

The Oates (Oats) family in Muhlenberg and Hopkins Counties, Kentucky

The large number of people named "Oates" or "Oats" in western Kentucky can be traced to a man named Jesse Oates. He was born in North Carolina in the 1700s and settled in Kentucky with his family in the early 1880s.

When he died in 1831, Muhlenberg County Court records show:

Jesse Oates will of Muhlenberg County, Kentucky, dated April 15, 1831. To wife Zilpha, to son Charles C. Oates, when he reaches the age of 21, to son Matthew Oates, to son Oliver H. Oates, to son Wyatt Oates, to son Richard M. Oates, to son Charles C. Oates, to son John M. Oates, to daughter Rachel Boggess, to daughter Betsy Dillingham, to daughter Zilpha Oates, to daughter Harriet Gough, to daughter Nancy Campbell and her orphan sons John Campbell and William Campbell. States his sons Jethro, William and David Oates having been given their share heretofore. Executors were wife Zilpha Oates, Richard M. Oates, and Vachel L. Dillingham. Witnesses: Ezias W. Earle and Robert Williams. Proven September County Court 1831. Book III, page 10-13.

In 1807, William Oates married Elizabeth Earle (daughter of Baylis Earle, Jr.) of Muhlenberg County (The Earles were originally from South Carolina). The young couple recorded the marriage in Hopkins County (it was the first marriage in the Hopkins County records).

Also among the first records of the Oates in Muhlenberg County are court orders showing Jethro Oates (Captain), Bryant Oates, and William Oates as "Patrollers" in 1812. (Since Bryant didn't show up in Jesse's will, it's possible that he died before his father).

In County records for 1815, a road was being surveyed "from Greenville to the branch running through Jesse Oates's Plantation, leading from Greenville to Earle's Mill on River." The road appears to have connected other landowners including Jethro Oates and Spencer Standley. (This is probably the family of Susan E. Standley who was later to marry William and Elizabeth's son, William W. Oates of our line).

In the U.S. Census, Jesse and two of his sons (William and David) are listed in the 1820 Census for Muhlenberg County. Richard M. Oates and Bryant Oates are listed as living across the river in Hopkins County. (It's possible that Bryant Oates-- who is about the same age as William, David, and Jethro) was a son who died before Jesse and therefore was not mentioned in his will of 1831.

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In 1830, the U.S. Census shows only Jethro Oates in Hopkins County (Bryant is no longer there); four Oats are listed in Muhlenberg: Jesse Oats (the father), David Oats, John M. Oats, and William Oats.

In the 1840 U.S. Census, Charles Oates as well as Percy Oates and Keaton H. Oates also appear in Hopkins County. Their ages indicate that they may be sons of Jethro. Meanwhile, in Muhlenberg County, we now have Zelpha Oates (widow of Jesse), a younger Jesse Oats, three sons of Jesse (Matthew, John, and David) as well as Elizabeth Oats (widow of William Oats) and Baylis Oates (son of William and Elizabeth).

In 1850, there are a handful of Oates in Hopkins County. Most of the Oats (Oates) seem to be living in Muhlenberg. Baylis E. Oates (age 41) is living there with his family, including Elizabeth Oates (formerly Elizabeth Earle -- age 54), widow of William. David Oates (age 58) and John M. Oates (age 52) are also listed as farmers in Muhlenberg. Also listed are some of the younger generation: CC Oates (age 25) and Emeline Oates (age 17).

The history of Muhlenberg County mentions William W. Oates (probably "our" William's nephew and cousin to our William W. Oates). He was reared on the farm where he was born 19 July, 1841. William W. was the son of Matthew and Martha Oates ("natives of Muhlenberg County and North Carolina, respectively) -- the second of five boys and one girl. When he was twenty years old, he enlisted in the Civil war in 1861 in Company K, the 11th Kentucky Volunteer Infantry (he fought at the Battle of Shiloh and was in the hospital for a year). William W. Oates owned 175 acres and married Elizabeth Coleman. They had nine children: Matthew A., Carroll E., Mary J., Viola V., Florence J., Effa M., Willis D., Lawrence G., and Vance. (In the 1880 U.S. Census, at the age of 43, he and Elizabeth had only seven children).