

KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P. O. Box 641, Covington, Kentucky 41012

Bulletin

January 1998

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KCHS MEETING

Tuesday January 6

7 PM

**First United Methodist Church
5th and Greenup**

Program

**Tour of Church and Rectory.
Established in 1866. Jesse Grant,
father of U. S. Grant, was a
member. U. S. Grant worshiped
there, and his sister was married
there.**

Searching for Senours: The French Connection

by

Marilyn Wade Duff

Senour Road in Kenton County is a pleasant country two-lane Road, shaded by old trees and bordered with tansy and Queen Anne's lace. It runs from Taylor Mill Road to Fowler Creek Road and was named for my maternal grandmother's family, which were among the first settlers in the county. The old family homestead still stands, a split-log house covered with clapboard by a later owner, and then, over the years, with wild vines of ivy, Virginia Creeper and clematis. Today, its virtually obscured from view.

On a recent trip to Northern Kentucky, I began to delve into the genealogy of the Senour branch of the family. We've always pronounced the name "Senior." But years ago I began to question that pronunciation, since "Senour" has a French ending and cannot logically be pronounced other than "See-nor," which is indeed the way northern branches of the family pronounce it. I wanted to make the "French Connection," as it were.

In the summer of '97, I returned to Northern Kentucky for the search, which included not only records at the old Alexandria Courthouse in Campbell County where the earliest are kept, but also the Independence Courthouse, the Independence Cemetery and the Kenton County Public Library. I began with early census lists, will

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A message from the President.....

For 20 years the Kenton County Historical Society has focused on its mission to identify and preserve Northern Kentucky history.

As the millennium approaches, our mission becomes even more important before we lose the heroes and history which inform future generations. As the millennium approaches, we have more tools to gather the region's history more efficiently and completely.

Please consider how your time and talents will allow you to participate in this exciting and evolving venture. In the insert, you will find several projects for your consideration. A tear-off application or a phone call to me, Karl Lietzenmayer, 261-2807, will expedite our work.

books, marriage records, deeds and tombstone inscriptions.

The name, "Bryan Senior," first appears in local records in 1795 on a tax list for Campbell County, which at that time was the only county until Kenton County branched off. Genealogists and historians warn that, when researching a family name, the spelling must be ignored. In the rugged and chaotic first years of our country, newly arrived immigrants stood before officials and spoke their names. The officials, often with minimal education, wrote the names down as they heard them. If the official was of English origin, as most were, he might write the name as an English equivalent he recognized by sound. Thus, "Senour" became "Senior."

And often the immigrants themselves weren't sure how to spell their own names. Even if they did, they probably were standing on the opposite side of a table in a long line, watching the seated official enter it with a quill pen, only able to see the entry upside down and unable to correct the spelling.

Those quill pens presented a problem as well. They sputtered, blobbed and dragged. "E's" became indecipherable from "o's." "I's" lost their dots and looked like "u's," or vice versa. Genealogists warn that even first initials got misspelled so that "Glock" became "Clock," and so on. Add to that the fact that historical archives available to us today are copies, made by volunteers over many years: from quill pens, to smudgy pencils, to fountain pens, to ballpoint pens to typewriters--with endless possibilities for error and transmutation of spellings.

When Bryan Senior arrived in 1795, Kentucky was mostly wilderness. Its sparse population was clustered around Ohio river ports like Covington or Louisville and the central bluegrass plains around Lexington, Harrodsburg and Frankfort. A few new settlers dropped off along the Wilderness Road - Cumberland Gap route that was hacked through the forests and over the Allegheny Mountains by Daniel Boone.

But in 1795 Kentucky had been a state for only three years. Land grants were being handed out then to encourage new settlers as word spread in the eastern states of Kentucky's rich farming soil, as well as the beckoning rivers and forests with their plentiful fish and game. It was a great opportunity for adventuresome souls willing to become Kentucky "backwoods men."

Bryan Senior [sic] must have been one of those. He apparently arrived alone, with no possessions. After the names on the 1795 census there are spaces to be checked: "Total Blacks (slaves)," "Horses," "Cattle," "Acres," and Water Course or Town (where living). Bryan Senior has no checks in the spaces after his name. He was a man on foot who perhaps just stepped off a flatboat from the East, owning no slaves, no cattle, no horse, and no permanent address. The only notation following his name is "In the state since the 10th of March."

When he arrived on March 10, 1795, George Washington was still President, Thomas Jefferson was Secretary of State, and Benjamin Franklin had been dead only five years. Daniel Boone, Kentucky's most famous resident,

was still in the state, trying to divide and market land he'd laid claim to around Boonesborough (Lexington) to newcomers. He was eventually denied title to the land by an ungrateful U. S. government, and, disillusioned, remained in Kentucky for four more years before moving on to Missouri.

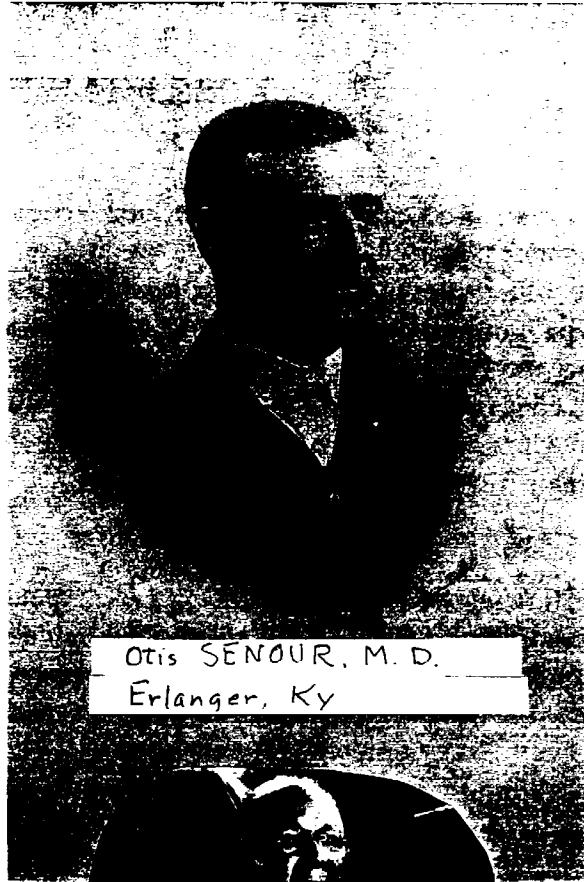
Bryan Senior is the only one by that name listed in the tax rolls of 1795, but he appears again in 1797 in the Will Book of Campbell County as a witness to the will of one John McCollum. He's identified as the deceased's son-in-law apparently having married Ann McCollum. Bryan, or Bryant as he now spells his first name, had not only found himself a wife in a hurry, but one with property! Today McCullum [sic] Road and Senour Road exist in close proximity to each other near Independence, the County Seat.

In Will Book entries, the name is spelled "Senior," "Senier," "Seneour," and "Senour," intermittently. Marriage records of this time began listing others beside Bryant: 1800, Phillip Senior to Mary Glore; 1805, John Senour to Rhoda Waymann; 1813, Phillip Senour, again, to Mary Mernan (the frontier took its toll on women and many men found themselves alone with children and needed another wife to carry on); 1814, John Senior (with "Senour: in brackets) married again, this time to Elizabeth Mernan (probably Mary's sister); 1816 Phillip Senour, for the third time, to Elizabeth Fuell; and 1818, Daniel Senour to Nancy Roach.

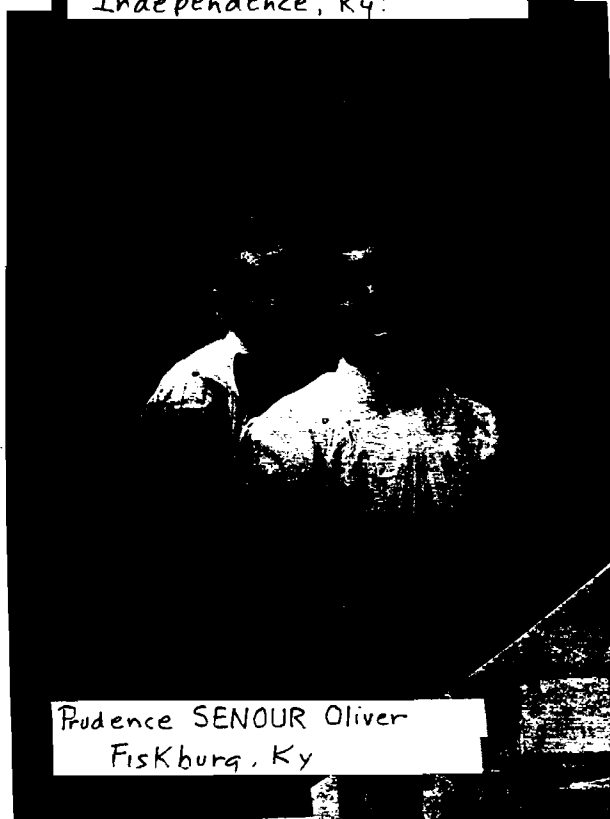
What grounds do I have for believing that these are forebears of my "Senours"? First, family lore has it that we are distant cousins of



Roena SENOUR Stephens
Independence, Ky.



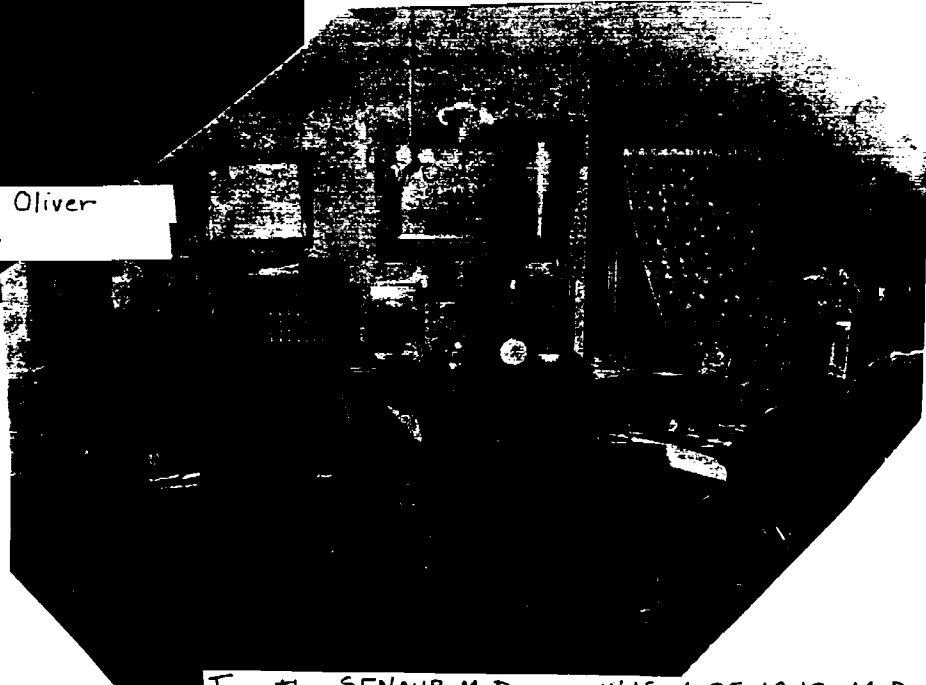
Otis SENOUR, M. D.
Erlanger, Ky



Prudence SENOUR Oliver
Fiskburg, Ky



Orville SENOUR
Witchita, Kansas



Timothy SENOUR, M.D.; son, Wilford SENOUR, M.D.
Bellevue, Ky.

KCHS MEMBER PARTICIPATION

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- 1. Program Chairperson** - The main focus of each monthly meeting is the program which should inform us about some history in Kenton County: tours of historic homes, churches or businesses, a lecture or paper delivered, re-enactments of historic figures. We need someone to follow up on ideas, make arrangements for meeting rooms, etc. **We also need members of the Society to offer program ideas to the Program Chairperson.**
- 2. Photo Coordinator** - Photo collection housed in Kenton County Public Library. Coordinator will collect and identify photos of known persons with Northern Kentucky roots, their homes, old street scenes of our area, attempt to identify events, persons, and locations on unmarked photos and judge the historical significance of the photo, create ways to motivate citizens to search their attics and drawers for historic photos.
- 3. Oral History Coordinator** - Record conversations with our elderly citizens about the past which would inform our sense of history and culture.
- 4. Staff for Northern Kentucky Heritage Magazine** - Editors to read papers, develop rapport with the "movers and shakers" of local history in all 13 counties. Assistants for bi-annual mailing to 730 subscribers; labeling, bundling, counting and delivering to Covington Post Office.
- 5. Keyboarding** - Enter papers into computer to produce a disk for publication use, indexing back issues of NKH Magazine on disk. Members living anywhere in the country could do this through mail or internet.
- 6. Volunteer Coordinator** - Recruit volunteers (through *Bulletin* or other) for above and future jobs. Follow up and match volunteers with jobs.

 I am able to volunteer in the following areas. Please send information. No(s)._____

I would like to discuss further the following areas before committing. No(s)._____

Name _____

Address _____ Phone () _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

the Waymans, a still prominent family in the area, and this early Senour-Waymam connection is established here. Second, during the same time period, these same four Senour men were appearing on the Census Lists and in the Will Book as witnesses and executors--with various spellings of the surname (Senior, Seneour, Senier, and Senour) but always the same four given names as in the marriage records: Bryant, John, Phillip, and Daniel. So we must assume they are the only four grown men in the area at this time by the name of Senour or a sound-alike.

Were these brothers? come to join Bryant in the wilderness state to homestead and lay claim to brides and land? So it appears. Traveling in those days demanded youth and vigor to survive. And the four men were marrying within years of each other, with the name *gradually settling into the Senour spelling*. At the same time, they were becoming respectable citizens as they witnessed wills, posted bonds for the marriage of others and staked claim to land.

But still no valid proof presented itself that the name was French. Not until I got to the Campbell County Census for 1820, that is. There, listed in a row, are Bryant, Seignour, John Seignour, Phillip Seignour, and Daniel Seignour.

"Seignour" is a French word pronounced either "senior" or "see-nor," with the "ig" silent. It is defined as "landowner, squire, farmer, or lord." As in most European countries, surname often mirrored occupations: Cooke, Baker, Taylor, Brewer, Smith. So it no doubt was with "Seignour." But on the rugged frontier of early

America, the odd, un-English spelling of the name had gotten lost. Until 1820.

In the sparsely populated backwoods of Kentucky, it's unfathomable that another set of men with the same four first names and a similar sounding last name existed at this time. No one else with a similar sounding name is listed in the 1820 census.

It appears that these men--Bryant, John, Daniel, and Phillip--were simply reclaiming the correct spelling of their family name. It's fun to imagine the circumstances which led to the brief re-assertion of the spelling.

Just as quickly as the French spelling appeared in the Campbell County Census of 1820, it was dropped. In ensuing records, it was Senour, for good and always. Only the pronunciation remains a matter of jolly contention between northern and southern branches of the family.

And so the "French Connection" for my Senour forebears was made. And having made it, I'm emboldened to go on and answer other intriguing questions about a French family that found its way to Northern Kentucky. Were they originally refugees from the French Protestant (Huguenot persecutions in Europe of the 1600s and 1700s)? Did they settle in the first Huguenot Settlements in New York State (New Rochelle and New Paltz) or did they make their way to Virginia and North Carolina with other French settlers? Could New Orleans, with its vast number of French immigrants have been their port of entry? or even Quebec?

And how did they find their way to Northern Kentucky? By

flatboat down the Ohio River from the east, or overland with the covered wagons through the Cumberland Gap? What motivated them to make such horrendous journeys through lands still populated with Indians and crisscrossed with roaring rivers? Typhoid, measles, malaria--all ravaged populations in crowded cities with no sources of pure water, no sanitary means of sewage disposal, no modern medicine. Were they fleeing the plagues and diseases which were decimating populations in the primitive cities of New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and Savannah at the time?

I hope to answer all these questions in time. The French spelling, Seignour, will lead me to its origins in the eastern United States, as well as Europe, as I continue my search.

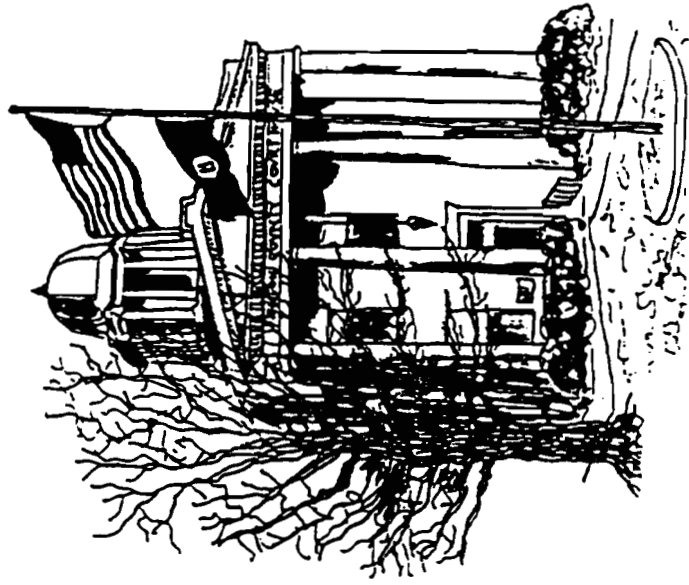
Well-preserved records in Northern Kentucky repositories made the connections to my Senours and enabled me to gain much knowledge of the family from the 1700s to present. None of it could have been accomplished without the help of historical societies intent on preserving history.

The author, a freelance writer who resides in Fullerton, California, grew up in Covington. Her husband is Covington native Cline Duff. They are lifetime members of the Kenton County Historical Society.

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**INSIDE: Searching For Senours:
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Dedicated to preserving our heritage as the "Gateway to the South"