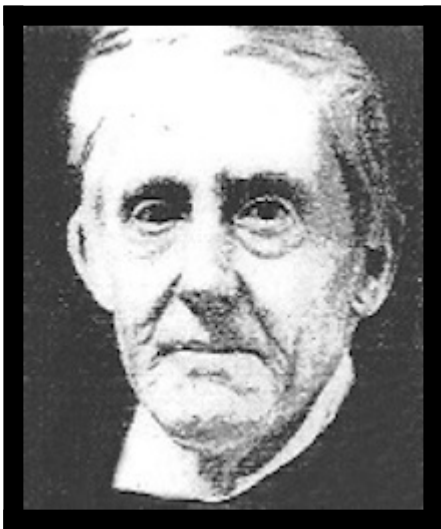


# Leonard Stephens, Kenton County, Kentucky's First Sheriff

## Leonard Stephens Kenton County, Kentucky's First Sheriff



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Kenton County was officially established on January 29, 1840,  
carved entirely from the western half of Campbell County which

had been established earlier in 1794. Kentucky's Second Constitution dictated at the time that a sheriff be appointed, based upon the recommendation to the Governor of two qualified candidates chosen by the Kenton County Court. Governor Charles A. Wickliffe appointed Leonard Stephens as the first Sheriff of Kenton County. He served in the office from 1840 until 1842.

Stephens was born in Orange County, Virginia on March 10, 1791. He moved to Campbell County (now Kenton County) from Bryans Station in Fayette County Kentucky in 1807 with his parents, Benjamin Stephens (1754-1775) and Dorothy Waller Stephens (1756-1836).

Stephens was active in politics and served four terms in the Kentucky House of Representatives (1824-1828) and one in the Kentucky State Senate (1829-1833). Not long after he left the Senate, he attained the rank of a Brigadier General, and in 1839, Governor James Clark promoted him to Major General, commanding the 13th Division of the Kentucky Militia.

During the early decades of Kentucky statehood, the sheriff served as the county's principal law-enforcement and administrative officer—a position that carried far broader responsibilities than the modern office. In this period, Stephens would have been responsible for arresting individuals charged with crimes and for serving the criminal warrants issued by the courts. He was required to deliver writs, summonses, and other legal orders essential to the functioning of county government, while also collecting state and county taxes, a duty that often consumed the largest share of a sheriff's time and attention.

As sheriff, Stephens also acted as jailer, overseeing the custody, care, and transport of prisoners held under county authority. He supervised the conduct of elections, ensuring that

polling places operated lawfully and that vote totals were properly certified. In civil matters, he executed court-ordered judgments and managed public sales, including property auctions arising from debt cases or estate settlements. Together, these responsibilities made the sheriff one of the most influential figures in early county administration.

Stephens died on March 8, 1873 in Boone County, Kentucky at the age of 81. He is buried in the Stephens Family Cemetery in Erlanger, Kentucky.