shall be held legitimate.

Those heretofore cohabiting, declared man and wife, and their children legitimate. But must make declaration before county court, and same to be recorded.

Fees.

Record, evidence.

§ 3. It shall not be lawful for any negro or mulatto to intermarry with any white person, nor for any white person to intermarry with any negro or mulatto; and any person who shall so intermarry shall be deemed guilty of felony, and, on conviction thereof, shall be confined in the State penitentiary for any period, in the discretion of a jury, not less than five years. Those shall be deemed negroes and mulattoes who are of pure negro blood, and those descended from a negro to the third generation inclusive, though one ancestor of each generation may have been a white person.

Negroes or mulattoes not to intermarry with whites, nor vice versa. Penalty.

Who deemed negroes and mulattoes.

§ 4. This act to take effect.

Approved February 14, 1866.

Below is the microfilm cover page for the ledger book containing records of the earliest legal African American marriages in Laurel County, Kentucky. The original ledger book was donated to the Laurel County History Museum and Genealogy Center by the Laurel County Court Clerk's office several years ago.

TITLE TARGET

RECORDS FILMED FOR (USE NAME OF AGENCY):

Laurel County
County Clerk
London, KY.

TITLE OF RECORD SERIES:

1063815
Marriage Register - Negro

L1235

SERIES NUMBER (AGENCY RECORDS RETENTION SCHEDULE)

EARLIEST DATE OF RECORD:

1866

LATEST DATE OF RECORD:

1875

BOOK INDEX:

BOUND IN BOOK SEPARATE NONE NOT APPLICABLE

GENERAL INDEX AVAILABLE: YES NO

FILMING ARRANGEMENT (ALPHABETICAL, CHRONOLOGICAL, NUMERICAL, ETC.):

Chronological

COMMENTS

8 pages

IF RETAKES ARE NECESSARY, THEY WILL BE SPICED
AT THE END OF THIS ROLL

Provided by the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives for use in the filming of Kentucky public records,
in accordance with standards of the Department's microfilm certification program.

FRC-011
Rev. 10/87

Early African American Marriages in Laurel County, Kentucky

The following transcription was generously provided by Renee Beets of the Laurel County Historical Society in London and is reprinted here with her permission.

Each entry in the original ledger is on two pages. The left page has three columns: 1] Date of License, 2] Parties' Names and 3] Authority. The page on the right side contains one column with the Minister's Return.

There were several entries on each set of pages and the clerk used a lot of ditto marks. For clarification, Renee wrote the repeated words rather than using the ditto marks.

The authority for the marriages on pages 1 - 4 was the County Court Clerk R. L. Ewell.

NOTE: Images of the actual pages follow the transcription for each set of pages.

Marriage Register, Pages 1 - 2

Date of License	Parties' Names	Authority
18th of August 1866	Joel Kemper to Mary Pitman	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: Filed declaration of having lived as man & wife for three years and state desire to live as such. Certificate given etc.		
<hr/>		
Aug 18, 1866	David McKee to Amanda Pearl	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: Filed declaration August 8th 1866		
<hr/>		
Aug 18, 1866	Robert Brown to Lucinda	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: Filed declaration August 11th 1866		
<hr/>		
Aug 18, 1866	M. Brown to Rachel Pitman	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: Filed declaration August 11th 1866		
<hr/>		
Aug 18, 1866	Jerry McKee to Lily Barnett	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: Filed declaration August 11th 1866		
<hr/>		
August 18, 1866	Amos Pearl to Emily	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: Filed declaration August 10th 1866		
<hr/>		
August 18, 1866	Samuel McKee to Easter	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: Filed declaration August 4th 1866		
<hr/>		
August 18, 1866	David Jackson to Jincey	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: Filed declaration August 18th 1866		

NOTE: See the actual images on the next two pages . . .

NO.	DATE OF LICENSE.	PARTIES' NAMES.	AUTHORITY.
	18 th of August 1866	Joel Kempser to Mary Pitman	Clerk of Court
	Aug 18 1866	David McKer to Amanda Pearl	"
	" 11	Robert Brown to Lucinda	"
		M ^c Brown Rachel Pitman	"
		Jerry McKee to Lily Barnett	"
		Anna Pearl to Emily	"
		Samuel McKee to Caster	"
		David Jackson to Henry	"

MINISTER'S RETURN.

Filio declaration of having lived as man & wife for three years and still desire to live as such certificate given 96

Filio declaration August 18th 1866.

" " " 11th "

" " " 11th "

" " " 11th "

" " " 10th "

" " " 4th "

18th "

Marriage Register, Pages 3 - 4

Date of License	Parties' Names	Authority
Aug 10, 1866	George Cardwell to Mahala	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: Filed declaration August 1866		

Date of License	Parties' Names	Authority
Aug 10, 1866	James Butler to Easter	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: Filed declaration August 4th 1866		

Date of License	Parties' Names	Authority
Aug 10, 1866	Green Jackson to Mary McKee	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: Filed declaration August 4th 1866		

Date of License	Parties' Names	Authority
Aug 10, 1866	George McKee to Sally	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: Filed declaration August 4th 1866		

Date of License	Parties' Names	Authority
Aug 10, 1866	John Arthur to Eliza Collier	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: Filed declaration August 4th 1866		

NOTE: See the actual images on the next two pages . . .

NO.	DATE OF LICENSE.	PARTIES' NAMES.	AUTHORITY.
	Aug 10 1866	George Cardwell to Mahala —	Chk co Comr
	"	James Butler to Easter —	"
		Gunn Jackson to Mary McKie	"
		George McKie to Sally	"
		John Arthur to Eliza Colyer	"

India declaration august 1866

" " " " " "

" " " " " "

" " " " " "

" " " " " "

Marriage Register, Pages 5 - 6

Date of License	Parties' Names	Authority
1866, 2nd of June	Wiley Fletcher to Delpha Jackson	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: This is to certify that the rites of matrimony were on the 2nd day of June 1866 legally solemnized by me between Wiley Fletcher and Delpha Jackson at London Ky in the county of Laurel in the presence of W. H. H. Thompson & W. Aikman. -- Samuel McKee Minister of gos [gospel]		

Date of License	Parties' Names	Authority
August 18, 1866	Charles Lee to Mary Jackson	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: This is to certify that on the 19th day of August 1866 the rites of matrimony were legally solemnized by me between Charles Lee and Mary Jackson at Judge Jacksons in Laurel County Ky in presence of B. Brown & Jackson. -- Samuel McKee Minister		

Date of License	Parties' Names	Authority
Nov 29, 1866	Bartlett Brown to Allace Carr	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: This is to certify that on the 29th of Nov 1866 the rites of matrimony were legally solemnized by me between Bartlett Brown & Allace Carr at London Laurel County in presence of Isaac Carr & Wm. Carr. -- Samuel McKee Minister		

Date of License	Parties' Names	Authority
[Blank]	John Colyer to Eliza Dunn	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: [Blank]		

Date of License	Parties' Names	Authority
Aug. 29, 1867	Jeff Moore to Peggy Gibson	Clerk Co. Court
Minister's Return: Laurel County viz -- It is hereby certified, that under and by virtue of the within license, I did on the 27 day of July 1867 at the clerk's office in said county celebrate the rites of matrimony between the within named parties Jeff Moor & Peggy Gibson and that Wm. F. Watkins & J. T. Black and others were present and witnessed said celebration. Given under my hand this 29th day of July 1867. -- R. L. Ewell Minister C. C.		

Date of License	Parties' Names	Authority
1867	Moses Jackson to Sally Colyer	Ben Chesnut
Minister's Return: C. Colyer 25 Dec 1867; Witness Dorcus Chesnut & Martha Hall		

Date of License	Parties' Names	Authority
1868	Henry Moore to Elizabeth Colyer	R. L. Ewell
Minister's Return: Witness Robert Leake & John Colyer		

NOTE: See the actual images on the next two pages . . .

NO.	DATE OF LICENSE.	PARTIES' NAMES.	AUTHORITY.
	1866 June	Wiley Fletcher to Selpha Jackson	Chas Co Court
	Aug 18 th 1866	Charles Lee to Mary Jackson	"
	Nov 29 1866	Barrett Primmer to Allace Carr	"
		John Colyer to Eliza Drum	"
	July 29 1867	Jeff Moran to Bessy Gibson	"
	1867	Mrs Jackson to Sally Colyer	Ben Church
	1868	Henny Moore to Elizabeth Colyer	R L Emuel

MINISTER'S RETURN.

This is to certify, that the Rites of Matrimony were on the 2nd day of June 1866 legally solemnized by me between Wesley Spletter and Selpha Jackson at London Ky in the county of Laurel in the presence of W. H. Thompson & W. H. H. H. H.

Samuel McKee Minister

This is to certify, that on the 15th day of Aug 1866 the Rites of matrimony were legally solemnized by me between Charles Lee & Mary Jackson at Judge Jacksons in same county Ky in presence of B. Brown & J. Jackson

Samuel McKee Minister

This is to certify that on the 23rd of Nov 1866 the Rites of matrimony were legally solemnized by me between Bonted Brown & Alice Carr at London Same county in presence of Isaac Carr & Pr Carr

Samuel McKee Minister

Laurel County Ky;

It is hereby certified, that under and by virtue of the within License I did, on the 27 day of July 1867 at the clerks office in said County celebrate the rites of matrimony between the within named parties Jeff Moon & Peggy Libran and that Mr. F. Watters & J. J. Black and others were present and witnessed said celebration Given under my hand this 29th day of July

1867

R. L. Lovell

Minister C. C.

Witness 25 Dec 1867

Witness Darius Chumt & Martha Hall

Witness Robert Leach & J. H. Leach

Marriage Register, Pages 7 - 8

Date of License April 14, 1870 Minister's Return: Witness D. Fletcher and Emily Jones	Parties' Names Jerry McKee & Aimmy Sevier	Authority R. L. Ewell
Date of License January 24th [21st?] 1871 Minister's Return: Witness My Family	Parties' Names John Arther & Polly Johnson	Authority Sam McKee [?]
Date of License Dec 17th '74 Minister's Return: Solemnized 17 Dec. 1874 by Green Jackson at Dove Jacksons in presence of David Jackson & Ginsey Jackson	Parties' Names Humphrey Harden to Ruth Jackson	Authority Green Jackson
Date of License Dec 24th '74 Minister's Return: Married 24th Dec. 1874, at David McKee's, in the presence of Bolin Farmer & David McKee.	Parties' Names James Chesnut & Martha Jackson	Authority Green Jackson
Date of License March 10th 1875 Minister's Return: [Blank]	Parties' Names Peter Mullins & Mary Arthur	Authority [Blank]

NOTE: See the actual images on the next two pages . . .

NO.

DATE OF LICENSE.

PARTIES' NAMES.

AUTHORITY.

Went
14th 1870

Josiah M. & Susan D. Davis

R. L. Howell

January 24th
1871

John Arthur, Polly Johnson & Saml. Kea

Dec. 17th 74

Humphrey Hardin & Ruth Lockon

Green Lockon

Dec. 24th 1874

James Chismutt & Martha Jackson

Green Jackson

March 10th 1875

Peter Mullins & Mary Archer

Wm D. Fisher and Emily Jones

Wm D. Fisher
 my family

Salisbury 17 Dec 1874 by Green Jackson at Dove Jackson in presence
 of David Jackson & Lursey Jackson

married 21st Dec. 1874, at David McKee's, in the presence of John Farner & David McKee