
Indirectly Identifying Relatives of Michael Kerns of Blair County and Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania

By Pam Pracser Anderson

When a name occurs in two counties, only thorough research and careful comparisons can reveal whether it applies to one person or more than one.

Experienced genealogists avoid same name–same person conclusions, even with uncommon names. Neither do they assume that like-named persons a generation apart are parent and child. They are especially wary when distance and time separate the records and no evidence specifies a shared identity or relationship. Nevertheless, discounting the possibilities can obscure the truth.

Michael Kerns of Blair County, Pennsylvania, makes the point. No record of Michael names his father or gives his wife's maiden name. Michael Kerns of Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania, had a son Michael. Did the son, father, or someone else of that name settle in Blair County? Clues in records of four Kerns generations, from 1792 through 1938, help identify Michael's father, likely mother, and wife.

MICHAEL KERNS OF BLAIR COUNTY

Michael, who was born on 16 July 1800, died on 14 June 1875. He was buried with his wife, Elizabeth, at the Hollidaysburg Presbyterian Cemetery in Blair County.¹ In 1850 the middle-aged couple was first enumerated in Blair County with eight apparent children ages eight to twenty-four.²

Records of each child give information about their parents, some conflicting. The tabulated evidence shows points of agreement and gives clues to their parents' origins. See table 1.

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1. *Find A Grave* (<https://www.findagrave.com>), memorial 38676445, transcription by LSK, 23 June 2009, of Michael Kerns gravestone (Hollidaysburg Presbyterian Cemetery; Hollidaysburg, Pa.). Also, *ibid.*, memorial 39017997, transcription of Elizabeth Kerns gravestone, 3 July 2009. Records show various spellings of *Kerns*, including *Carnes*, *Carns*, *Currens*, *Kearn*, *Kearns*, and *Kern*. This article uses *Kerns* except when quoting.

2. 1850 U.S. census, Blair Co., Pa., population schedule, Allegheny Twp., fol. 242r–v, dwelling 65, family 71, Michael Carns; microfilm publication M432, roll 755, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Also, 1860 U.S. census, Blair Co., Pa., pop. sch., Woodbury Twp., p. 133, dwell. 894, fam. 913, Michael Carns; NARA microfilm M653, roll 1078. Also, 1870 U.S. census, Blair Co., Pa., pop. sch., Gaysport Boro, p. 2, dwell./fam. 15, "Michl" Karns; NARA microfilm M593, roll 1309.

Table 1
Evidence of Michael and Elizabeth Kerns from Their Children's Records

CHILD	CHILD'S BIRTH DATE AND BIRTHPLACE	FATHER AND HIS BIRTHPLACE	MOTHER AND HER BIRTHPLACE
Mary A. Kerns	November 1825	[Not named] Pennsylvania	[Not named] Pennsylvania ^a
Esther (Kerns) Conifer Reed	15 April 1827 Pennsylvania	John Kerns Germany	"Don't know" ^b
William Kerns	April 1829 Blair County	Michael Kerns Ireland	Elizabeth Neal ^c America
"	Trout Creek Valley	[Not given]	[Not given] ^d
"	Canoe Valley	[Not given]	[Not given] ^e
"	9 February 1829 Yellowspring, Pennsylvania	Michael Kerns Ireland	Mary Neil/Neal Scotland ^f
Henry Kerns	26 July 1832 Franklin County, Pennsylvania	Michael Kern Pennsylvania	Elizabeth Wolf Pennsylvania ^g
Uriah Kerns	30 March 1834 Blair County, Pennsylvania	Michael Kern Pennsylvania	[Not given] ^h
Elizabeth (Kerns) DeHaven	7 August 1837 Trough Creek, Pennsylvania	Michael Kern Ireland	Elizabeth Neal Path Valley, Franklin County ⁱ
Rachel J. (Kerns) Tresse	14 January 1840 Pennsylvania	Michael Kern Pennsylvania	Ruth Pennsylvania ^j
Emma Ida (Kerns) Helsel	15 October 1842 Pennsylvania	Michael Kern Pennsylvania	"Don't know" ^k

a. 1900 U.S. census, Blair Co., Pa., population schedule, Gaysport Borough, Enumeration District 74, sheet 1B, dwell./fam. 19, Mary Karns; microfilm T623, roll 1381, National Archives and Records Administration.

b. "Pennsylvania, Death Certificates, 1906-1964," *Ancestry* (<https://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=5164>) > 1913 > 000001-001900 > image 106, certificate no. 102 (1913), Mrs. Esther Reed.

c. Jennie Amrhein and Roy Amrhein, comps., *John P. Lafferty Funeral Home Records 1889-1907* (Hollidaysburg, Pa.: Blair County Genealogical Society, 2004), 74.

d. "Pennsylvania, Death Certificates, 1906-1964," *Ancestry* > 1938 > 085001-088000 > image 3131, certificate no. 87442 (1938), Orville William Kerns (son of William).

e. "William Kerns," *Mirror* (Altoona, Pa.), 16 June 1904, page 8, col. 3.

f. Forrest Shoup Jr., "An American Family Tree," typescript, ca. 1970s, section on Kerns family, ch. 2, p. 13; Blair County Genealogical Society, Hollidaysburg, Pa. The parent information is undocumented.

g. "Pennsylvania, Death Certificates, 1906-1964," *Ancestry* > 1918 > 081751-085000 > image 351, certificate no. 82082 (1918), Henry S. Kern. For the township, see Henry S. Kern, Declaration for Pension, 22 May 1912 (Pvt., Co. I, 46th Penn. Inf., Civil War), pension no. 764070, Case Files of Approved Pension Applications . . . , 1861-1934; Civil War and Later Pension Files; Department of Veterans Affairs, Record Group 15; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

h. "Pennsylvania, Death Certificates, 1906-1964," *Ancestry* > 1907 > 041451-044960 > image 1713, certificate no. 42701 (1907), Uriah Kern.

i. *Ibid.* > 1908 > 033001-036800 > image 2336, no. 35257 (1908), Elizabeth DeHaven.

j. *Ibid.* > 1921 > 053501-056500 > image 1762, no. 55136 (1921), Rachel J. Treese.

k. *Ibid.* > 1916 > 112341-115620 > image 2043, no. 114311 (1916), Emma Helsel.

With an improbable exception, items in table 1 show the children's father was Michael Kerns. The children's birthplaces suggest their parents zigzagged across three or four south-central Pennsylvania counties. Not all the birthplaces can be correct, however. William, for example, could not have been born in four places. Also, two children were reported born in Blair County in 1829 and 1834, before it existed. In 1846 Blair was formed from Bedford County, now south of Blair.³

Besides specifying Blair County and Franklin County, Pennsylvania, the locations imply births in Huntingdon County, lying between the two. Yellowspring and Canoe Creek (not "Valley") are small towns in Huntingdon County. Trout Creek, not found on maps of those counties, likely was Trough Creek, also in Huntingdon County.

Another confusion might also explain claims that Michael was born in Ireland. Dublin Township, Pennsylvania, lies in Huntingdon County.⁴ After Michael's death, his children and grandchildren, with fading memories that Michael was born in Dublin, could have confused Huntingdon County with Ireland.

If Michael was born in Pennsylvania, then Dublin Township seems the likely place. Records of him and his family should be in Huntingdon County.

MICHAEL KERNS OF HUNTINGDON COUNTY

On 10 September 1792, eight years before the birth of Michael of Blair County, Michael Kerns purchased 190 acres in Huntingdon County, creating his first record there.⁵ An 1883 Huntingdon County history highlights that older Michael, backdates his settlement to before 1791, and mentions the "Kern farm" in Tell Township, formed from Dublin Township in April 1810:

"[The Tuscarora Creek] rises in Dublin township and flows northeasterly along the northwest foot of Hunting Ridge, through the hamlet of Nossville, to the Kern farm. . . . Trough Spring Creek rises on the McNeal and Berrier farms in the southerly part of the township . . . and empties into Tuscarora Creek on the Kern farm, at the foot of Hunting Ridge. . . . Among the other early settlers in this neighborhood were . . . [several neighbors and] Michael Kern, all of whom were there previous to 1791.⁶

This history also says Michael was a Dublin Township supervisor in 1800—the year Michael Kerns of Blair County was born. The older Michael was constable in Tell Township in 1817.⁷ His Huntingdon County household in 1800, 1810, and 1820 included a boy who could have been Michael Kerns of Blair County. See table 2.

3. *Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Passed at the Session of 1846* (Harrisburg: state printer, 1846), 64–70, "An Act Erecting Parts of Huntingdon and Bedford Counties into a New County, to be Called Blair," 26 February 1846.

4. J. Simpson Africa, *History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883), 265.

5. "Pennsylvania, Land Warrants and Applications, 1733–1952," database and images, *Ancestry* (<https://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=2350>) > Huntingdon > 1828 > images 19–20, Pa. Land Office, survey warrant, 9 June 1828, for land grant deeded by Henderson Harvey to Michael Kern, 10 September 1792.

6. Africa, *History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Pennsylvania*, 364–65.

7. *Ibid.*, 266 (supervisor) and 365 (constable).

	AGES IN 1800 ^a	AGES IN 1810 ^b	AGES IN 1820 ^c	COMBINED IMPLICATION
MALES	26–44	45 and upward	45 and upward	head, b. 1755–65
	under 10	10–15		son, b. 1794–1800, gone by 1820
	under 10	under 10	18–25	son, b. about 1800
		under 10	18–25	son, b. 1800–1804
		under 10	10–15	son, b. 1804–10
FEMALES	26–44	26–44	45 and upward	wife of head, b. 1765–74
	26–44	16–25	26–44	dau., b. 1784–90
	10–15			dau., b. 1784–90, gone by 1810
	under 10	10–15	26–44	dau., b. about 1794
	under 10	10–15	18–25	dau., b. 1794–1800
		under 10	10–15	dau., b. 1804–10

a. 1800 U.S. census, Huntingdon Co., Pa., Dublin Twp., p. 142, Michael Kern household; microfilm publication M32, roll 40, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).
 b. 1810 U.S. census, Huntingdon Co., Pa., Dublin Twp., p. 11, M Carnes household; NARA microfilm M252, roll 51.
 c. 1820 U.S. census, Huntingdon Co., Pa., population schedule, Tell Twp., fol. 13, Michael Carren household; NARA microfilm M33, roll 104.

This older Michael Kerns died on 2 January 1838 at age eighty-four.⁸ Thus, he was born likely in 1753. His will, proved on 15 January 1838, gives his wife, Catherine, and daughter Nancy life interests in his real estate and requires Catherine to “keep and maintain” Nancy. It also directs that, after their deaths or marriages, his real estate be sold and the proceeds divided among seven children: Elizabeth, Catharine, Barbara, Mary, Jacob, Michael, and Peter.⁹

Table 2 implies Michael had four sons, but his will names three. The omission suggests a son died before December 1837, when Michael made his will. John Kerns was taxed in Tell Township as a single freeman in 1817 and as a property owner in 1821–25.¹⁰ The location, his apparent age, and the absence of another Kerns family suggest John was the omitted son. If he turned twenty-one in 1817, he was born in

8. Elf Cemetery (Tell Twp., Huntingdon Co., Pa.), Michel Kern marker; photographed and transcribed by author, 17 October 2015.

9. “Pennsylvania, Wills and Probate Records, 1683–1993,” *Ancestry* (<https://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=8802>) > Huntingdon > Wills, Vol 9–11, 1878–1888 > images 400–401, Huntingdon Co., Will Book 10:307–8, Michael Kerns, 28 December 1837. When the clerk registered the will, on 23 May 1885, he wrote: “This Will was found to be not registered[,] it was mislaid or otherwise.”

10. Huntingdon Co., Pa., “1810–1833 Tell Township Tax Lists,” digital images on CD, chronologically arranged and then grouped alphabetically by first letter of surname, John Kerns entries; Huntingdon County Historical Society, Huntingdon, Pa. The CD does not include the 1814 and 1819 lists.

Table 3
 Estimated Ages of Children of Michael Kerns of Huntingdon County

NAME ^a	LIKELY BIRTH YEARS
Elizabeth	1783–84 ^b
Catharine	1784–90 ^c
Barbara	about 1790 ^d
Mary	1792–93 ^e
John	1795–96 ^f
Jacob	1798–99 ^g
Michael	1800–1804 ^h
Nancy	1804–5 ⁱ
Peter	1807–8 ^j

a. For all except John, see "Pennsylvania, Wills and Probate Records, 1683–1993," *Ancestry* (<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=8802>) > Huntingdon > Wills, Vol 9–11, 1878–1888 > images 400–401, Huntingdon Co., Will Book 10:307–8, Michael Kerns, 28 December 1837. For John, see explanation in the text.

b. 1850 U.S. census, Huntingdon Co., Pa., population schedule, Barree Twp., fol. 136r, dwelling 185, family 188, John Scott household for Elizabeth Scott, seventy-six; microfilm publication M432, roll 784, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). William Scott, likely Elizabeth's heir, renounced his right to administer Michael Kerns's estate. See "Pennsylvania, Wills and Probate Records, 1683–1993," *Ancestry* > Huntingdon > Wills, Vol 12–13, 1888–1894 > image 9, Huntingdon Co., Will Book 12:6–7, renunciation by heirs, 18 May 1889.

c. See table 2.

d. See table 2.

e. 1850 U.S. census, Huntingdon Co., Pa., pop. sch., Cromwell Twp., fol. 270r, dwell./fam. 37, Mary Gilleland, fifty-eight. Nancy Gilliland, likely Mary's daughter, renounced her right to administer Michael Kerns's estate. See Huntingdon Co., Will Book 12:6–7, renunciation by heirs, 18 May 1889.

f. John's birth is estimated from his appearance as a taxpayer in 1813. See Huntingdon Co., "1810–1833 Tell Township Tax Lists," digital images on CD, chronologically arranged and thereunder grouped alphabetically by first letter of surname, John Kern entries; Huntingdon County Historical Society, Huntingdon, Pa.

g. 1850 U.S. census, Wabash Co., Ind., pop. sch., Salt Creek Twp., fol. 113r, dwell 245, fam. 249, Jacob Carns, fifty-one; NARA microfilm M432, roll 152.

h. See table 2.

i. 1850 U.S. census, Huntingdon Co., Pa., pop. sch., Tell Twp., fol. 258r, dwell./fam. 57, Catherine Kern household for "Agness" Kern, forty-five.

j. *Ibid.*, dwell./fam. 56, Peter Kern, forty-two.

1795–96. His survivors in 1831 may have included "Daniel Kern 6 yr. old Jan. 1831 son of widdow Kern."¹¹

Except for Michael's daughter Nancy, who apparently was disabled, his testamentary listing of his surviving children, with daughters first, reflects their birth order. See table 3, which shows that Michael's son Michael was of comparable age to Michael Kerns of Blair County.

Surviving Tell Township tax listings, for 1810–33, are consistent with the family composition shown in tables 2 and 3. They name only five Kerns taxpayers. Michael was taxed as a property owner throughout that period. Born before 1789, that taxpayer could be only the 1837 testator. John appeared as a single freeman in 1817,

11. *Ibid.*, 1831, listing of "Poor Children between the age of 5 and 12 years old."

Jacob and a second Michael in 1826 (later than they should have), and Peter in 1829. Those appearances are consistent with the sons' birth order shown in table 3. Jacob and Michael's appearance together is consistent with births a year or two apart.¹²

Inexplicably, Jacob, the younger Michael, and Peter appear both as single freemen and property owners: Jacob in 1826–28, the younger Michael in 1826, and both he and Peter in 1831 and 1833. The same name on two lists usually indicates two men; however, Huntingdon County records show no Jacob, Michael, or Peter Kerns who was not the elder Michael or one of his heirs.

No record states that Michael's widow, Catharine, was his children's mother. But absent contrary evidence, she likely was the mother of at least some of them. Born in 1762–63, Catharine died in the 1850s.¹³ In 1783–84, when Michael's eldest child, Elizabeth, was born, Catherine was about twenty-one. She was about forty-five in 1807–8, when Peter, Michael's youngest heir, was born. Catharine shared the name of Michael's second daughter.

ELIZABETH (NEIL) KERNS

Michael Kerns of Blair County married Elizabeth probably before their first child's birth, in November 1825.¹⁴ Three of their children's records name their mother as Elizabeth Neil. Records of three other children call her Elizabeth Wolf, Mary Neil, or Ruth.

An undocumented family history says Elizabeth Neil, daughter of David and Esther (Daver) Neil, "married Michael Kern and raised a family."¹⁵ The will of Elizabeth's childless brother David Neil corroborates that account. Among his other adult siblings, he names "my sister Elizabeth Kerns."¹⁶

The Neil home was Spring Run, Fannett Township, Franklin County.¹⁷ Fannett lies directly east of Tell Township, Huntingdon County, where Michael Kerns's

12. Huntingdon Co., "1810–1833 Tell Township Tax Lists," Kerns entries.

13. 1850 U.S. census, Huntingdon Co., Pa., pop. sch., Tell Twp., unpaginated, dwell./fam. 57, Catharine Kern; NARA microfilm M432, roll 784. Catharine is not found in 1860. See "1860 United States Federal Census," *Ancestry* (<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=7667>), "Broad" search for surname "Kerns" and birth in 1782–92.

14. 1900 U.S. census, Blair Co., Pa., pop. sch., Gaysport Borough, enumeration district (ED) 74, sheet 1B, dwell./fam. 19, Mary Karns; NARA microfilm T623, roll 1381. No evidence specifies that Mary was Michael and Elizabeth's daughter, but her name, age, and location are consistent with other censuses. See 1850 U.S. census, Blair Co., Pa., pop. sch., Allegheny Twp., fol. 242r–v, dwelling 65, family 71, Michael Carns household. Also, 1860 U.S. census, Blair Co., Pa., pop. sch., Woodbury Twp., p. 133, dwell. 894, fam. 913, Michael Carns. Also, 1870 U.S. census, Blair Co., Pa., pop. sch., Gaysport Boro, p. 2, dwell./fam. 15, Michael Karns household.

15. William T. S. Deavor, *A Brief History of the Deavor Family in America* (Harrisburg, Pa.: M. E. Book Rooms, 1896), 11.

16. "Pennsylvania, Wills and Probate Records, 1683–1993," *Ancestry* > Huntingdon > Wills, Vol F–G, 1852–1873 > image 302, Franklin Co., Pa., Will Book F:583–84, David Neil, 1 August 1863.

17. Hayes R. Eschenmann, *First Families of Old Cumberland County*, ed. Paul Barnes, vol. 29, *Shade Gap (Huntingdon and Franklin Counties)* (Carlisle, Pa.: Cumberland County Historical Society, 2005–9), 17, tracts SG191 and SG192, David Neill/Neal tract descriptions and map.

son Michael grew up and paid taxes.¹⁸ Via today's roads, the Kerns property in Huntingdon lies approximately fourteen miles from the Neil property in Franklin.

By 1830 Michael Kerns and Elizabeth were likely married with three children. He did not head a census household that year, and his family does not fit neatly into the Michael and Catharine Kerns household in Tell Township. The David Neil household, in Fannett Township, however, includes people of the ages and sexes of Michael and Elizabeth's young family.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Michael Kerns lived in Blair County, Pennsylvania, from the 1840s until 1875, when he died. No record of him names his father. No source connects him directly to Michael Kerns, son of Michael, who paid taxes in Huntingdon County. Indirect evidence, however, makes a case:

- Records of the Blair County Michael's children suggest he and some of those children were born in Huntingdon County.
- The birth year on Michael's Blair County gravestone is consistent with that of Michael, son of Michael, who lived in Huntingdon County as a child and young taxpayer. That year fits within the birth years of the senior Michael's other children.
- No other Kerns family left records in Huntingdon County during either Michael's lifetime.
- Michael appeared in Blair County after the Huntingdon County Michael's last record there.
- Before their marriage the Blair County man's wife, Elizabeth Neil, lived near the part of Huntingdon County where Michael's son Michael grew up.
- The senior Michael is the only viable candidate for the father of the man who died in Blair County.²⁰

Sharing a name does not prove two men are father and son, or that a son in one county became a same-name father in another county. Only thorough research and sound reasoning can achieve genealogical proof. In this case, sources spanning more than one hundred forty years did not specify an identity or parental relationship. Instead, they show indirectly, but convincingly, that Michael Kerns of Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania, was the father of Michael Kerns who settled in Blair County, Pennsylvania.

18. *Atlas of Blair and Huntingdon Counties, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: A. Pomeroy, 1873), map 146. The map pinpoints the "M. Kern Est." in Tell Township.

19. 1830 U.S. census, Franklin Co., Pa., Fannett Twp., p. 222, David Neil household; NARA microfilm M19, roll 151.

20. For father candidates, the author examined searchable census, church, land, probate, and tax records on *Ancestry* and *FamilySearch* for Kerns men born by 1775. The author also searched *Fold3* (<https://www.fold3.com>) and "Genealogical Research System," *Daughters of the American Revolution* (http://services.dar.org/public/dar_research/search/). She searched in person at the Franklin County and Huntingdon County courthouses, both county's historical societies, and the Pennsylvania State Archives.