

First Families of Tennessee

In 1993, on the eve of the Tennessee bicentennial, the East Tennessee Historical Society launched a new lineage organization, the First Families of Tennessee. The bicentennial year of 1996 closed with more than 14,000 charter members.

Due to popular demand, First Families of Tennessee is now a permanent program of the East Tennessee Historical Society. Membership is open to anyone who can document descent from an ancestor who was a resident of any part of what is now Tennessee by 1796. First Families of Tennessee application files provide valuable documentation on the family history of many of Tennessee's founders and pioneers and are available for genealogical research in the McClung Historical Collection of the Knox County Public Library, Knoxville.

ELIGIBILITY: To qualify for a First Families of Tennessee certificate, the applicant must directly descend from an ancestor who settled in Tennessee prior to December 31, 1796. The applicant must be able to prove descent from the ancestor (male or female) by an official record or records **for each generation, including proof for the applicant.** Current Tennessee residence is not necessary.

INSTRUCTIONS: The FFT application consists of two pages. Page 1 asks for information about the applicant and the FFT ancestor; page 2 is the line of descent chart. Please complete both to the best of your ability. If you have more than one FFT, a separate application is required for each. Only one ancestor will be inscribed on a certificate, except when the ancestor and spouse both are proven to qualify.

PROOFS: Applications must be based on credible genealogical research. For a list and explanation of suggested **primary and secondary sources**, see "Specific Sources of Proof" download below.

If your application is based on a previously approved application (such as a parent, sibling, grandparent, aunt, cousin, etc.) it is not necessary to resubmit documentation for overlapping generations. You need only to send proof of descent for generations needed to link you to the previously approved applicant. **It is still necessary to fully COMPLETE the FFT application and line of descent chart for ALL applications.** Incomplete applications will not be accepted.

Applicants are required only to submit proof of descent for each generation and proof of residence by 1796. Additional material is strongly encouraged, such as family group sheets, biographies, newspaper articles, photos of people, homes, and tombstones, and other material that may be of interest to future researchers.

SUBMITTED MATERIALS: All applications and documentation become the property of the East Tennessee Historical Society and the McClung Historical Collection and will be retained in the custody of the McClung Historical Collection. No original documents should be sent. Send a photocopy or other facsimile of pertinent materials.

Eligibility shall be determined by committee appointed by the East Tennessee Historical Society. The committee's decision shall be final.

Incorrect or incomplete applications will be returned for corrections and additions, and the applicant will be encouraged to resubmit.

HELPFUL HINTS:

1. Certified copies are not required.
2. Copies of original records encouraged but not required. Give exact source citations.
3. Published abstracts and transcripts are acceptable; include copy of title page.
4. You must complete the application page and line of descent chart for **ALL GENERATIONS.**
5. **A family history is acceptable proof for ONLY ONE generation of descent.**

Applications and photocopied proofs, along with a \$25.00 check or money order payable to the East Tennessee Historical Society, should be mailed to:

**First Families of Tennessee Certificate
c/o East Tennessee Historical Society
P.O. Box 1629
Knoxville, TN 37901
PH: 865-215-8824**

The purpose of the required documentation is to prove relationships generation by generation. Documentation must be submitted to prove each generation of descent. Below are examples of records which MAY prove relationships.

PRIMARY SOURCES are defined as contemporary and/or government records made at the time of the event by the parties involved. These records are deemed acceptable sources in proving relationship from one generation to another.

1. **BIRTH RECORDS and DEATH RECORDS:** Tennessee birth and death records have been kept statewide since 1914. Birth and death records also were kept for the period 1908-1912, but these are often incomplete and do not show relationships. Some of the metropolitan areas, such as Knoxville, Chattanooga, Nashville, and Memphis, recorded births and deaths as early as 1881, but these records are fragmented and often cover only a few months or years.
2. **MARRIAGE RECORDS:** Tennessee marriage records are available from the County Court Clerk in the county where the marriage took place. Marriages after July 1, 1945 also are available at Office of Vital Records, Tennessee Department of Health and Environment, Cordell Hull Building, Nashville, TN 37247.
3. **CENSUS RECORDS:** Although Tennessee federal census records are available beginning in 1820 (1830 for East Tennessee), the 1850 census is the first to name every person in the household and to include age and birthplace.
4. **WILLS/ESTATE RECORDS:** Wills/estates (testate: with will); (intestate: without will); guardianships, lists of heirs and relationship, name changes, and sometimes transfer of real estate. Wills and estate records are kept in the County Court Clerk's office.
5. **LAND RECORDS AND PLATS:** Purchase or sale of property often shows residency and marital relationship. Available from the county where the land was owned. Records are maintained by the Register of Deeds.
6. **TAX RECORDS:** Taxes were paid on property on a yearly basis. Records may be located in the Register of Deeds and/or tax assessor's office in county where the land was located.
7. **MILITARY RECORDS:** Records include muster-in and muster-out, pay vouchers, pension papers, and military bounty land warrants (before 1856) for WWI (1914-1918); Spanish-American War (1898-1899); Civil War (1861-1865); Indian and Other Wars (1816-1898); Mexican War (1845-1849); War of 1812 (1812-1815); Revolutionary War (1775-1783). Records are available from the national Archives & Records Service, 8th & Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20408.
8. **CHURCH RECORDS:** Church records often contain birth, death, marriage, and funeral information of their membership.
9. **COURT RECORDS:** Civil, criminal, divorce, and naturalization records begin from formation of the county and may be located in the circuit court or superior court where the event occurred.

SUPPLEMENTAL OR SECONDARY SOURCES are any sources in print that do not come from a contemporary or government record. These records will be evaluated as documentation on a case-by-case basis. The inclusion of these records is encouraged. Photocopies of these materials will provide valuable material for future generations in using this permanent file.

1. **FAMILY HISTORIES/COUNTY HISTORIES, PUBLISHED:** A published family history/genealogy or county history will be accepted for proof of descent for ONE GENERATION ONLY. When submitting this type of material, include a copy of the title page, photocopies showing direct ancestral descent and location of the book.
2. **BIBLE RECORDS:** Dated and/or undated. Include a photocopy of the page showing the publisher, date of publication, and the actual pages showing names, dates, and events. Identify current owners of Bible when known.
3. **OBITUARIES:** Dated and identified, when known, name of newspaper and location. Most libraries have copies of local newspapers.
4. **NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS:** Give name and location of newspaper. Clippings may include anniversaries, biographical sketches, awards, marriage notices, reminiscences, etc.
5. **BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORIES/SKETCHES, PUBLISHED:** many Tennessee counties have at least one history with biographical sketches.
6. **PERSONAL PAPERS:** Unpublished written data including letters, diaries, journals, reunion records, and manuscripts. Please include dates when known.
7. **TOMSTONE INSCRIPTIONS:** Submit photographs for transcriptions of the stone. Also include the name and location of the cemetery. Tombstones do not often indicate parentage.
8. **FUNERAL HOME RECORDS:** Local funeral home records when available, often give birth and death information, as well as names of parents and other relatives.
9. **LINEAGE ORGANIZATIONS (DAR, SOR, UDS, SCV, SAR & others):** Descents already approved by lineage organizations such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, Sons of the Revolution, Colonial Dames, United Daughters of the Confederacy, etc., or any other that requires proof similar to FFT documentary standards will be accepted. Submit a copy of signed and dated lineage application that includes line of descent. IT IS STILL NECESSARY TO FULLY COMPLETE THE FIRST FAMILIES OF TENNESSEE application and line of descent.

For a list of early Tennessee historical research sources, please send self addressed, stamped envelope to:
East Tennessee Historical Society
P.O. Box 1629
Knoxville, TN 37901