

# Daniel Shawhan (1738-1791)

## An Historical Sketch of Daniel Shawhan

*by Ronald T. Shawhan and Robert E. Francis*

The Daniel Shawhan (1738-1791) lineage traces itself back to **DARBY SHAWHAN** a Scotch-Irish immigrant who arrived in Kent County, Maryland in about 1698 — he may have come by way of Barbados. We know that he was an illiterate but industrious farmer, growing tobacco, on land known as “Darby’s Desire”, which was/is located a short distance northwest of the city of Kennedyville, in Kent County, MD; he and his wife, Sarah Meeks, lie buried on these grounds. Darby and Sarah were married in the still existing St. Paul’s Church, on November 20, 1707 — that union produced eight children, including Daniel (1709-177?), the father of our subject.

**DANIEL SHAWHAN** was a farmer and a tanner — i.e. one skilled in such leatherwork as shoe-making. He married Jennet (last name unknown) and had several children, including Daniel (1738-1791). Daniel, b. 1709, migrated from Kent County to Frederick County, MD in about 1740, and subsequently to Hampshire County, VA/WV in about 1759. Along the way he fought in the militia during the French and Indian War and provided ferry service to the defeated troops of General Braddock as they returned to Maryland, bloodied from the mauling they received at the hands of the French and their Indian allies when the British tried to capture Ft. Duquesne (Pittsburgh); Braddock himself had been killed during the action and the surviving troops were saved from total destruction primarily through the efforts of Colonel George Washington.

**DANIEL SHAWHAN, JR.**, was born December 17, 1738, in Kent County, Maryland,<sup>1</sup> to Daniel Shawhan, Sr. (1709-1770) and Jennett (surname unknown). There is nothing known about Daniel’s early years. Daniel moved with his family to Frederick County, Md., and then to Hampshire County, Va. It was here in 1762 that Daniel fell in love with and married the beautiful Margaret Bell, the daughter of Robert Bell (1710-1768) and Agnes Fleming (1707-1785). Family lore gives us a most wonderful expression of Margaret’s beauty. It is said that Margaret “... had hair like sunsets filled with gold and red.”<sup>2</sup> (Note: Refer to Volume II, p. 143, for further information about the Bell family--REF)

The Bell family had immigrated from County Antrim, Belfast, Ireland, in the early 1740’s. Margaret was born about 1742 either in Ireland or after the family crossed the ocean and settled four miles from Romney, Va., on the south branch of the Potomac river. From a recent family narrative, an interesting story is told about the Bells in this early period:

“Mr. Bell had many narrow escapes from the Indians of that forest. In company with two other young men, named Vaughan and Scisson, one day Robert Bell was in search of strayed horses, when the party was surprised by an Indian ambushcade on a branch of \_\_ augherty Run, Va. Vaughan was killed, a savage threw his tomahawk at Bell and wounded him. Scisson turned on his horse and fled. After the fight Mr. Bell was able to get on his horse, but he only went a short distance when he fell off. Mr. Bell’s horse arrived home before Scisson did and a party at once was formed to search for Bell. The party met Scisson at the Ohio river and he related what had happened to Mr. Bell. They supposed he was dead and returned to their homes. Within a week later they found Bell at Ft. Pitt, his wounds dressed by Dr. Knight, who figured conspicuously at the burning of Crawford.”

Robert Bell served in the expedition of 1754, during the French and Indian War, and was among the number who accompanied General George Washington on his first trip on the Kanawha. General Washington made a note in one of his diaries of those who accompanied him in his canoe.

The Bells had eight sons and two daughters. Another Bell family tale involves their son, James Bell, Sr. Though the story is not directly related to our subject, it illustrates the all-too-precarious situation our ancestors faced in those early years. When James was a small lad of ten years, his father went to Patterson Fort for a wagon

load of wood. James and his brother went along, their father wanted them to gather wood while he was hauling some home. The two boys were busy gathering wood when the Indians attacked them. They caught James but his brother ran and the Indians shot at him and he fell under a log, the Indians thinking he was dead; he was not hurt, however, and later went home and told that James was captured. The Indians took James to Indiana and kept him there till he was returned by treaty. When his father went after him he took two horses that James might ride home. When they met, James got on the horse but had ridden only a short distance when he saw a woman and some children who were also set free. James dismounted, letting the woman ride.

“When he arrived home it was at night. His mother, hearing the wooden latch lift with a string, called: ‘Is that you, James?’ and his father answered, yes. It was a joyful meeting. James had many stories to relate of his capture. Among them, was that when the Indians took him the Ohio river they made a canoe and put him in it and they had nothing to eat save what they called ‘cush meat.’ He always claimed they crossed into Pennsylvania and came through Chartiers Valley, near Chartier’s Creek. He told how they would have two lines of Indians and would make him run between the lines. And of an old Indian squaw who would be angry if they struck him, but he was a fast runner and did not get struck often. They pulled all his hair out of the top of his head and put rings in his ears. After he had been with them awhile the Indians got very friendly with him and when he left the old Indian squaw cried.

“In 1768 Robert Bell, Sr., was killed while riding home from a trip to Western Pennsylvania. On returning as he was nearing home in Virginia, after inspecting the land he intended to settle on in Pennsylvania, he was thrown from his horse and killed.

After the death of Robert Bell, Agnes Fleming and her 10 children moved to Alleghany County, Pa. It is thought that this move prompted Daniel and Margaret to migrate to Alleghany County sometime after October 23, 1771. Daniel purchased 640 acres six miles out of Fort Pitt, in the vicinity of the Old Mt. Lebanon Presbyterian Church, a section now called Carnegie, Pa., but then called St. Clair Township.<sup>3</sup>

Daniel Shawhan, Jr., is credited with being the first Shawhan to go into the whiskey distilling business, establishing a tradition that would last for four generations.<sup>4</sup> He produced a rye whiskey called “Monongahela Red” and settled down to enjoy the success of his business for the next seventeen years.

When the Revolutionary War erupted, Daniel answered the call by enlisting, August 5, 1776, in Captain Phillip Magoney’s Co., the Maryland Flying Camp—a mobile supply group.<sup>5</sup> Daniel fought in the Battle of Yorktown,<sup>6</sup> as well as serving in the Maryland 2nd Regiment in 1778, and subsequently with the 7th Co., 5th Bn., of the Washington Co., Pa. Militia.<sup>7</sup>

Daniel finally returned home to resume his life as a farmer and whiskey distiller. However, on the horizon events were conspiring that would change the course of his life. The events in question are what the history books call “The Whiskey Rebellion” and it is an ugly chapter in the first difficult years of the newly formed United States. The presenting problem was the call by some legislators for an excise tax to be placed upon the sale of whiskey. The western states, particularly western Pennsylvania and the Allegheny region of Virginia, did not take kindly to what they considered unfair taxation. However, as is always the case with volatile issues of this sort, much deeper problems lay beneath the surface. For these westerners, life on the edge of the frontier was, at best, dangerous and, at worst, a matter of sheer survival. For us today, it is difficult to imagine the terrible conditions under which the early settlers endured. It is easy to understand why average Pennsylvanian had little sympathy for the new government’s need to collect revenue. From his perspective, the government was doing little to protect its citizens on the frontier and, to add insult to injury, it sought to tax one of the few profitable commodities produced in the wilderness. The so-called Whiskey Rebellion reached a head in 1794 when President Washington sent in troops to quell the opposition. Ironically, the excise tax was overturned several years later by President Thomas Jefferson.



*Sideboard brought down the Ohio river by Daniel Shawhan in 1788.*

By 1788, Daniel decided that enough was enough and moved his family down the Ohio river to (then) Bourbon

County, Virginia. Family legend has it that the family stopped over night at a spot near Townsend Creek, located about 6 miles north of present day Paris, Kentucky, and just behind the present day Mt. Carmel church. Daniel drank from a limestone spring and declared to his wife that the water was good for distilling whiskey. He then purchased 20 acres of land and established his whiskey distilling business. Family tradition (bolstered by some Bourbon County newspaper articles written in the mid-1900's) claims that Daniel Shawhan was the originator of Bourbon whiskey. This claim, while making for great folk-lore, is probably not true.<sup>8</sup> What is true, however, is that Daniel Shawhan can rightly claim to be among the first generation of whiskey distillers to produce the distinctive liquor called "Bourbon."

Unfortunately, Daniel did not live long enough to reap the rewards of his efforts; he died at the age of 52 on May 11, 1791, leaving no will. He is buried in the Old Stoner Presbyterian Cemetery, Ruddle's Mills, Kentucky.<sup>9</sup>

The names of the appraisers of the Inventory (refer to Volume II, p. 267, for a copy of this inventory) of Daniel Shawhan, dec'd, are very revealing. "Wm McCune" was the father of Margaret "Peggy" McCune, the future wife of Daniel's son, John. "Jacob Spears," a neighbor to Daniel, was also a whiskey distiller by trade. Arguably, Jacob may have been the first to distill "Bourbon" whiskey, using that name. "Joseph Pew" (1753-1820) lived on an adjoining farm to Daniel. His family graveyard is located alongside Highway 27 only about 1/4 mile from the present day Mt. Carmel church. Joseph's daughter Cynthia Pugh married Samuel Ewalt, brother to Sallie Ewalt (wife of Daniel Shawhan's son Joseph).

We are left with very little information on the fate of Daniel Shawhan's wife, Margaret. Records indicate that Daniel's son John lived on the 130 acres of land of his father Daniel, taking care of his widowed mother Margaret (Bell) Shawhan, his sisters and young brothers. He cleared the land about the house and made improvements and raised crops toward their support. Shortly after 1809, his mother and youngest brother Joseph went to live together near an improvement set up by John's brother Daniel, after John married and had several children of his own.<sup>11</sup> We have no record of her death or where she was buried. Presumably she was buried next to Daniel in the Stonermouth Presbyterian cemetery.<sup>12</sup>

Daniel and Margaret Shawhan had the following children: Robert (1764-1833), Daniel III (1765-1841), Agnes (Nancy) (1767-), John (1771-1845), Jane "Jennie" (1775-1863), Benjamin Shawanson (1776-), Elizabeth (1779-1853), and Joseph (1781-1871).<sup>13</sup>

The first son, Robert, remained in Pennsylvania and continued the family trade of whiskey distilling. Interestingly, Robert is the only Shawhan to be remembered by general historians as a whiskey maker. His name is associated with the Whiskey Rebellion as one of the farmers who complied with the whiskey tax and had his barn burned down by opponents of the tax.<sup>14</sup>



**Daniel Shawhan Cabin, ca 1790  
Shawhan-Ruddle's Road,  
Shawhan, Kentucky**

Situated on a rise overlooking a branch of Stoner Creek, this two-story weatherboarded log house has several frame additions, forming a "saddlebag" with central chimney. The interior was never updated, as was often the case, and retains original Federal woodwork. In close proximity to the house are a large stone springhouse and a log barn.

On both the 1861 and 1877 maps the site is identified as the farm of Daniel Shawhan, a grandson of Daniel Shawhan, Sr. (1738-1791). The elder Shawhan immigrated to Bourbon County from Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, about 1788 and may have built the log structure. Perrin pp. 144, 150, 492.

Editor's Note: Picture and description taken from "Historic Architecture of Bourbon County, Kentucky," Walter E. Langsam, William Gus Johnson; Photographs by William Gus Johnson. Historic Paris-Bourbon County, Inc., in conjunction with The Kentucky Heritage Council, p. 80.

Note from Bob Francis: I visited the village of Shawhan, Kentucky, in March, 1998, and was told that the log cabin was torn down about three years ago.

Agnes Shawhan, like her brother Robert, decided to raise her family in Pennsylvania, rather than make the move to Kentucky.<sup>15</sup> In 1785 when Agnes (Nancy) was 18, she first married Isaac WILLIAMS, in Youghioghania Co., West Augusta district of VA. Isaac died in 1853 in Allegheny Co., PA. Isaac was the brother of Mary Williams who married Agnes's older brother Robert. They had the following children:<sup>16</sup> Isaac, who married Mary Ann ROBERTSON, daughter of Eli ROBERTSON (1776-1844) & Elizabeth SHAWHAN (1779-1853); John; Sarah, who married BAUSMAN; Amelia, who married John HULSE; Elizabeth, who married John M. MASON; Agnes, who married Nathaniel PATTERSON; Dorale, who married Reinhardt BAUSMAN; Margaret; Mary; Robert Shawhan. Some family historians state that Agnes married second to a Mr. Miller. Nothing more is known about this family line. (Note: Refer to Vol. II, p.

The rest of Daniel's children moved to Bourbon County, Kentucky, and are included in this Volume. Very little is known about the third son of Daniel and Margaret, Benjamin Shawhanson, other than his birth date and that he married Nancy COLLINS, daughter of John COLLINS, on 27 February 1806 in Bourbon County, Kentucky. Hopefully, further research will uncover more information about Benjamin and his possible descendants; until then, nothing more will be written about him.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Shrewsbury Parish records, page 240.

<sup>2</sup> Madsen, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Isobel Madsen records that "the property (as of 1951) was still in the hands of the family under the name of 'Shawhan Place.'" (Madsen, p. 11.) This reference has recently been verified through e-mail correspondence with Mr. Dale Patterson, a descendant of Robert BELL and Agnes FLEMING (the parents of John Shawhan's mother Margaret Bell). Mr. Patterson writes (in an e-mail message dated October 13, 1998): "I had always heard that Margaret and her family had moved on past Carnegie to Kentucky with several of the Bell brothers, but someone from that family came back at some time and settled, because at the base of the hill, close to where James and Johns' (sons of Robert Bell) claims touched each other, there was a small section of Carnegie that has always been known as Shawhan's Hill. Dad remembers his grandfather saying that one of them came back, and John sold them a little piece of his property. I'm not certain who it was that came though, but I know that one little section is still referred to (by the old timers), as Shawhan Hill."

<sup>4</sup> The family takes great pride in its four generation history of whiskey making; especially as amongst the first of those to distill that unique brand of whiskey called "Bourbon." During my research for this book project, I found it intriguing that, while our family possesses a rich variety of stories telling of the Shawhan family's contribution to whiskey making, the historians fail to include us even as footnotes in history. Refer to the essay "The History of Bourbon Whiskey and the Shawhan Family" in Volume II (p. 89) of this series for a thorough treatment of this subject.

<sup>5</sup> Maryland Archives, Vol. 18/45.

<sup>6</sup> D.A.R. Patriot Index page 608.

<sup>7</sup> R.T. Shawhan, p. 5

<sup>8</sup> Refer to my essay "The History of Bourbon Whiskey and the Shawhan Family" for a thorough treatment of this subject.

<sup>9</sup> There is no longer a gravestone which marks the final resting place of Daniel Shawhan. I visited the cemetery in March, 1998, and again in July, 1998, trying to find his and Margaret's gravestones, but to no avail. (REF)

<sup>10</sup> Bourbon County Court Will Book A, pp. 116-117. Refer also to a copy of the original inventory in Vol. II, p. 267, "Daniel Shawhan Estate Inventory."

<sup>11</sup> Hills, William G.; Shawhan, Violet Romer; Norton, Nell Downing; Lemley, Marie Perrin. "Shawhan-Shaughen Genealogy," p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> Though this is pure speculation at this juncture, could it be that Margaret was denied burial in the Stonermouth Presbyterian church graveyard because her son, Jon, had left the church after being denounced from the pulpit by the Rev. Samuel Reynolds because of John's attendance at the "Great Revival" of the Rev. Barton Stone in August, 1801 (refer to "The Biography of John Shawhan" in this issue)? It is interesting to note that no other Shawhan family member besides Daniel is buried at the Stonermouth Presbyterian graveyard. This leads us to speculate that Margaret may have been buried in the John Shawhan family cemetery. However, there is no physical evidence which supports this possibility. (REF)

<sup>13</sup> Some family historians mention two other children, Mary and George, but there is no evidence to substantiate this claim. Until this evidence does surface, these children will not be addressed in this study.

<sup>14</sup> From *The Whiskey Rebellion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 265, by Thomas P. Slaughter, we read: "During the winter of 1793-94 some of the larger distillers responded to the economic pressure imposed by the Quartermaster General. If they wanted to sell whiskey to the army, by far the largest potential customer on the frontier, they would have to register their stills and pay the tax. In response to this movement, tax resisters warned that they would burn out all who complied. True to their word, local firebrands destroyed the stills and mills of Kiddoe, Robert Shawhan, and William Richmond."

<sup>15</sup> R.T. Shawhan, p. 7

<sup>16</sup> Isaac's will, probated Oct. 16, 1853, in Allegheny Co., Pa. mentions children: John Williams; Sarah Bausman; Amelia, wife of John Hulse; Elizabeth, wife of John Wm. Mason; Isaac; Agnes, wife of Nathaniel Patterson; Dorale, wife of Reinhardt Bausman; Margaret; Mary; Robert Shawhan.