

# **Nathan Kelly, Campbell County, Kentucky's First Sheriff**

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Nathan Kelly departed Augusta County, Virginia, in late 1790 and subsequently settled in the newly developing town of Newport in Campbell County, Kentucky. In 1791, James Taylor—surveyor, founder of Newport, and one of the region's most influential landowners—sold Kelly a lot on which he constructed the first dwelling in the town considered substantial enough to be regarded as a true house, located on the south side of modern Second Street between Columbia and Central Avenues.

Kelly was appointed the first sheriff of Campbell County by Governor Isaac Shelby in December 1794 and formally took his oath of office in January 1795. It is believed that Kelly secured the office through the influence of James Taylor, who was appointed at the same time to the position of Clerk of Courts. Later in 1795, Kelly was appointed among the first trustees of the town.

As sheriff, Kelly played a foundational role in shaping the county's law-enforcement and administrative framework during its formative years. His tenure, which lasted from 1794 to 1797, occurred during a period of rapid settlement, land speculation, and political organization along the Ohio River.

In early Kentucky, the sheriff served as the county's chief law-enforcement and administrative officer, responsible for arresting individuals accused of crimes, executing criminal warrants, serving writs and summonses, and carrying out other legal orders essential to county governance. The sheriff also acted as the principal tax collector for both the state and county and, in many jurisdictions, performed the duties of jailer, overseeing the custody and security of prisoners.

Kelly's civil service abruptly ended when he resigned from his positions, as trustee on September 11, 1797 and as Sheriff in November. His documented history ends at this point, as it is believed that he permanently left Newport and Kentucky.

His contributions to the early civic structure of Campbell County and the settlement of Newport remain central to his historical legacy, even as significant aspects of his personal life remain undocumented due to the fragmentary nature of surviving frontier-era records.