

IDEA GUIDE



VISITLEX

Lexington Visitors Center
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HISTORIC HOMES AND PLACES

Lexington and the Bluegrass Rich in Reminders of Bygone Days

Until time travel becomes possible, the best way to revisit the past is through its tangible remains...

...the houses and other places where famous, as well as not-so-famous, people lived and gathered ...

... the battlefields and buildings where the courses, both of history and many lives, were swayed...

... the monuments built to honor, and to deliver to posterity, the heroes of each generation.

In Lexington and the Bluegrass region, there's a lot of history to be re-lived. This was the first part of Kentucky to be settled, and the beginning of the American West. The Civil War deeply divided the state but, fortunately, left most antebellum houses and buildings intact. Many national leaders and other prominent individuals of 18th and 19th-century America had a connection to Lexington.

Whether you are searching for relics of past eras and interesting people, examples of architectural worth, or scenes of noteworthy events, you'll find plenty of fascinating historic homes and places to explore in and around Lexington.

Where to begin? How about at the beginning...

Bluegrass Note: The Lexington Walk brochure, a walking tour of downtown, is available free from VisitLEX, the Lexington Convention and Visitors Bureau. The walk includes information about many historic buildings in the downtown area.

IN LEXINGTON

Going to the Source

Few cities can point to an actual spot where they began. But it's known that in the late spring of 1775, a group of surveyors—among them one William McConnell—were camped at a spring a couple of miles from present-day downtown. Word reached them of a battle between the British and the colonists at Lexington, Massachusetts, the battle that would start the Revolutionary War. To commemorate that battle, they named their campsite "Lexington."

Amazingly, this frontier campsite escaped obliteration through development over the next 220 years (although the area was used as a mill site, gunpowder factory, distillery site and dairy farm). And thanks to the efforts of hundreds of Lexingtonians, civic leaders and citizen volunteers alike in the 1990s, Lexington's birthplace is now a 21.5-acre city park, with primitive trails and a visitor center. So you, like McConnell and company, can sit by the spring, beneath towering burr oak trees imagining what it might have been like in Revolutionary War days, the campfire crackling and the shivers running down your spine as you discuss the exciting news.

McConnell Springs is located off Old Frankfort Pike inside New Circle Road. (Turn into Cahill Industrial Park onto McConnell Springs Drive, across from the Fire Training Center.) The park is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday;

trails are open till dusk. Guided nature and history hikes are frequently scheduled. Call (859) 225-4073 for more information.

Historic Homes and Architectural Attractions

The historic Lexington homes that are open for tours showcase a variety of architectural styles, as well as the stories of some of Lexington's most influential and fascinating families and individuals. In Lexington you also have the opportunity to take a rare behind-the-scenes look at a restoration-in-progress on a nationally significant house.

Ashland, the Henry Clay Estate. Henry Clay was an important statesman and famous orator in early 19th-century American politics, a U.S. Senator, Speaker of the House, Secretary of State and three time Presidential candidate. In his home city of Lexington, "Harry of the West" was a respected lawyer, and a revered and leading gentleman farmer. Although most of the 600 acres of his "beloved Ashland" are now a residential neighborhood, about 20 acres are preserved as a National Historic Landmark. Ashland, The Henry Clay Estate, includes an Italianate-style house built for Henry's son, James. (The house where Clay lived from 1809 until his death in 1852 was torn down in 1857; some of its materials were used in the new Ashland.) There's a great deal of family memorabilia on display, much of it relating to the "Great Compromiser" himself.

Ashland is located at 120 Sycamore Road and offers tours on the hour, Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and open on Sundays April through November from 1 to 4 p.m. Closed January. Only open for groups, by appointment, in

Bluegrass Note: For more information about Lexington sites relating to African-American history, see the Idea Guide article: African Americans in the Bluegrass.

Bluegrass Note: Hopemont, The Hunt-Morgan House is located in the charming and historic Gratz Park neighborhood. The park was the original site of Transylvania University (now just across Third Street, at the north end of the park), and the houses were built for some of the most prominent and cultured families of Lexington's early 19th-century days as the "Athens of the West." The park's statues of children were a gift from James Lane Allen, a Lexingtonian and popular 19th-century author.

February. Admission charged. There's no charge to visit the formal English parterre-style garden, a favorite spot of local artists, or walk the lovely wooded grounds. (859) 266-8581

The Mary Todd Lincoln House. Mary Todd, who would become Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, one of America's most controversial First Ladies, was born in Lexington in 1818. Her father, Robert Todd, was a successful businessman and Whig politician; her grandfather, Levi Todd, was one of Lexington's founders. Her mother died when she was six. In 1832, her father and his new wife moved the family to this brick house on West Main Street. Mary lived here until she was 21, when she went to Springfield,

Illinois to live with her sister.

She and Abraham Lincoln visited the house several times. Today, family pieces and period antiques as well as personal possessions of Mary Todd are on display. The late Georgian style brick house was built in 1803 to 1806, and includes a period herb and perennial garden in the back yard. Open for tours 10 a.m. till 3 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Closed December through mid-March. Admission charged. (859) 233-9999

Hopemont, The Hunt-Morgan House. The brick house at 201 North Mill Street has several claims to historic fame. It was built in 1814 for the first millionaire west of the Alleghenies, a hemp merchant named John Wesley Hunt. Among Hunt's descendants was Confederate General John Hunt Morgan, the flamboyant leader of the guerrilla fighters known as "Morgan's Raiders." Local legend has Morgan riding his mare Black Bess up the front steps, stopping to kiss his mother in the hall, and galloping out the back door—with Union troops in hot pursuit. Morgan's nephew, Thomas Hunt Morgan, born in Lexington in 1866, would become the first Kentuckian to win a Nobel Prize, for his work in genetics.

The Hunt-Morgan House is cherished not only for its human history, but for its architectural features as well. Representing a Kentucky adaptation

of the Federal style, it features a large, impressive entrance door with leaded fanlight and sidelight windows; reeded woodwork and door jambs; beautifully carved mantels; and a three-story cantilevered staircase.

Tours are given at 1, 2, 3 and 4 p.m. on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday. On Saturday tours are given at 10, 11, 12, 1, 2 and 3 p.m. Closed on Mondays and Tuesdays. The house is closed mid-December through mid-March. There's a Civil War museum on the second floor. Admission charged. (859) 233-3290

Waveland. Waveland was built in 1847 for Joseph Bryan, a great-nephew of Daniel Boone. With its Ionic columns and portico, frieze patterned after those on the Acropolis in Greece, 14-foot ceilings, and grand yet graceful demeanor, it is considered an excellent example of Greek Revival architecture in Kentucky. Its human story is that of life on a pre-Civil War hemp plantation. Along with the house itself, slave quarters have been restored.

Owned by the Commonwealth of Kentucky, Waveland is a State Historic Site. There are flower and herb gardens as well as picnic tables and a playground. Tours are given on the hour. Call ahead for hours of operation. The house is open by appointment in the winter. Admission charged. (859) 272-3611

Latrobe House. There's no furniture, and in fact, some of the walls have been torn out. But that's precisely what attracts most visitors – particularly those with a serious interest in architecture

and preservation — to the Latrobe House at 326 Grosvenor Avenue near downtown.

The Latrobe House offers a rare opportunity not only to see a restoration in progress, but to see the restoration of one of only three remaining homes in America designed by Benjamin Henry Latrobe.

Latrobe was one of the designers of the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, and is known as the “Father of American Architecture.” He is considered America's first trained professional architect.

The house in Lexington, also known as the Senator John and Eliza Pope Villa, was designed for a prominent early Kentucky politician in 1811. One of its most interesting architectural features is a rotunda set in the middle of the square house plan. Over the decades, however, the house's facade and interior were greatly altered and remodeled. It wasn't until a 1987 fire and subsequent cleanup that it became apparent that the house was built exactly to Latrobe's design, a factor that makes it even more architecturally significant.

During a tour you'll get an explanation of whatever work happens to be underway. Plans include restoring the facade to its 1811 appearance and restoring the original interior layout. When the restoration is complete the house will serve as a center for preservation.

Latrobe House is owned by the Blue Grass Trust for Historic Preservation, and is open for tour by appointment (call 859-253-0362). Admission charged.

Bluegrass Note: It may look historic, but the turreted castle you see at the corner of Versailles Road and Pisgah Pike was built as a private residence in 1969. Even though it stood unfinished and unoccupied for nearly forty years, it became a much loved landmark and source of constant speculation. A spectacular fire consumed the main residence in May of 2004. It is now open as a special event facility, restaurant and luxury inn. (859) 256-0322

Bluegrass Note: If you have a serious interest in architecture, you'll find excellent books about local architecture at area bookstores. “*Vestiges of the Venerable City*,” by Clay Lancaster, is a detailed chronicle of historic Lexington structures with many photographs (including some places that no longer exist). “*The Bluegrass of Kentucky*,” by Richard and Patricia DeCamp, includes color photographs and descriptions of outstanding homes and estates in Lexington and five surrounding counties.

More Historic Lexington Places

Private homes aren't Lexington's only historical buildings. Here is a sampling of other noteworthy sites.

Patterson Cabin. At Transylvania University, on Broadway at Third Street, you can see the Patterson Cabin, built around 1783 by one of Lexington's founders. Old Morrison, the school's Greek Revival style administration building, was built between 1830 and 1834. Its designer was Gideon Shryock, one of Kentucky's leading Greek

Revival architects.

Courthouse Square, The Old Fayette County Courthouse. This impressive Romanesque-style structure on Main Street is Lexington's fifth courthouse, and was restored in 2018. To the west is Cheapside, a small park with a pavilion. Originally a wide street, this was the site of slave auctions and abolitionists' speeches in antebellum Lexington; later it was the site of horse sales and other trading.

First National Building.

Also on Main Street is Lexington's first "skyscraper." The 15-story First National Building at Main and Upper streets was the tallest building between Cincinnati and Atlanta when built in 1914. It is now home to the 21c Museum Hotel.

The Lexington Opera House at Broadway and Short


Street was built in 1886 and restored in 1975. Al Jolsen, Will Rogers and Fanny Brice are among those who have graced its stage; the Opera House is still used for ballet and stage performances. (859) 233-4567

Lexington Cemetery. Since 1849, over 60,000 people have been buried in this beautifully land-

scaped, park-like cemetery west of the downtown business district. Nationally known as an arboretum and garden, it contains many lovely and interesting monuments to well-known Kentuckians, many adorned with statues, poetry and interesting epitaphs. Most visible is the 130-foot tall Henry

Clay monument. At the top is a statue of Clay facing toward his beloved Ashland estate. The grounds are open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. seven days a week. Free. Keep in mind that while park-like, the Lexington Cemetery is not a park; no picnicking, pets, bicycling, sports activities or sunbathing allowed. (859) 255-5522

Loudoun House. The Gothic villa at 209 Castlewood Drive in Lexington is considered one of the finest Gothic Revival houses in the South. It was built in 1849-1850 for Francis Key Hunt, who chose one of the leading architects of the time, Alexander

Jackson Davis of New York, to design his house. Davis had designed many of the mansions in New York's Hudson Valley. Davis designed a romantic, castle-like villa with towers and turrets. Loudoun House is home to the Lexington Art League, which uses it as exhibit and classroom space and for special events and artists' studios. (859) 254-7024 

Bluegrass Note: In 1911, a statue on the Fayette County Courthouse lawn of Confederate General John Hunt Morgan created waves of controversy. The sculptor Pompeo Coppini showed Morgan astride what was obviously a stallion, instead of the General's beloved mare Black Bess. (According to accounts, a collective gasp arose from the crowd when the statue was unveiled. One prominent Lexingtonian was supposedly so outraged that he challenged the sculptor to a duel). You can now view the statue at Lexington Cemetery near the Confederate cemetery.

Bluegrass Note: Many historic Lexington buildings have found new uses. The Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning, 251 West Second Street, is located in the 1904 building that served as Lexington's library until the 1980s. ArtsPlace, home to many of the city's arts organizations, is located in a Beaux Arts style building downtown at 161 North Mill Street. The Mayor's offices and other Urban County Government offices are located in the old Lafayette Hotel at 200 East Main Street. An entire block of 19th-century commercial buildings in downtown was renovated to become the office, retail and dining complex called "The Square" and is also home to the Lexington Explorium and Lexington Children's Theatre.

Be sure you see the insert:
Historic Places in the Bluegrass Region.

**For more information contact VisitLEX at
(800) 845-3959.**

By Teresa Day, a freelance travel writer based in Lexington, KY

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HISTORIC PLACES IN THE BLUEGRASS REGION

History beckons from every direction in Lexington. Believe it or not, here's just a sampling of attractions worth visiting:

America's largest restored Shaker community. About 25 miles southwest of Lexington via US 68 is **Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill**. More than 30 beautifully restored buildings display Shaker furniture, crafts, textiles, and other artifacts. There also are gardens, craftmaking demonstrations, an interpretive center and many special events. Spring through fall, you can take a paddlewheel ride down the Kentucky River, the state's most historic waterway. Open daily. Admission charged. (859) 734-5411

Pioneer places. Just a few miles from Shaker Village is **Old Fort Harrod State Park**, in Harrodsburg. The fort is a nicely done, scale replica of Kentucky's first permanent settlement. The adjacent Pioneer Cemetery and many items in the Mansion Museum are the real McCoys. The fort is open year round but hours vary; the museum closes in winter months. Admission charged. (859) 734-3314

In rural Mercer County is the **Old Mud Meetinghouse**, an 1800 Dutch Reform church building. Tour by appointment; call the Harrodsburg Historical Society after 1 p.m. at 859-734-5985 to arrange a guided tour.

Where leaders lived. South of Lexington via Interstate 75 (or the historic **Valley View Ferry** off KY 169) is **White Hall State Historic Site**. (859) 623-9178. This elegant Italianate, mansion built around 1799, was ahead of its time on such matters as indoor plumbing and central heating. Just as interesting is the story of its owner, Cassius Marcellus Clay, an outspoken emancipationist, newspaper publisher and Minister to Russia. Open Wednesday through Sunday, April 1 through October 31. Call for hours. Admission charged.

Nearby, between Richmond and Winchester, is another replica of a pioneer fort. **Fort Boonesborough State Park** (859) 527-3131, replicates the frontier outpost settled by Daniel Boone

in 1775. Open Wednesday through Sunday, April through October.

Winchester's Main Street is a charming example of a 19th-century commercial district. The **Holly Rood Clark Mansion**, built in 1813 for Kentucky's 12th governor, James Clark, is open by appointment. (859) 745-6664

Civil War camp and cemetery. Past Nicholasville off US 27, south of Lexington, is **Camp Nelson Civil War Site**. Camp Nelson was a large base of operation for the Union army, particularly as a recruiting center for African-American soldiers. Thousands of Kentucky slaves joined Union forces, and after Emancipation, thousands of African-American families received official documents of freedom at this spot. More than 4,000 Civil War casualties are buried in Camp Nelson National Cemetery. (859) 881-5716

A constitutional square and a "country" doctor. Continuing south via US 27 and US 150 you'll come to Danville, home of **Constitution Square State Historic Site** (134 South 2nd Street; 859-236-7794). You'll see a pre-1792 post office (the first west of the Alleghenies) and replicas of an early meetinghouse, courthouse and jail. Across the street is the **McDowell House**, where in 1809, pioneering Kentucky doctor Ephraim McDowell performed the first successful surgery to remove an ovarian tumor. The Federal-style house includes an apothecary with early medical and dental supplies and equipment. Admission charged. (859) 236-2804. A walking tour of this picturesque community includes the **Rodes House**, 305 North Third, where the film "Raintree County" was filmed in 1956. Pick up a walking and driving tour map at the visitor center (105 East Walnut St.; 859-236-7794).

Fields of battle. Ten miles west of Danville, at **Perryville Battlefield State Historic Site**, you can walk the fields where Kentucky's biggest and bloodiest Civil War battle was fought on October 8, 1862. Each October, the battle is commemorated with a reenactment, tours, living history encampments, ghost walks, a parade, and a craft fair and flea market each October. (859)-332-8631

Home of an Indian fighter. East of Danville

and Stanford via US 150 is one of Kentucky's oldest brick houses. The **William Whitley House State Historic Site** was built in the 1780s. Features include a hidden staircase and hiding places in case of Indian attack. Open spring through fall. (606) 355-2881

Pioneers and a place of prayer. North of Lexington in Paris, you can see **Duncan Tavern** (323 High Street; 859-987-1788). Guests at this 1788 stone tavern included Daniel Boone. Open Wednesday through Saturday. At **Cane Ridge Meeting House** east of Paris (KY 537; (859) 987-5350) you'll see the largest log meetinghouse in the nation. Mass revivals here in 1801 and 1804 led to the founding of the Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ. Open daily, April through October. Call ahead in winter months.

A monument to the lost cause. **Battle Grove Cemetery** on East Pike Street in Cynthiana (north of Paris via US 68 and US 27) contains what is thought to be the second oldest Confederate memorial in the United States. Indian Creek Baptist Church on Millersburg Pike is the oldest church west of the Alleghenies that is still in use.

Revolutionary reminder. Off US 68, about 20 miles north of Paris, is **Blue Licks Battlefield State Park**, site of the last Revolutionary War battle in the West in 1782. A monument marks those who died, including Daniel Boone's son Israel. (800) 443-7008

Country places and an unsung hero. Off US 60 west of Lexington (turn right on KY 1967 next to the castle) is **Pisgah**, the state's largest rural historic district, including the 1812 Pisgah Church. Returning to US 60 and continuing west you'll come to Woodford County, where historic sites include the **Jack Jouett House** (Craig's Creek Pike; 859-873-7902). The Federal-style brick cottage was built in the late 1790s by Jouett, an unsung "Paul Revere" who made a daring all-night ride to save

Thomas Jefferson from capture by the British. Open April 1 through October 31. Call for hours.

Capital history and the "Wright stuff."

Kentucky's capital, Frankfort, west of Lexington via I-64, contains numerous public and private buildings of historic interest. You can tour the Beaux Arts-style **Capitol** building (502) 564-3449; the restored 1914 Beaux Arts-style **Governor's**

Blue Note: Ward Hall, just west of Georgetown on US 460, is considered one of the finest examples of Greek Revival architecture in the nation. This huge house – 75 feet square — was built as the summer home of Mississippi planter Junius Ward in 1856 (for the then lavish sum of \$50,000). Features include a two-story portico with 40-foot columns, rubbed walnut woodwork, lavish interior fresco ornamentation and a winding staircase. It is occasionally open for touring: call (502) 863-5356.

Mansion, modeled after Marie Antoinette's summer villa (502) 564-3449; and the **Old State Capitol**, with its intriguing self-supporting stone staircase (502) 564-1792. Private homes open for tour include **Liberty Hall** (home to Kentucky's most famous ghost, the "Grey Lady") and the **Orlando Brown House**, both beautiful examples of elegant Kentucky living in the early 1800s (a dual tour is offered; 502-227-2560). The **Vest-Lindsey**

House, built in 1820, was the boyhood home of U.S. Senator George Graham Vest, who is credited with the phrase "dog is man's best friend." (502) 564-6980. Frankfort also includes the only Frank Lloyd Wright-designed house in Kentucky. Privately owned, it is not currently open for tours but you can drive by: 509 Shelby Street, Frankfort, KY.

Memorable memorials. The picturesque **Frankfort Cemetery**, overlooking the Kentucky River, is the resting place of many Kentucky notables including Daniel and Rebecca Boone and poet Theodore O'Hara, whose tombstone carries his famous poem "Bivouac of the Dead." One of the most unusual and personal war memorials in the nation is located on Vernon Cooper in Frankfort; the **Kentucky Vietnam Veterans Memorial** is a huge sundial. Names of the 1,065 Kentuckians killed in Vietnam are arranged so that the shadow of the gnomon touches each soldier's name on the anniversary of his death. 🐾