

Knox County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions – Early Case Files **Database Information/Key**

The *Knox County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions* was the first court established in Knox County. The Court first convened on July 16, 1792, in Knoxville.

This index contains a list of processed early *County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions* case files. These files were processed by the staff of the Knox County Archives.

KEY TO COLUMN HEADINGS

Surname:	Family name of individual/group
Given Name:	First and possibly middle names of the individual Defendant/Plaintiff:
Date:	Year in which the case was filed or the earliest date found in file.
Docket #:	Docket/case number assigned to this record. If you would like to see a file, the staff will need to know this number.
Box:	The box in the Archives storage area which contains the file.
Comments:	Various notes about the docket/case or the individual/group. Common listings include alternate name spellings, whether defendant was charged by the <i>State of Tennessee</i> , whether the docket/case is debt related, etc....

Files with no docket numbers are arranged alphabetically by their plaintiff(s) or by the first person listed on their folders. If the individual or group for whom you are looking is not the plaintiff, please look in the COMMENT field to find the name under which his or her file will be alphabetized. The staff will need to know this name before they can find the file for you.

Brief Court History

The *Knox County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions* (commonly referred to as the *County Court*) was the first court established in Knox County, first convening on July 16, 1792. It was the primary court handling most local affairs during the early settlement period

The *County Court* consisted of Justices of the Peace (J. P.'s), each representing a defined area which they served. The J. P.'s were appointed by the Territory or State until 1836, elected thereafter. They were given sole jurisdiction over minor civil matters, cases involving less than \$50 in property or fines, handling all the minor civil and criminal

matters such as tax disputes, probate, debt disputes, etc... as well as serving as officiants at marriage ceremonies. These tasks constituted the makeup of the *Court of Common Pleas*.

Cases involving more than \$50 in property or fines were handled by the district *Superior Court of Law and Equity* as were appeals of *Court of Common Pleas* judgments until 1809 when the *Superior Courts of Law and Equity* were dissolved by the state. Criminal jurisdiction was transferred to the *Circuit Court* upon its creation in 1810 as were the major civil disputes.

The J. P.'s also served as representatives on the *Court of Quarter Sessions* (Quarterly Court). The *Quarterly Court*, meeting in quorum, served as the legislative body of the county, enacting laws and ordinances by which the local community was governed. The *Quarterly Court* was the forerunner to today's County Commission system of government.

By 1915, the functions of these two courts had grown sufficiently in Knox County that the court was formally separated into two separate courts, the *Quorum Court* and the *Quarterly Court*, each continuing their designated functions and responsibilities but now operating separately. This structure remained in place until the *County Court* structure was dissolved in 1980, replaced by the *County Commission/County Executive* structure. Probate responsibilities of the old *County Court* were transferred at this time to the *Chancery Court, Probate Division*.