

ABSALOM SKIRVIN

By
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William Arnold's log house

Imagine stepping back in time to the woods of the Kentucky frontier in **1820**. Deer and turkey are abundant throughout the forest. Approximately Three-hundred-fifty log cabins dot the parallelogram shaped land within 460 square miles. About 1,750 people live in this area. The Kentucky State Governor has recently approved this pioneer country to be named Grant County as of February 12, 1820.

Henry Childers is host for the first Circuit Court in his home on May 5, 1820. He walks the judge and sixteen men to act as the grand jury. One of these pioneers, probably dressed in buck-skin trousers, moccasins, and coonskin cap, is **Absalom Skirvin**, a 37-year old farmer and hunter. His wife and nine children (five boys and four girls) under the age of fifteen are back at his homestead. The men discuss three current issues, one of them being the need for planning roads and appointing overseers. Agreement is reached to charge each household \$4 for County expenses the first year, rather than issue bonds.

A month later at the second Circuit Court it is decided to accept Mr. William Arnold's generous donation of 1 ½ acres of his land to be used for the County seat, because the Court House would be close to a large spring called "Public Spring." It is agreed to name the town "Williamstown" in honor of Mr. William Arnold.

Mr. Arnold is tasked with building the two-story rectangular brick court house. At thirty-four feet long and thirty feet wide it is about the length for an adult to walk seventeen steps or for a child to walk about twenty-two steps. Mr. Arnold is paid \$6,597 total over three years. He finishes the Court house by December 1821.

Absalom Skirvin is hired to build the two-story, sixteen-foot square jail. This gives an adult prisoner room to walk about six to eight steps in each direction. The walls are made from hewed logs and dovetailed on top of each other. Each story has two small windows. Absalom is paid \$220 for his services.

A post-and-rail fence thirty feet square is built on the public property to hold stray cattle, horses, pigs, etc. as needed.

Three log houses are in Williamstown owned by: William Arnold, P.B. Hume, and James Conyer.



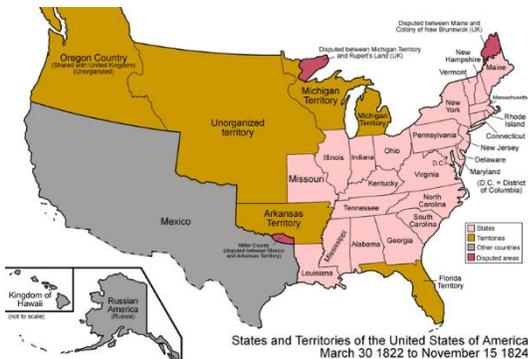
Let's zoom two years forward to **1822**. Twenty-five acres of Mr. Arnold's land has now been surveyed into one fourth acre lots. In the new court house **Absalom Skirvin** is appointed as one of the first Trustees of the town. There are seven trustees total. Wooden buildings are starting to be built along Main street in town. The five tavern licenses granted back in 1820 allow tavern keepers to charge 25 cents per meal, 12 ½ cents for lodging, and 25 cents to lodge a horse and feed it with hay.

Three years later on May 19, **1825** excitement fills the atmosphere of Williamstown as people from all over Grant County arrive to catch a glimpse of French General Marquis de Lafayette as he tours America to celebrate fifty years since the Battle of Bunker Hill. Lafayette helped the Colonists to defeat the British in the American Revolution.

He rides in a horse drawn stage coach through Williamstown in the early morning, along with his son and other dignitaries and stops for breakfast at William Arnold's house. They know each other from fighting together in 1781 at the battle of Yorktown where British Lord Cornwallis surrendered. William Arnold had been severely wounded in that battle. Upon seeing each other Arnold and Lafayette fall onto each other's necks and weep. Several hours later Lafayette continues his journey north toward Cincinnati, Ohio to see all twenty-four states in a year. He greets everyone as they throng to meet him along the road. Pride and happiness fill the hearts of the pioneers and they talk about this highlight even into their old age.



Lafayette, age 67 in 1825.
Portrait by Matthew Harris Jouett



Absalom Skirvin, your 5x great grandfather, age 42, his wife, Sarah Harrison Skirvin, who goes by Sallie, age 40 wave as Lafayette goes by in a stagecoach. Their oldest sons, William Skirvin, age 22, and Harrison Skirvin, age 19, take a break from helping their father with the crops to go see Lafayette with their family as this is a once in a life time event. Perhaps their daughter, Arminta Skirvin, age 17, notices Parker Osborne Thompson, age 16, her future husband, standing with his family under a nearby tree. Maybe, their son, Joel Skirvin, age 12, climbs a tree to get a better look and puts his two fingers between his lips for a good long whistle as the buggy passes. Daughters, Sophia and **Emaline**, ages 10 and 8, clap and jump up and down with excitement and wave to the smiling men waving back. Sallie could be pregnant with their last child, Daniel Skirvin, who will be born in 1826, a few months after Lafayette's farewell tour. Most likely his older sisters will tell him as he grows up all about their experiences when

Lafayette came through town. Perhaps Absalom Skirvin's aging parents, John (age 77) and Mary Ann Kitchen Skirvin (age 75) participated in the crowds watching Lafayette go past. John Skirvin was 27-35 years old during the American Revolution. He was at the prime of his adulthood. Where was he and what was he doing during the American Revolution?

It's time to time travel again three years later to **1828** for the next recorded event in Absalom Skirvin's life. His youngest brother, Enoch Skirvin, age 28, is getting married to Delilah Huffman on August 27, 1828 in Grant County, Kentucky. Absalom, being the second born, and oldest brother of fourteen siblings remembers when his baby brother was only two years old and he was already twenty-one when Absalom married his first cousin, Sarah "Sallie" Harrison on 30 June 1804 before Grant County, Kentucky was established. It was called Fayette County, Kentucky at that time. Tragedy strikes when just one week after Enoch and Delilah's wedding Enoch is dead! What happened?

A year later 1829 Absalom and Sallie Skirvin's oldest daughter, Arminta Skirvin at age twenty-one marries Parker Osborn Thompson. They have a son, Thomas Thompson, about 1830 and a daughter, Armilda Louise Thompson, in 1831.

Absalom's father, John Skirvin, dies in May 1832 and just five months later his mother, Mary Ann Kitchen Skirvin, also passes away.

Appendix - How I found my sources:

Familysearch.org = History of Grant County, Kentucky 1876

I signed in to my free account on familysearch.org on 19 February 2019 and looked up Grant County, Kentucky where some of our Blanchet, Carter, and Skirvin ancestors lived in the 1800s. Some of our extended family still live there today in 2019 like the Stanley family who own Stanley Funeral home in Williamstown, Kentucky and are descended from Anna Blanchet Clinkscales, who was sister to my great, great grandmother, Grace Caroline Blanchet Carter. I downloaded the pdf of the *History of Grant County, State of Kentucky*, as compiled by Robert H. Elliston in 1876. The first 24 pages were provided which gave an interesting history of how Grant County started in 1820 and some of its first inhabitants. I left a message with the Grant County public library in the county seat, Williamstown, Kentucky to ask how to purchase the book as I understand from some message boards on familysearch.org and ancestry.com that there are some references to our ancestors in this book and it is well worth the \$35 to purchase it.

While reading through the *History of Grant County* the first thing I learned is that the U.S. Congress passed an Act recommending that all states prepare a historical sketch of every County and Town in the United States to be read publicly on the 4th of July of our Centennial year celebration, which would have been in 1876. It began to dawn on me that every county that was in existence in 1876 should have a historical account that could uncover some of the events our ancestors experienced in their lifetimes that would bring their stories to life more than just the dry dates found in census records, etc. Sure enough, as I was reading the history of how Grant County came to be I discovered a name I was not expecting, Absalom Skirvin. I remembered that name in my genealogy database, Legacy and looked him up. Yes, he was from Grant County!

Before I go on to my other sources I briefly want to pause to reflect on what was happening in 1876. Ulysses S. Grant was the 18th U.S. President. The 1st World's Fair in America was being held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania from 10 May to 10 November to celebrate the first 100 years of the United States! The giant right hand and torch for the Statue of Liberty was on display at the World's Fair while the rest of the Statue was still under construction until 1886. The Declaration of Independence was on display at the fair. Other novelties were the sewing machine (had taken off in the 1850s), the typewriter (just introduced in 1874) and the telephone (Alexander Graham Bell had just patented it in 1876)! Colorado became the 38th state on the 1st of August 1876.



Now back to the other sources I utilized to learn more about Absalom Skirvin.

Familysearch.org = Grant County, Kentucky Marriages 1820-1850

As I poked around some more in the "books" section of familysearch.org for Grant County I also discovered a book called *Grant County, Kentucky, marriages 1820-1850*

by Robert D. Craig, 1934. I was able to download that pdf as well and discovered eight Skirvins who were married during that thirty-year time period in Grant County, Kentucky. Could they all be the children of Absalom Skirvin?

Ancestry.com = Census Records

I went back to my tried and true methods I have been using for years on [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) looking up census records. I was able to confirm several of Absalom Skirvin's children who were listed in the marriage records as being in his household in the census records.

Findagrave.org = Cemeteries and Tombstones

One of my other favorite fishing holes is [findagrave.com](https://www.findagrave.com). I discovered that there is a Carter Family Cemetery in Dry Ridge, Kentucky and was able to find some more dates and even photos of gravestones for some of our relatives like Absalom Skirvin's daughter, Emeline Skirvin and her husband William Henry Harrison Carter.



History of Grant County, Kentucky found on Familysearch.org and Google Scholar:

Discovered the name Absolem Skirvin in *The History of Grant County* written in 1876 on page 10 found on familysearch.org regarding the county seat of Williamstown named after William Arnold who donated 1 1/2 acres for the government buildings to be built. https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/598736-the-history-of-grant-county-state-of-kentucky?offset=6&viewer=1&medianame=FL13696054_2842855_000006&q=Grant%20County%2C%20Kentucky#page=6&viewer=picture&o=download&n=0&q=Grant%20County,%20Kentucky

The above source states, "The first Circuit Court was held at the house of Henry Childers on the 5th day of May 1820, Hon. John Trimble presiding. The Grand Jury of the Court were... (16 people listed) Absalom Skirvin. This Court adjourned on the day it convened, having transacted all the business, the Grand Jury making three indictments - one against the County Court for not having the County divided into road precincts and overseers appointed" (10).

"The first jail was built by Absalom Skirvin for \$220. It was sixteen feet square, and was built of hewed logs, dovetailed and let down one upon the other. This jail was two stories high, and had two small windows in each story. There was also a "stray pen" built on the public ground for the purpose of holding all the stray stock that was taken up. This was thirty feet square, and inclosed by a post-and-rail fence" (10).

"In 1822 there were twenty-five acres of land condemned by Mr. Arnold for the town of Williamstown, which was surveyed and laid off in one fourth acre lots, and Wm. Arnold, William Little, Wesley Williams, James Collins, Amuel Williams, Thomas Watson, and Absalom Skirvin were appointed the first Trustees of the town" (12).

In 1824/25 - "We must not here forget to state that in the year 1824 General Marqu's Lafayette, who, next to the Father of our Country, is dear in the hearts of the American people, passed through our county on his way from Lexington to Cincinnati in company with his son and private secretary... The party took breakfast at the house of Mr. Arnold, who was an officer in the Revolutionary War, and who received a severe wound at the battle of Yorktown at the time of the surrender of Lord Cornwallis. General Lafayette and Capt. Arnold know each other personally and were so overcome by emotion at their meeting that they fell upon each other's necks and wept like brothers. After remaining with Capt. Arnold for several hours they passed on through the county..." (Capt. William Arnold was the man Williamstown was named after) (17).

In 1856 Williamstown's wooden buildings on Main Street were destroyed by a fire accidentally set by one of Mr. Samuel Marksbury's children playing with combustibles in the basement of their home. "Thirty families were in a few minutes rendered destitute and homeless." Three thousand dollars was raised throughout the county and "good and substantial houses" were built "in a few years." Two more fires in 1864 and 1867

destroyed a few individual buildings like a tavern, stable, tenement buildings, and a wooden mill (13).

Scholar.google.com

scholar.google.com "Collins' Historical Sketches of Kentucky: History of Kentucky, Volume 1" Discovered on page 138 states, "Aug. 15, 1864 Geo. W. Wainscott, Wm. Lingenfelter, and John Lingenfelter executed at Williamstown, Grant co., by order of Gen. Burbridge - in retaliation for the murder of Joel Skirvin and Andrew Simpson by guerillas."

1864 – attempted murder and lynching of the perpetrators

First newspaper "Williamstown News" was published in 1872 for 6 months.

Next came the "Grant County Bulletin" for one year.

Third was "Williamstown Sentinel" in 1874 which was still in operation when this book was published in 1876 (14).

"Raccoon" John Smith, a preacher in Grant County, KY in the mid 1800s, is mentioned on page 15. He got his name because he was paid in 10 coon skins worth \$.10 each to do a marriage one time.

Wikipedia – Lafayette's Fairwell Tour

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visit_of_the_Marquis_de_Lafayette_to_the_United_States

According to the timeline on this site Lafayette was in Georgetown, Ky on May 18, 1825 and Cincinnati, OH to spend the night on May 19, 1825. Therefore, he would have passed through Williamstown, KY on the morning of May 19, 1825 where our Skirvin ancestors lived at the time.