

# Kentucky Place Names: A Guide to the Origins and Meanings of Geographic Names in the Bluegrass State



## Kentucky Place Names by Robert M. Rennick

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

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Kentucky, the Bluegrass State, is a land of rich history and diverse geography, with a tapestry of place names that reflect its unique past and vibrant culture. From the rolling hills of the Appalachian Mountains to the fertile plains of the Ohio River Valley, Kentucky's place names bear witness to the many peoples and events that have shaped its identity.

In this comprehensive guide, we will explore the fascinating origins and meanings behind some of Kentucky's most iconic and intriguing place names. We will delve into the stories of Native American tribes, European explorers, settlers, and pioneers who left their mark on the Bluegrass State's landscape.

## Native American Influences

Before European settlement, Kentucky was home to a diverse array of Native American tribes, including the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Shawnee, and Iroquois. These tribes left a lasting legacy on the state's geography, with many place names reflecting their languages and cultures.

- **Kentucky:** The name "Kentucky" is derived from the Iroquois word "ken-tah-ten," meaning "meadowland." It was first used to describe the area along the Kentucky River, and eventually came to refer to the entire state.
- **Ohio:** The name "Ohio" comes from the Seneca word "ohi-yo," meaning "great river." It was originally used to refer to the Ohio River, but later became the name of the state.
- **Louisville:** The city of Louisville is named after King Louis XVI of France, who supported the American Revolution. It was originally called "Falls of the Ohio" due to its location at the Falls of the Ohio River.

## European Exploration

In the 16th century, European explorers began to explore the Ohio River Valley, including Kentucky. These explorers often gave places names that reflected their own languages and cultures.

- **Kentucky River:** The Kentucky River was named by English explorer John Filson in 1784. He named it after the Shawnee chief Kentuck, who had been killed by white settlers.
- **Cumberland River:** The Cumberland River was named by English explorer Thomas Walker in 1750. He named it after the Duke of Cumberland, who was a supporter of the British colonies.

- **Mississippi River:** The Mississippi River was named by Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto in 1541. He named it after the Native American word "misi-sipi," meaning "great river."

## Settler and Pioneer Influences

As Kentucky was settled by European Americans in the 18th and 19th centuries, settlers and pioneers often gave places names that reflected their own experiences and aspirations.

- **Lexington:** The city of Lexington was named after the Battle of Lexington in Massachusetts, which was a turning point in the American Revolution. It was originally called "Fayette" after the Marquis de Lafayette, a French general who supported the American cause.
- **Bardstown:** The city of Bardstown was named after David Bard, a pioneer who settled the area in 1780. It was originally called "Bairdstown" after his surname, but the spelling was later changed to "Bardstown."
- **Paducah:** The city of Paducah was named after a Chickasaw chief named Paduke. It was originally called "Paduke's Village" after his settlement, but the name was later shortened to "Paducah."

## Unique and Intriguing Place Names

Kentucky is home to a number of unique and intriguing place names that defy easy categorization. These names often have fascinating stories behind them.

- **Mammoth Cave:** Mammoth Cave is the longest known cave system in the world. It was named by explorer John Croghan in 1799, who

described it as "a vast and magnificent cavern, which surpasses anything of the kind I have ever seen."

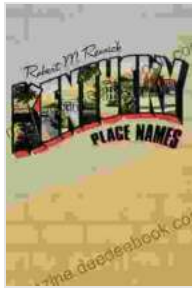
- **Bowling Green:** The city of Bowling Green is named after a large, flat rock that was used as a bowling green by settlers in the early 19th century. It was originally called "Warren" after General Joseph Warren, a hero of the American Revolution, but the name was later changed to "Bowling Green."
- **Hazard:** The city of Hazard is named after a man named James Hazard, who owned a store and post office in the area in the late 19th century. It was originally called "Johnson" after the county it was in, but the name was later changed to "Hazard" after James Hazard.

The place names of Kentucky are a rich and varied tapestry that reflects the state's unique history and culture. From Native American tribes to European explorers to settlers and pioneers, many peoples and events have left their mark on the Bluegrass State's landscape. The origins and meanings of Kentucky's place names provide a fascinating glimpse into the past and help us to better understand the present.

Whether you are a lifelong Kentuckian or a visitor to the Bluegrass State, we hope that this guide has helped you to appreciate the rich history and stories behind some of Kentucky's most iconic and intriguing place names.

## References

\* Rennick, Robert M. (2002). Kentucky Place Names. The University Press of Kentucky. \* Stewart, George R. (1970). American Place Names. Oxford University Press. \* Gannett, Henry (1905). The Origin of Certain Place Names in the United States. US Government Printing Office.



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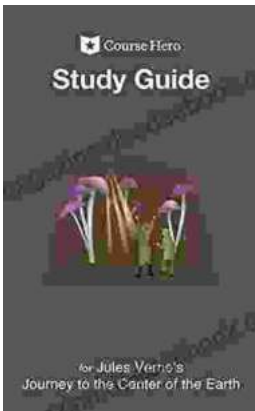
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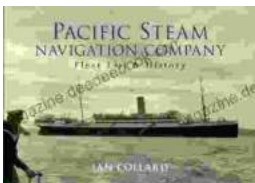
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