

Sunfish

EDMONSON COUNTY

Kentucky

Oasis of Catholicism

Compiled by:
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Dedication

To the pioneering priests on the Kentucky frontier, Stephen T. Baden, Charles Nerinckx, J.B. Vandemergel, John B. David, August Degauquier, Elisha J. Durbin, and others, to the early settlers of Sunfish, and to their descendants who have kept the Faith alive and strong at Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church.

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I first became interested in genealogy in 1980, wanting to find something about the history of my family. My father, born in 1876, and my mother, born in 1891, as well as most of the "old ones" of Sunfish had already died, and they could have been invaluable help in getting me started. At first I intended to learn something about the Simon family, for no one seemed to know where we came from, or when we came to Kentucky. My father had said we were of French descent, but there was no proof, and Dad didn't even know his grandfather's name. I soon found that I could not do just the Simon family, for our family was so closely related to the Durbins and the Logsdons. I then decided to do research on all of the Catholic families of Sunfish.

I started with nothing more than the name of my grandfather, Joachim Simon. Since I had heard of a Silas Simon, I looked for Silas on the census of 1850, and when I found Silas, I also found my grandfather. Joachim was the oldest child listed in the family.

Family research became an obsession. I found it was the first thing I thought of in the morning and the last thing I thought of at night. Trying to separate the different Durbin families, with everyone naming their children the same, became a real chore, but I believe I have succeeded.

One of the most difficult tasks was finding good records. Many records were destroyed by fire, and many others were in such a haphazard condition that all one could do was guess. For example, the Hart County Courthouse was destroyed by fire during the Civil War, and the Grayson County Courthouse was destroyed in December of 1864, June of 1896, and again in April of 1936. Many of these records related to Sunfishers, for many migrated from these Counties to Sunfish.

Sunfish was a part of Jefferson County when that County was formed by Virginia in 1780; in Nelson County when that County was formed in 1785; in Hardin County when that County was formed in 1793; in Ohio County for one year (1809); and in Grayson County when that County was formed in 1810. When Edmonson County was formed in 1825, from sections of Warren, Barren, Hart and Grayson, then Sunfish was, and is, in Edmonson County.

In trying to locate "lost" Sunfishers, I have driven thousands of miles in Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri and Indiana. I have written to people all over the United States, and have been very lucky in finding some who have been doing their own research for twenty-five to thirty years. These researchers have helped me locate former Sunfish people who migrated to Missouri and Illinois, and set me straight about the pioneers who came to Kentucky after the Revolutionary War.

I have spent hundreds of hours going over dusty books in cold (and hot) offices in basements and attics, and the Kentucky Historical Society in Frankfort became a second home. I have tried to be as accurate as possible, but some of my answers are educated guesses, and speculative at best. I have used the census records, and have recorded names and ages as found. I have searched church records for marriages and baptisms, and have searched courthouse marriages, deed books, will books and settlement books. Since many people were never found on the census records, tax records were searched, trying to find their movements. Some of the very people who were responsible for taking down information seem to have been lazy, incompetent, and half literate.

There is still much work to be done, and I hope I can influence others to get going on their family tree. The longer one puts it off, the harder it will be to find answers. Every day more and more of our past is lost, either through the loss of irreplaceable records or through the deaths of the people who "lived" the information genealogists seek. How many times, I wonder, have genealogists failed in their mission because "great aunt Bessie", who could have answered all of one's questions, died a year ago?

Some of the information included in this book has come from published sources, such as:

The Centenary of Catholicity, by Benjamin J. Webb;

History of Kentucky, by Honorable Z. F. Smith;

Collin's History of Kentucky;

Annals of Kentucky;

Flashlights in Folklore, by Charles Whittle, Sr. of Brownsville;

History of the Durbin and Logsdon Families, by Welsh of California;

and numerous family files and periodicals found at the Historical Society.

I am indebted to numerous people who have answered my letters and given me information on the families. I am especially grateful to Stella Durbin Hulshof, of Portageville, Missouri, Robert Ross Durbin, of St. Louis, Missouri, James R. Virden, of Versailles, Ohio, Gloria Lucas, of California, Sally Prior, of Washington State, and to all the clerks and workers in the courthouses where I have visited. Without their help and guidance, this book would have been thin indeed.

I am especially grateful to my wife, Mary Sibyl, who has given me encouragement at every turn and who, when I have become discouraged, has found some of the most valuable pieces of the puzzle. I'm sure that without her help, I would have given up long ago.

I am also grateful to my second cousin, Maggie Simon Neville, who has freely given her talents and time in researching the Simon family, and other families as well.