



Where Do I Live, Again?: Finding Kentucky Geographic Information

Kurt Metzmeier

Recently, local election officials sent letters to residents of the Willow Creek subdivision informing them that the state mapping software had located their homes in Jefferson County, not Oldham County, where it appears from news stories the deeds to their properties were registered. The residents had been paying taxes, voting and sending their kids to Oldham County schools for decades.

A story in the *Courier-Journal* noted that while the underlying property lines had not changed, the state Board of Elections had recently aligned its precinct maps with the state geographic information database, an action which revealed the discrepancy. There are indications that some officials knew that some deeds along the Jefferson-Oldham border were registered in the wrong county. Jefferson Property Valuation Administrator Colleen Younger said that such conflicts had in the past been resolved with “handshake agreements.” Jefferson County Clerk David Yates has already filed a declaratory action to get the courts involved in resolving this mess as orderly as possible.

Interestingly, this will not be the first time the Jefferson-Oldham line has led to a dispute. In 1873, local landowner Phillip R. Taylor petitioned the legislature to move the portion of his sizable estate in Jefferson County to Oldham County. The legislature granted his request, creating the Oldham County Notch. No one knows exactly why the legislature agreed, but the possibility of corruption in such laws is why the 1890-91 Constitutional Convention

barred local and special legislation in § 59 and § 60 of the Kentucky constitution.

Since the foundation of the United States, Americans have surveyed and recorded deeds to their properties in the county where they resided. However, until recently, those property surveys, as well as county boundary lines, were the product of human surveyors drawing lines on sturdy paper. Only in the late 20th century, when satellites began surveying the globe, computers became affordable and the internet made information readily accessible, did human

maps give way to geographic information systems (GIS).

The Census Bureau’s TIGER

The federal government had long made street-level maps—a necessity for the thousands of workers it sent out to collect census data. In 1990, the United States Census Bureau debuted the Topologically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Referencing (TIGER), a computer-based geographic information system created to assist census takers in finding the houses they needed to enumerate. It includes roads, highways, city limits, rivers and census tracts.

However, the government did not keep this information to itself; the TIGER database of coordinates has been available freely to mapmakers for years. However, when combined with Global Positioning System (GPS) satellite data that became publicly available in the late 1990s, it became the basis for everything from MapQuest to the state GIS systems involved in this controversy.

“TIGER helped grow an entire industry — the GIS industry — and created many good jobs by providing popular mapping products integral to the everyday lives of Americans,” U.S. Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker said while commemorating its 25th anniversary last year.

Kentucky State Resources

As referenced earlier, in 2022 the Kentucky General Assembly passed KRS 42.655, which mandates that “the

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geographic information clearing house maintained by the [Kentucky] division of geographic information systems shall be the sole database of geographic information maintained by state agencies.” A regulation, 200 KAR 41:010, was promulgated to ensure that all official government mapping used the same “state plane coordinate system” to ensure uniformity. The conflict on the Jefferson-Oldham County line is most likely a pre-existing issue that has been brought to light. With borders drawn between 120 Kentucky counties, I suspect it will not be the last.

The KyGeoNet (<https://kygeonet.ky.gov/>) is the home of the Kentucky Division of Geographic Information’s Geospatial Data Clearinghouse referenced in KRS 42.655. It provides access to three important databases. The key one is the KyGovMaps Open GIS Data Portal (<https://opengisdata.ky.gov/>), which is the primary geographic and geospatial data clearinghouse for Kentucky. Ky-FromAbove (<https://kyfromabove.ky.gov/>) provides access to “statewide aerial photography, Lidar point clouds, and bare-earth digital elevation models.” Yes, I don’t understand all of this, either, but the aerial maps are very good. If you want to confirm that the Louisville Highlands are indeed on high ground, KyTopo (<https://kyfromabove.ky.gov/pages/kytopo>) provides access to topographical elevation maps.

Jefferson County and Oldham County Geographic and Land Records LOJIC

The Louisville/Jefferson County Information Consortium (LOJIC) “represents a multi-agency effort to build and maintain a comprehensive Geographic Information System (GIS) to serve all of Louisville Metro, Jefferson County, Kentucky.” The four agencies that make up LOJIC are Louisville Metro Government, the Jefferson County Property

Valuation Administrator, the Metropolitan Sewer District and Louisville Water Company. Partners include Jefferson County Public Schools, LG&E, the US Army Corps of Engineers, the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet and Bullitt and Oldham counties.

This collaboration means the base LOJIC Online map includes useful data overlays. You can search an address and then get in-depth information on that property, including ownership, assessed value, lot size, parcel number and information on sewer, fire and waste collection services. You can also view historic aerial imagery of the lot and surrounding properties, with semi-annual images back to 1997 for Jefferson County. (Less frequent aerial photography is available for parcels in Oldham and Bullitt dating back to the early 2000s.) Comprehensive census data and political district information is also available for a chosen parcel. Just moved in and don’t know your neighbors’ names? Just look up your address, then move your cursor over nearby houses and click to see the owners’ names.

Property Valuation Administrator (PVA)

In Kentucky, the PVA is an elected county official responsible for determining the property value of parcels for assessing ad valorem property tax. These valuations are important to property taxpayers and sellers and are therefore public records. The Jefferson County PVA (<https://jeffersonpva.ky.gov/>) has a limited free search by address and more data in a paid service for realtors, but LOJIC is a more robust tool. The Oldham PVA (<https://oldhampva.com/>) property search uses a commercial provider, but if you start at the Oldham PVA page, the basic search is free. Neither has maps, but both indirectly contribute to LOJIC.

County Clerk Deed Records

In Jefferson County, deed records are in the custody of

the county clerk’s office and accessed through the deed room in the Jefferson County Courthouse, and those from 1985 can be searched at <https://search.jeffersondeeds.com/>. In Oldham County, you can search a property at <https://oldhamcountyclerk.ky.gov/land-records/>.

Mapping the Jefferson County Way of Life

A recent letter to the *Courier-Journal* from a resident of a subdivision built in the 1970s and straddling the county line decried the “new law” that classified her as a resident of Jefferson County. “I do not in any way, shape, or form want to be classified as a Louisvillian,” she declared, because I disagree with [their] ways of life.”

It goes to show how important, emotionally and in real estate law, a county line on a map can be. It determines where people vote, who represents them and where they pay taxes. It can also be part of their identity. It will be interesting to see how the property, voting and tax records are ultimately untangled, but it will likely involve quite a bit of litigation.

However, some people will inevitably need to adapt to a Louisville Metro lifestyle. To ease the transition, I suggest giving the newcomers David Domine’s “A Dark Room in Glitter Ball City” from Carmichael’s Bookstore, a gift certificate to the Mayan Cafe and Jack Harlow’s “Jackman” on vinyl.

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