

Uniqueness of Kentucky

Kentucky is unique. Although Kentucky is one of fifty states, the commonwealth is like no other state in the Union. Kentuckians have every right to be proud of their homeland.

The history of Kentucky is one filled with adventure, drama, patriotism, and sacrifice. The pioneers that braved the hardships of life on the frontier, instilling a sense of courage and perseverance in their descendants that helped develop the uniquely Kentucky character. The people of the commonwealth are noted for their bravery, hospitality, loyalty, independence, and pride of place. Kentuckians are a warm and friendly people who welcome those who enter their borders. They are also a people who brook no nonsense. They are fierce in their devotion to fair play and have little or no tolerance for those who try to take advantage of others. If an individual is lucky enough to make a friend of a Kentuckian, that individual has a friend for life.

Although Kentucky represents a somewhat homogeneous society, each section of the state offers something different. Kentucky is far more than just thoroughbreds and the Kentucky Derby. There is more to the commonwealth than Daniel Boone and bands of pioneers blazing a trail through the wilderness, or of the legendary feuds of the eastern Kentucky Mountains. The state is made up of these images and more.

In Kentucky the accents of Virginia, the Carolinas, Maryland, and Pennsylvania can still be heard. The descendants of the early settlers brought with them not only their accents, but also their cultures. These cultures combined to form the unique culture that is Kentucky. The people of the commonwealth cherish the traditions of a bygone age. They are the epitome of Southern graciousness, and known for their hospitality. Good food and plenty of it, bespeaks the Kentuckian's desire to share their bounty with others. Few people could truthfully say that when in Kentucky, one could not dine well. Fried chicken, Kentucky ham, thick cathead biscuits, dripping with rich butter, delicate pastries, and all kinds of homemade sweets, tempt the palate of the most discriminating gourmet.

As an agricultural state, Kentucky has produced superior crops that have won the praise of the national and international community. Early in the state's history, three Kentucky crops made their influence felt throughout the world, tobacco, hemp, and corn. Kentucky tobacco remained for decades one of the most sought after products in the world. Tobacco users admired the delicacy of the state's burley leaf. Kentucky hemp provided ship's rigging for the U.S. Navy and bagging for the expanding cotton production of the Deep South. The importance of Kentucky corn in the commonwealth's economy cannot be overestimated.

One of the first laws that applied to Kentucky had to do with corn. The "Corn Patch and Cabin Rights" law went into effect in 1779. Virginia wanted to develop its western lands in Kentucky. Under the law, settlers had to prove that they seriously intended to improve their land claims in Kentucky. To do so the settler had to build a cabin and plant a patch of corn prior to January 1, 1778. With these requirements fulfilled, the settlers could lay

claim to 400-acres of land. The Virginia lawmakers failed to specify how big the cabin had to be, or how big the corn patch.

Corn also made its mark on Kentucky history in a far different way than some might have expected. After it is harvested, corn is a bulky crop to transport to market. In the days without good roads that allowed heavily burdened wagons to carry their cargos to market, bulk produce had to be used on site or made more compact. It did not take Kentuckians very long to figure out what to do with their corn crops. Tons of corn could be distilled into a much sought after liquid product—whiskey. Pioneer necessity helped create a product that became part and parcel of the Kentucky legend. Countless barrels of whiskey, and that uniquely Kentucky spirit—bourbon, poured out of the produce of the commonwealth.

The uniqueness of Kentucky goes beyond the standard symbols that are often associated with the state's image. The physical makeup of the commonwealth is as dramatic as any state in the Union. Kentucky has lakes, mountains, rivers, rolling hills, vast forests, and stretches of level land that are an agricultural paradise. The scenic majesty of the state is breathtaking. Kentucky has the nation's finest state parks system. From eastern to western Kentucky, the parks of the commonwealth offer the finest in Kentucky hospitality.

Kentucky history is one of the most important factors in making the state unique. From the writings of John Filson (1753-1788) in the first history of Kentucky (*History of Kentucke* written in 1784), to the recent works of a number of academically trained modern historians, Kentucky is rich in historical tradition. The pages of Kentucky history are filled with the exciting exploits of pioneers and their families. Later histories became more sensitive to the lives of the American Indian and to black Kentuckians who helped build the commonwealth through forced labor.

The student of Kentucky history has a wide choice of authors and interpretations to choose from. Humphrey Marshall wrote a one-volume history of the state in 1812, followed by an expanded two-volume study in 1824. Marshall's *History of Kentucky* is worth reading because it really provides the first attempt at writing a critical history of the commonwealth. Major works on Kentucky history continued throughout the nineteenth century. By the twentieth century the need for more objective histories had become apparent. E. Merton Coulter, Charles Kerr, E. Polk Johnson contributed to the body of work on the state's history. In the 1930s Dr. Thomas D. Clark wrote a one-volume history of the state that remained in use as a standard text for more than a half a century. In the 1990s Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter co-authored *A New History of Kentucky*. This one-volume work supplanted Clark's work and brought Kentucky history to the threshold of the twenty-first century.

The glory that is Kentucky may be found in many places. In history, art, literature, poetry, song, and sports. Bluegrass music is known worldwide. Some of the greatest artists in country music come from Kentucky. The songs of Loretta Lynn, Bill Monroe,

John Michael Montgomery, Ricky Skaggs, to name only a few, have made an impression on the music industry.

Every May, the anticipation of the Kentucky Derby draws the attention of millions of people throughout the world to the grandeur of the “Sport of Kings.” Kentucky remains the “horse capital of the world.” Sports in Kentucky involves not only horses, but also basketball, football, and a myriad of other sports. The people of the commonwealth are credited with the conversational term “I bet,” due to their love of competitive sports.

The American Indian referred to Kentucky as the “land of tomorrow” or the “great meadow.” No matter what the meaning, Kentucky is home to millions of people who live within its boundaries, as well as those who have an association from ancestry. Judge James Hillary Mulligan (1844-1915) of Lexington immortalized Kentucky in his famous poem “In Kentucky.” Mulligan captured the essence of Kentucky in the closing lines of the poem. The songbirds sing the sweetest in Kentucky; The thoroughbreds are the fleetest in Kentucky; Mountains tower proudest, Thunder peals the loudest, The landscape is the grandest— And politics—the damnedest In Kentucky Kentucky remains a grand place. It is the heart and soul of the nation. There is no place like it on earth.