Did the U. S. Federal Government Register Births?

Since birth certificates are such a big topic lately, it seemed like a good time to ask this question and look for an answer. You are probably wondering why I would ask such a question. This is why.

This document isn't in the best shape and the ink is a little faded but it is a "Notification of Birth Registration" which appears to have been issued by the U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census. It says that David Hankins McCauley [my father] was born on July 12, 1926 at RFD #4, Greenville, Ky and lists his parents as John Will McCauley and Verdie Hankins. It has signatures of the Director of the Census and the Special Agent of the Bureau assigned to Kentucky which appear to have been stamped on the document. It even has a file number - 34948. Looks like an official birth registration issued by the U. S. government doesn't it?

I've wondered for years what this thing is exactly and today I finally decided to find out. It was pretty easy to find the answer. I went to the Census Bureau website, entered "birth records" in their search field and found this article. In summary, it says that the "Notification of Birth Registration" form was issued by the Census Bureau in the first half of the 20th century but it's not a "birth certificate." The form was created in 1924 at the request of some state vital statistics offices "to promote the accurate registration of births in the United States." It was completed by the state agency and sent to the parents of newborns when the birth was registered in the state office of vital records. The form was used until the late 1940s but the Census Bureau never maintained these records.
After reading this, I did something that should have occurred to me long ago. I compared the file number to the number on Daddy's state issued birth certificate. Yes, it's the same number. As you can see, the state issued birth certificate is a "short form" which is apparently all that Kentucky has issued for several years now. I didn't find a copy of Daddy's birth certificate at the house or in the safety deposit box (where I found Mom's) back when I got into genealogy about 10 years ago. (Wonder what he used when he applied for Social Security?) I finally ordered a certified copy of his birth certificate in 2004 and was very disappointed that it was just an abstract of some of the information from the original form. I called Vital Statistics and was told the short form is all I could get.

Lucky for me, I have a "long form" copy of my own Kentucky birth certificate - just in case I decide to run for President. Of course, it's titled "Certificate of Live Birth" so maybe I won't try to run.

9 comments:

Carol April 27, 2011 at 11:01 PM
Interesting, I have never seen a document like this.  
Reply

Susan (Nolichucky Roots) April 28, 2011 at 12:16 AM
You'll have my vote, should you decide to run! This is fascinating. I've never seen this either. Makes me wonder if my parents have one tucked away somewhere.  
Reply

a3Genealogy, Kathleen Brandt April 28, 2011 at 12:35 AM
Great piece. I was also told that these were used later to stop Social Security registration fraud in some states. As you know many people
changed their birth year to become eligible for SS benefits, but there are cases, where these limited birth records, prevented them from doing so.

Reply

Linda McCauley  April 28, 2011 at 12:08 PM
Carol - Since it appears that no state or federal agency kept an "official" copy of this form, they are probably fairly rare. I'm wondering if my grandparents thought that was Daddy's BC and didn't get the real one. If they had both, it's odd this is the only one that he still had.

Susan - I've questioned my mother several times and she doesn't remember ever seeing it if she ever had one. Makes me wonder if they weren't actually used all of the time during the life of the form (1924-1940s).

Kathleen - That's interesting.

Reply

Mavis  May 7, 2011 at 3:17 PM
I've never seen a document like that either. Interesting.

Reply

Family Curator  June 13, 2012 at 6:17 PM
I'm so glad to see your post on this! I have a few of these "Notification of Birth Registration" forms in my source files and I am puzzling about the correct EE citation format. My best guess is something like an amended birth certificate. What do you think?

Reply

Replies

Linda McCauley  June 13, 2012 at 6:34 PM
I just realized that I haven't written a source for it at all. I used his official birth certificate as the source for his birth info. Since this "notification" wasn't exactly an official document (neither state or feds kept a record or copy of them), it seems more like a "hospital certificate" than a birth certificate to me. I might lean toward sourcing it as a "Family Artifact."

Anonymous  January 28, 2013 at 12:30 PM
I also have the first notification of birth registration for my father. I was wondering if it has anything to do with being born on a Indian reservation? And this document is prof of birth. This is also the only record he had

Linda McCauley  January 28, 2013 at 10:23 PM
It doesn't appear to have anything to do with Indian
reservations. They may well have been issued on reservations at the same time but they weren't limited to them.