

Origins of the Hughes of Owen County KY

This is a summary of research into the origins of the Hughes families that lived in Owen County KY at the time that the county was formed in 1819. These families had been in Scott County KY since 1815, on land that then became part of Owen County. Before living in Scott County, these Hughes had been in Fayette County KY since 1795/1796. This research has been a collaborative effort between John D. Hughes (jdughes@adelphia.net), Ted Hughes (tlh1937@iquest.net), and myself (brad.hurley@snet.net).

It appears that all of the Hughes in early Owen County KY sprang from a single family. The members of this family appear to include:

- **John**, b. 1761-1770, m. Sally, d. after 1831. He lived in Fayette County KY 1795-1816, Scott/Owen KY 1817-1829, and Fayette County KY 1830-1831.
- **William**, b. 1781 in VA, m1. Franky Wood 1805 in Fayette County KY, m2. Anna Eliza Guill 1840-1844 in Owen County KY, d. 1854-1856 in Owen County KY. He lived in Fayette County KY 1802-1813, and Scott/Owen County KY 1814-1854.
- **Nathan**, b. 1775 in VA, m. Mary Davis 1809 in Fayette County KY, d. 1857-1858 in Owen County KY. He lived in Fayette County KY 1796-1813, and Scott/Owen County KY 1814-1857.
- **Oliver**, b. before 1775, d. after 1816. He lived in Fayette County KY 1796-1816, and never appeared in Owen County KY.
- **Peter**, b. before 1766, d. after 1828. He lived in Fayette County KY 1807-1828, and never appeared in Owen County KY.

There are several indirect lines of indirect evidence that these individuals were part of the same family:

- 1) These individuals are listed together in tax lists, census records, and deed records starting in 1796 and continuing until their deaths or disappearance. A complete listing of these records is at <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=bradhurley&id=I03720>
- 2) Hattie Selma (Hughes) Tombragel (1896-1993) was a descendant of the first three people listed above:
 - John -> John Jr -> James Polk -> Willard Everett -> Hattie Selma
 - Nathan -> John D. -> Drucilla Catherine -> Willard Everett -> Hattie Selma
 - William (-> maybe William H.) -> Joseph -> George S. -> Sarah Alice -> Hattie SelmaHattie stated that her grandfather James Polk Hughes was a distant cousin of "John Wesley H., a hard shell Methodist". I believe she was referring to John Wesley Hughes (1852-1932), a Methodist evangelist who founded Asbury College, who was the son of William Hughes. This means that John and William were related. Hattie always had a very sharp mind.
- 3) There were multiple connections between these Hughes and the Guill family. William married Ann Eliza Guill (b. 1820), and John's daughter-in-law married Wilson B. Guill (b. 1798 VA).

Based on this, the evidence most strongly suggests a family relationship between John and William. The evidence is not quite as strong for including Nathan in this family because items #2 and #3 don't apply to Nathan. The weakest evidence is for including Oliver and Peter, who are mentioned in a subset of the records in item #1.

We have some indirect evidence about the parents of this family:

- The mother's name may be Elizabeth.
 - Elizabeth appears on Fayette County KY tax lists from 1796-1804. She is listed adjacent to Nathan and Oliver in 1796, Nathan in 1797, Nathan in 1799, Nathan and Oliver and William in 1802, and Nathan and Oliver and William in 1804.
 - The tax lists imply that Elizabeth is Oliver's mother. In 1799, she is listed as "Elizabeth Hughes and son", and Oliver is not listed that year even though he appears near Elizabeth in the preceding tax list (1797) and adjacent to her in the following tax list (1802). In 1802, she is listed as "Elizabeth Hughes (widow)". Elizabeth does not appear in 1803, but it appears that her 3 horses are listed with Oliver that year.
 - On the other hand, Elizabeth's property (3 horses) does not appear to have gone to any of the children in this family after 1804. In 1805, John, Nathan, Oliver, Peter, and William didn't have any more horses than they did the year before. This could mean that Elizabeth is not the mother, or it could mean that she moved away rather than dying in 1804.
- The father's name may be William.
 - The book "Wilmore, Kentucky", published in 1965, by T. Walt Hughes (son of John Wesley Hughes), says that the father of the William listed above was also named William. This information must be treated carefully, however, because other claims in the book appear to have been inaccurate.

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In an attempt to find where this family lived before 1796, by which time they were definitely in Fayette County KY, I have been guided by a number of secondary sources, and have used primary sources to try to verify this information. The secondary sources are:

- 1) "The Autobiography of John Wesley Hughes" (published 1923), stated:
 - His father [William] was born in Culpeper County VA
 - His father [William] was brought by his parents to Kentucky Country in a large home-made basket with the parents riding horse-back and the children riding in the baskets thrown across the horses

- 2) "Wilmore, Kentucky" by T. Walt Hughes (published 1965), stated:
 - The Hughes were Welshmen
 - In 1682, William Owen and Jonathan Hughes arrived in Jamestown, VA. They married twin daughters of Lewis and Eliza Jones.
 - The Hughes were in Culpeper County VA and Goochland County VA
 - In 1784, Lewis Owen and William Hughes left Goochland County bound for Harrodsburg (Mercer County) KY
 - After arriving in KY, they decide to go downstream 70 miles on the Kentucky River to a cleared area of 40 acres that they heard about. They built a double decker raft to go to their new location. They used logs from their raft to build their first homes, each a two-room cabin with two fireplaces. This was 68 years before John Wesley Hughes was born in one of those cabins [1784].
 - William Hughes had a son William Lewis Hughes (1784-1855) [the William listed above], who in turn had a son John Wesley Hughes (b. 1852).

- 3) Mrs. Herman Williamson, a genealogist who was a descendant of William, stated:
 - William was born in Culpeper County, Va, cir 1790, came to Owen County via Louisville, 1810, settled near Big Eagle Creek [Owen County KY].

- 4) Hattie Selma (Hughes) Tombragel (1896-1993), stated:
 - The Hughes were Welsh
 - James Polk Hughes (John's grandson) was a distant cousin of "John Weslyn H., a hard shell Methodist" (Williams' son)

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To verify this information, I have reviewed the tax lists of all Kentucky counties and the personal property tax records of selected Virginia counties (Culpeper County and Goochland County) up to 1796, and have transcribed all entries for the Hughes surname in these lists.

Tax lists are excellent resources for locating individuals in early Kentucky and Virginia, because they are annual listings of all white males over the age of 21 (even if they don't own any taxable property), as well as women, minors, free blacks who owned any taxable property (such as land, horses, cattle, or slaves).

Tax lists during this timeframe offer some clues that can allow researchers to distinguish between multiple individuals with the same name, and relationships between people:

- **Assessor Notes.** Sometimes the assessor puts notes alongside each name to distinguish between people with the same name. The note might indicate the name of the plantation they lived on, or a "Jr." or "Sr." designation, an occupation, or relationship ("son of..")
- **The taxable property.** In most cases, people's taxable property stayed relatively stable from one year to the next. Because of this, you can usually distinguish between people with the same name by looking at the property they owned during the previous or following years.
- **The visitation date.** The date is not always recorded. When it is, you can presume that people visited by the tax assessor on or near the same date lived near each other. This is especially helpful when trying to determine the proximity of people with different surnames.
- **Adjacent people with the same surname.** These people were probably visited by the tax assessor at around the same time, so are probably living near each other and are probably related.
- **The name of the tax assessor.** Many counties were broken up into districts that were visited by different tax assessors, and the same assessor often visited the same district year after year.

I have posted my transcriptions of these tax lists, and my analysis of their meaning, on the web. I have created a spreadsheet containing the results of my research in each county, which can be found at:

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~bradhurley/research/xx-yyyyyy.xls>

where XX is the state abbreviation (in this case, KY or VA), and YYYYYYY is the name of the county

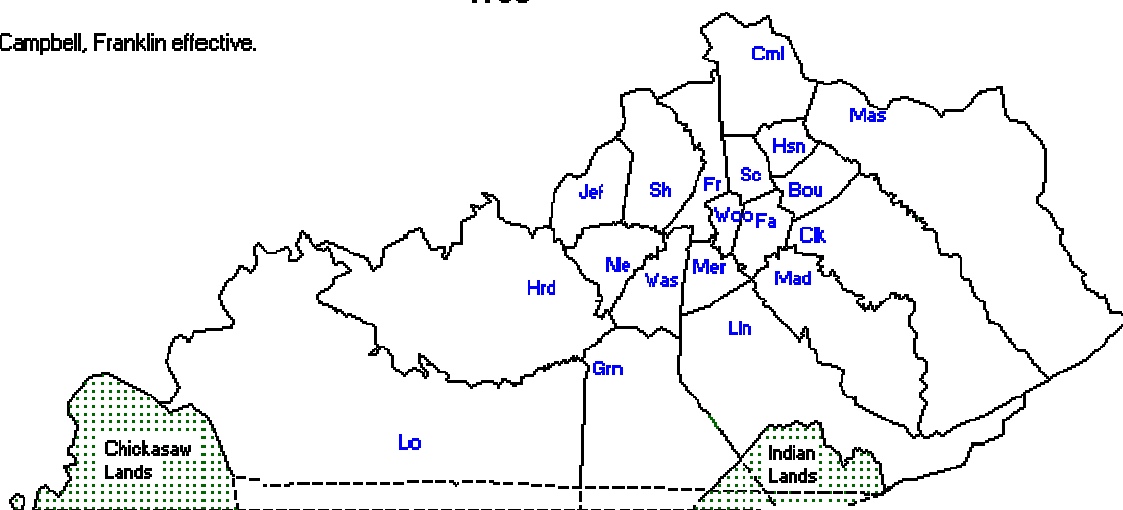
In these county files, I have a tab called "Tax Lists" which contains the raw transcription of the tax lists. I have also created a tab for each surname I was researching in that county, trying to combine all of the information I had gathered for individuals with that surname. If you go to the "Hughes" tab, you'll see a column for each person named Hughes in the county (based on my analysis of the data), and a row for each different source of information I have from the county.

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County boundaries in 1795 were very different than they are now. Here is a county map of Kentucky from that time period:

1795

Campbell, Franklin effective.



Source: FamilyHistory101.com

Here is a summary of the tax lists for these counties, and the research I've performed so far:

County	Formed	Tax List Start	FHL Film #	Research Status
Bourbon	1786	1787	7879	Obtained information from Internet (1787-1799)
Madison	1786	1787	8126	Transcribed film (1787-1795)
Fayette	1780	1787	7957	Transcribed film (1787-1839)
Lincoln	1780	1787	8114	Transcribed film (1787-1800)
Jefferson	1780	1789	8050	Transcribed film (1789-1796)
Mercer	1786	1789	8156	Transcribed film (1789-1812)
Woodford	1788	1790	8280	Transcribed film (1790-1796)
Mason	1788	1791	8140	Transcribed film (1791-1796)
Logan	1792	1792	8122	Transcribed film (1792-1796)
Nelson	1785	1792	8178	Transcribed film (1792-1796)
Shelby	1792	1792	8227	Transcribed film (1792-1796)
Washington	1792	1792	8263	Transcribed film (1792-1796)
Clark	1792	1793	7930	Transcribed film (1793-1796)
Hardin	1792	1793	8013	Transcribed film (1793-1796)
Harrison	1793	1794	8021	Transcribed film (1794-1796)
Scott	1792	1794	8221	Transcribed film (1794-1835)
Campbell	1795	1795	7911	Obtained information from Internet (1795-1811)
Franklin	1795	1795	7977	Transcribed film (1794-1796)
Green	1792	1795	8004	Transcribed film (1795-1796)

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Summary of Findings

This table lists all of the Hughes entries found in Kentucky and Virginia tax lists prior to 1796. It also shows the years in which each person was located in each county.

More detail about the individual tax entries are available by clicking on the county names above.

Legend:

Cells shaded gray mean that a tax list is not available from that county in that year.

An "x" indicates that the person was listed in the tax list in that county in that year.

Entries in green are members of this family.

Entries in red are not members of this family.

Entries in black might be members of this family.

First Name	County	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96
Abner	Jefferson KY									x	x	x	x	x		x
Abraham	Clark KY															x
Abraham	Culpeper VA										x					
Absolom	Madison KY						x	x					x			
Andrew	Clark KY												x	x	x	x
Andrew	Fayette KY										x	X				
Andrew	Mercer KY								x							
Anthony	Culpeper VA	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Barnabas	Madison KY												x			
Barnabas	Mercer KY														x	
Benjamin	Culpeper VA	x					x		x							
Benjamin	Goochland VA	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Benjamin	Jefferson KY								x							
Benjamin Jr.	Goochland VA					x			x							
Blackmore	Washington KY															x
David	Bourbon KY						x	x	x	x		x				
David	Clark KY												x		x	
David	Jefferson KY											x	x	x		
David Jr	Logan KY													x	x	x
David Sr	Logan KY														x	x
Edward	Mercer KY														x	x
Elizabeth	Fayette KY															x

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First Name	County	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96
Francis	Mercer KY													x		
George	Lincoln KY											x				
George	Mercer KY								x							
Isaac	Jefferson KY													x		x
James	Bourbon KY						x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x
James	Clark KY														x	
James	Culpeper VA	x					x									
James	Goochland VA											x	x	x	x	x
James	Logan KY														x	
James	Nelson KY											x	x		x	x
James	Washington KY														x	x
James E.	Fayette KY								x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Jesse	Clark KY														x	
Jesse	Fayette KY															x
Jesse	Jefferson KY								x						x	x
Jesse	Logan KY													x	x	x
John	Bourbon KY						x	x	x	x		x	x		x	
John	Clark KY														x	
John	Culpeper VA	x	x													
John	Culpeper VA						x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x
John	Fayette KY														x	x
John	Fayette KY							x	x	x	x	x	x			
John	Fayette KY								x	x	x	x				
John	Goochland VA		x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x					
John	Jefferson KY								x		x	x	x	x	x	x
John	Lincoln KY									x	x	x	x	x	x	x
John	Logan KY														x	x
John	Mercer KY													x	x	x
John	Scott KY														x	
John	Woodford KY											x				
John Jr.	Nelson KY											x	x		x	X
John Sr.	Nelson KY											x	x		x	X
Joseph	Fayette KY						x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	X
Matthew	Culpeper VA							x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Morgan	Jefferson KY								x							
Moses	Jefferson KY														x	
Nathaniel	Fayette KY															X
Nathaniel	Nelson KY												x		x	

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First Name	County	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96
Oliver	Fayette KY															X
Ralph	Bourbon KY						x	x	x	x		x	x		x	X
Ralph	Culpeper VA			x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x				
Ralph	Mercer KY															X
Robert	Culpeper VA										x	x	x	x	x	
Robert	Washington KY											x		x	x	X
Roland	Fayette KY								x	x						
Roland	Logan KY														x	X
Tarlton	Goochland VA						x	x	x	x			x	x	x	X
Thomas	Bourbon KY											x	x		x	
Thomas	Culpeper VA	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	X
Thomas	Fayette KY							x	x	x		x	x	x	x	X
Thomas Sen	Culpeper VA							x		x	x	x	x	x	x	X
William	Bourbon KY									x		x	x		x	X
William	Bourbon KY											x				
William	Clark KY															X
William	Culpeper VA	x	x	x												
William	Culpeper VA	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	X
William	Culpeper VA					x		x	x	x	x		x	x		X
William	Fayette KY						x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	X
William	Fayette KY								x				x	x		X
William	Goochland VA		x	x	x											
William	Lincoln KY										x	x	x	x	x	X
William	Logan KY														x	
William	Logan KY														x	
William	Mercer KY								x						x	X
William Jr.	Nelson KY											x	x		x	X
William Sr.	Nelson KY											x	x		x	X

Interpretation of Findings

People

Nathan – There is a Nathan in Nelson County in 1793 & 1795, but none of the other members of the family were listed with him. The 1850 census indicated that he was born in 1775, which means he would have turned 21 in 1796 and wouldn't have appeared on any tax lists before then. If he had appeared with other members of the family in 1793 or 1795, I would conclude this was the same Nathan. As it stands, this was probably a different Nathan.

Oliver – There are no tax records for Oliver before 1796. This could mean that he turned 21 in 1796, which means he would have been Nathan's twin. Or it could mean that he didn't live in any of the counties searched so far.

Peter – There are no tax records for Peter before 1796. Census records indicate that he was born before 1775, so he would have appeared on the tax lists before 1796. He apparently did not live in any of the counties searched so far.

William – was too young to be on a tax list before 1796. None of his tax list entries have a middle initial of L, even though other William Hughes' in Owen County ARE listed with a middle initial. This fails to confirm Walt Hughes' assertion that his middle name was Lewis. Tax lists also limit the year of his birth to 1781 or earlier, as opposed to Walt Hughes' 1784 date.

John – There are up to 15 adults named John Hughes in KY (and selected VA counties) before 1795. Most of these individuals also appear in 1795/6, so they cannot be the right John, since the right John was in Fayette County KY by 1795. There are tax list entries in Culpeper VA, Goochland VA, Fayette KY, and Woodford KY that could be the right John. No one else from the family appears in the same county at the same time for any of these tax list entries, with the exception of a William being in Culpeper County in 1782-1783.

Elizabeth (possible mother) – There are no tax records for Elizabeth before 1796. This could mean that her husband lived until 1795, or that she didn't live in any of the counties reviewed so far.

William (possible father) – if the patriarch of this family was married to Elizabeth, he couldn't have been alive in 1796 (when she appears in the Fayette County tax lists). There are only a few Williams so far who fits the bill: one who appeared in Bourbon County only in 1792, and two who appeared in Logan County in 1795. But none of the other family members appear there with those Williams, so again no confirmation.

Places

Culpeper County VA – There was a William Hughes that stopped appearing in Culpeper County in 1784 – the year that Walt Hughes said that William Hughes left VA for KY. But Walt said that William left from Goochland County, NOT Culpeper. There is no evidence of any of “our” Hughes leaving Culpeper just before they appeared in Fayette County KY.

Goochland County VA - There was a William Hughes that stopped appearing in Goochland County in 1785 – one year later than Walt Hughes specified. Walt Hughes also mentioned that Lewis Owen had left the county that year, but there is no evidence of anyone by that name in the county between 1782 and 1796. There is no evidence of any of “our” Hughes leaving Goochland just before they appeared in Fayette County KY.

Mercer County KY (Harrodsburg) - There is nothing in KY tax records to indicate that this family lived in Mercer County or surrounding area prior to living in Fayette County KY. This goes against Walt Hughes’ account.

Jefferson County KY (Louisville) – There is nothing in KY tax records to indicate that this family lived in Jefferson County or surrounding area prior to living in Fayette County KY. This goes against Mrs. Williamson’s account.

Owen County KY – William Hughes didn’t build his cabin in Owen County in 1784, as Walt Hughes implied. William bought the land for that cabin 30 years later, in 1814. William didn’t float down the Kentucky River to this property, as Walt stated, because the land he purchased isn’t close to the Kentucky River. It might have been possible to float down the EAGLE River from Fayette County to Owen County, however, although it is a smaller river and I don’t know whether the river is navigable. It also might have been possible to float down the Kentucky River TO Fayette County from someplace further upriver.

Timeframes

1787-1795

Since there are relatively complete tax records in Kentucky and Virginia since 1787, the review of these tax lists should have allowed us to determine where the family lived between 1787 and 1795. Unfortunately, even after the comprehensive review of these tax lists, there is no definite answer. Here are some possibilities about where the family was during this time:

- **Virginia.** Tax records support the story that these Hughes left Culpeper or Goochland County in 1784/1785. As of now, we haven't found them anywhere else in Virginia after 1784/1785.
- **Kentucky.** It is a slight possibility that our family lived in Kentucky before 1796, but did not get recorded in any tax list, but that seems unlikely if they were there for more than a year. It's also possible that some of the records for John, Nathan, or William that we've found are for this family, but there isn't enough data to confirm it. I think it is most likely that this family was not in Kentucky prior to 1796.
- **Tennessee.** One popular migration route from Virginia to Kentucky was to travel overland southwest through the Shenandoah Valley into Tennessee, then through the Cumberland Gap into Kentucky. John Wesley Hughes' account could support this theory, because of the "babies in baskets" comment. Some Tennessee tax lists from this time period do survive, but they are not as complete as in Kentucky.
- **North of the Ohio River.** Another popular migration route from Virginia to Kentucky was to come down the Ohio River, and Walt Hughes' account certainly indicates that there was a family legend that the Hughes traveled by river at some point. It is possible that they floated down the river and lived north of the Ohio River, which would be in present-day Ohio or Indiana, before crossing the river into Kentucky in 1795/1796. If they stopped at the "Falls of the Ohio", which would have been as far as they could float, they would have been across the river from Louisville, which would support Mrs. Williamson's account. Records from this area and time period are very limited, however, so it seems unlikely that we would ever be able to confirm or deny this theory.

1782-1787

Virginia tax lists are relatively complete since 1782, but we've only reviewed a few counties lists so far. The family could certainly have been in Virginia during this entire timeframe. If they went elsewhere, it would be difficult to prove.

Migration of Other Families

- Walt Hughes said in his book that William Hughes and a Lewis Owen left Virginia for Kentucky at the same time. Lewis Owen is a pretty uncommon name. If we were able to find Lewis Owen and William Hughes in any records, it would definitely make it likely that we had found the right William. We've looked for Lewis Owen (or similar spellings: Louis Owens, Owen Lewis, etc) in the following records so far:
 - **1782-1796 Goochland County VA.** No record of Lewis Owen. This goes against Walt's account.
 - **1787-1796 Fayette County KY.** No record of Lewis Owen. It appears that neither Lewis Owen nor William Hughes (the father) ever made it to Fayette County KY. If Walt Hughes' story is true, we may find them together elsewhere.

Ideas for Future Research

- I don't think there will be much value in researching more Kentucky records for this Hughes family. I think the most fruitful location for further research will be with Virginia records.
- I think it would be worthwhile to review the Culpeper County VA tax lists again to see if Lewis Owen appears from 1782-1784. If he does, this will at last confirm something from Walt Hughes' account. Finding Lewis Owen there would do two things for us:
 - It would definitely place our Hughes family in Culpeper County VA in the 1782-1784 timeframe, allowing us to work backwards from there.
 - If we want to continue trying to locate our family between 1785-1795, we can look for Lewis Owen with William Hughes in order to positively identify the correct William Hughes.
- 1785-1795 Virginia Personal Property Tax List research. I think that focusing on Shenandoah Valley counties and Ohio River counties would be most likely to yield results. By finding the county where the Hughes lived during this timeframe, we might be able to find where William (the father) died and possibly find a will that could confirm or deny some of our theories.