

David Christopher: Pioneer

David Christopher, the first Christopher in Madison County, was a prosperous planter and a member of a family that settled in the Piedmont along the Virginia-North Carolina border in the late 1700s. The Christopher name appears in records of Halifax and Mecklenburg Counties in Virginia in the 1770s and 1780s, and then in neighboring Granville County, N.C., around 1800.¹

Records suggest that David and his family migrated to Kentucky sometime between 1803 and 1810.² 1803 is when daughter Betsy married Duke Kimball (or Kimbrell) in Granville Co. 1810 is when David and son John appear in the US Census for Madison County. David's household consisted of himself, wife Sarah, son Ambrose and daughters Rachel and Sally and nine slaves. John, who married Katherine Moss in North Carolina in 1798, had two girls and four boys. Duke Kimbrell and Betsy have four girls under 10.

Over the next decade, the family experienced both tragedy and joy. David died (his will was probated in 1820). But the family grew through the marriage of his remaining children. Rachel married Ruben Howell Searcy in 1811, Sally married Thomas Butler in 1813 and Ambrose married Mary Glackin in 1816. Daughter Mary and her husband, John Shanks, a Revolutionary War veteran, moved to Madison County in 1815. In the 1820 census Sarah has nine slaves in the household. Listed just following Sarah is son-in-law Howell Searcy, Rachel and four little girls. Not far away is son Ambrose with two young sons and 13 slaves; Duke Kimbrell and Betsy with eight children and a slave; and Thomas Butler and Sally with a young son and two slaves.³ All these families except the Shanks appear to have lived west of Richmond in the Tates Creek/White Hall area. Another probable member of the family, James Christopher, older than 45, is living alone, possibly near Red House. The Shanks appeared to be living in the eastern part of the county. John Christopher couldn't be located in the 1820 Census but he and two sons reappear in Eastern Madison County in 1830.

¹ Granville County was the home of Richard Henderson, who organized the Transylvania Company, bought Kentucky from the Indians and hired Daniel Boone to explore the territory. Many early settlers in Madison County moved from Granville County. These included surnames Newby, Kimball/Kimbrell, Searcy, et al.

² The David Christopher in the 1800 US Census of Granville County, N.C., appears to be too young to be the David who migrated to Kentucky. Also the ages of the children do not match up.

³ Also in the Butler household are three girls between 16 and 25 years of age who would have been born before Thomas and Sally were married in 1813. There also appears to be a significant age difference: Thomas is over 45 while Sally is between 26 and 45, a difference which is confirmed in the 1830 Census. This suggests Thomas was married previously. A Thomas Butler married Rachel McDonald April 12, 1798 in Madison County.

The next 30 years brought a great deal of change to the Christopher clan. John and his family move eastward, with son Wiley Moss Christopher eventually settling in Estill County. Sarah, the matriarch, appears to be living with Ambrose in 1830 but there's no evidence of her after that. John Shanks died in 1829 leaving Mary a widow who soon applied for his Revolutionary War pension. The Kimbrells and Butlers disappear from public records in Madison County before 1840. The Searcy's move to Clay Co., Mo., during the 1830s. A widower by 1840, Ambrose dies in 1844 but left in Madison County a sizeable clan of his own.