

Kentuckians and Civic Action



Workers at Labrot & Graham Old Oscar Pepper Distillery, 1883
Kentucky Historical Society

1902 Child Labor Law

In 1902, the General Assembly passed the first effective child labor law in Kentucky history.

The law made it illegal for most industries to hire children under age 14. Agricultural work was exempt, and parents could sign off to allow their children to work.

As soon as the law went into effect, some children were removed from factories. In Paducah, for example, 100 children under age 14 were taken out of the workforce. Some, however, kept working. In *A New History of Kentucky*, Dr. Lowell Harrison and Dr. James Klotter describe conditions at one Maysville factory. There, they write, “forty children, aged eight to thirteen, worked from 5:45 A.M. until 6:15 P.M., with a thirty-minute break for lunch. All the children had permits; they all were legal under the new law; they all worked twelve hours, and each child earned twenty-three cents a day.”

In 1906, the law was strengthened to raise the working age to 16.