From Shad's Hole

Spencer S Shawhan

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Out of Silence

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For Daniel —
who inherited one long gun and no more, and who never seemed to want to stay anywhere once it stopped being the frontier.

Acknowledgments

This book rests on the work of researchers who traced the Shawhan and Meeks families through Kent County's courthouse and probate records long before I ever opened an archive. Their persistence made it possible to reconstruct a household that otherwise left only a scattering of formal documents behind.

Eric Shawn's essay, *Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks: Some Historical Considerations*, and his excerpt from *The Siodhacháin Chronicles*, gave me my first clear footing — a careful, heavily footnoted evaluation of the evidence for this generation. Ron Shawhan, Bob Francis, and Eric Shawn's *The History and Genealogy of the Shawhan and Related Families* (1998) provided the working transcription of Darby's and Sarah's 1735 wills that guided my research until I could locate the original probate images myself. William G. Hills's 1939 research notes, later found at DAR headquarters by Ron Shawhan, and a 1941 query in *The National Historical Magazine* by Mrs. Wm. G. Hills of Chevy Chase, Maryland — asking the same question a family generation before me — deserve recognition as well. Her question remains unanswered: the parentage of Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks.

The Maryland State Archives holds the probate, land, and court records this book relies on most directly, and FamilySearch's *Maryland, Register of Wills Records, 1629–1999* collection made it possible for me to view the original 1735–36 wills for the first time in my own research.

Any errors of fact, inference, or interpretation are mine alone.

Spencer S Shawhan

November 2026

P.S. On Working with AI Tools

The narrative and analytical text of this book was shaped with the assistance of AI writing tools, and I want to acknowledge them in the same spirit I would acknowledge human collaborators who helped carry the work forward.

Claude, produced by Anthropic, became something like a **research assistant at my elbow** — quick to surface sources, test genealogical possibilities, and point out places where the evidence needed a firmer footing. During drafting, Claude often filled the role of a **developmental editor**, helping me think through structure, pacing, and how best to present the archival record without losing the thread of the story.

Microsoft Copilot worked more like a **line editor and revision partner**, helping me smooth transitions, tighten phrasing, and keep the tone consistent as chapters evolved.

Both tools made the long hours of drafting and revising feel less solitary. They offered clarity when I was stuck, alternatives when I needed them, and a steady second set of eyes on the page. But the historical framework, the evidentiary judgments, and every conclusion drawn from primary sources remain my own.

Preface

A Note on Method, Evidence, and Inference

Two Roads from Munster closed on a silence. Two possible crossings — one through Barbados, one straight to the Chesapeake — stood open before Darby Shawhan, and the record refused to choose between them. What it offered instead was a single line in a parish register: St. Paul's Parish, Kent County, Maryland. November 20, 1707. Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks.

This book begins at that moment when the record finally speaks his name. It does not turn back to the ocean behind him. It follows the life that any of those roads — or some third one erased entirely from memory — brought into being: a man newly married, then a landowner, then the father of eight children, living in a parish two hundred miles and an ocean away from wherever he first drew breath. It is a second movement, not a continuation of the same argument.

The record does not thicken quickly. A man steps into view in 1707, whole and alive, at an age when most Irish newcomers to the Chesapeake never saw their second year. His surname wavers through five spellings before it settles. His wife's parentage remains, even now, an unanswered question. This book handles that unevenness through three kinds of statements, kept apart. Documentary facts, cited precisely. Historically grounded inferences, drawn from what is known of Chesapeake demography, land practice, and family life. And interpretations, marked

as such, with their reasoning shown plainly rather than smoothed into certainty.

Where *Two Roads from Munster* worked with a true fork in the path — two plausible routes, no evidence to choose between them — this book's challenge is quieter. It is the silence of the record rather than its contradictions. Sarah Meeks enters history only at her marriage, with no confirmed trace before it. When the evidence offers a leading candidate rather than a coin flip, this book says so, explains why, and shows the counter-evidence as well. When the record offers nothing at all, that absence is named directly. A reader who attends to the book's signals — "the record shows," "the evidence points to," "one plausible reading" — will always know the ground beneath their feet.

What This Book Is

From Shad's Hole takes its name from the hundred acres conveyed to Darby Shawhan in 1709 by Francis and Margaret Bellows — the first piece of land he and Sarah could call their own, and the place where their household took root, the place where silence finally gives way to life lived on the ground. The book moves outward from that place in five parts:

- the improbability of Darby's survival to 1707 at all, set against the stark mortality of the early Chesapeake;

- the Eastern Shore world he entered — its geography, its tobacco economy, its labor systems, its parish life;

- the household he and Sarah made at Shad's Hole, and the eight children raised there;

- the imperial and military world that surrounded them without ever directly touching their days;

- and finally, Darby's last years and the different paths his children followed after his death in 1736.

Out of Silence forms the book's other half. It takes seriously what the first book's dedication already named — a family "set in motion by his silence" — and follows what grew from that silence once the record opens enough to let their lives be seen. This book does not promise another volume. Later generations, and whatever stories may someday be told about them, lie beyond its reach.

A Note on Names and Spelling

The name that eventually settles as "Shawhan" does not hold still during Darby's lifetime. In the documents behind this book it appears as Shawhan and Shawhawn in the 1707 marriage records, Shehan in the 1709 deed to Shad's Hole, Shehorne in Kent County bonds from 1709 and 1721, and Sheighane in a 1714 tax survey — five spellings, four transactions, one man, tracing back to the Irish Ó Siodhacháin. This is not clerical carelessness. It is what a name looks like before repetition fixes it in a colony's written record. The instability is itself evidence, and this book treats it that way. Quoted documents keep their own spelling. General discussion uses "Shawhan," the form the name eventually holds.

For Whom This Book Is Written

This book is written for the descendants of Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks, and especially for those descended through their son Daniel, whose choices — to leave Kent County in 1740, and to keep moving west after that — the dedication names directly. It is also written for anyone interested in how an ordinary Chesapeake household of the early eighteenth century can be reconstructed from wills, deeds, tax surveys, and parish registers, and in what those records can and cannot be made to say.

Genealogical research of this kind is never finished. This book represents the most careful account that can currently be made from what has been found. Readers wanting the full accounting of sources, and how each was used, will find it in the Bibliography at the back of the book.

Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks married in 1707 and died within a week of each other in April 1736, having raised eight children to adulthood on land they built from nothing. What they left behind was not an explanation of where they came from, but a family — and the record, however incomplete, of the household they made.

Spencer S Shawhan

November 2026

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PART I
Arrival Without a Record

The record that begins this book emerged like a faint mark that might easily have been missed. And in the years that followed, even the name it offered drifted, never settling into one shape.

Chapter 1

Darby's 1707 Appearance in the Record

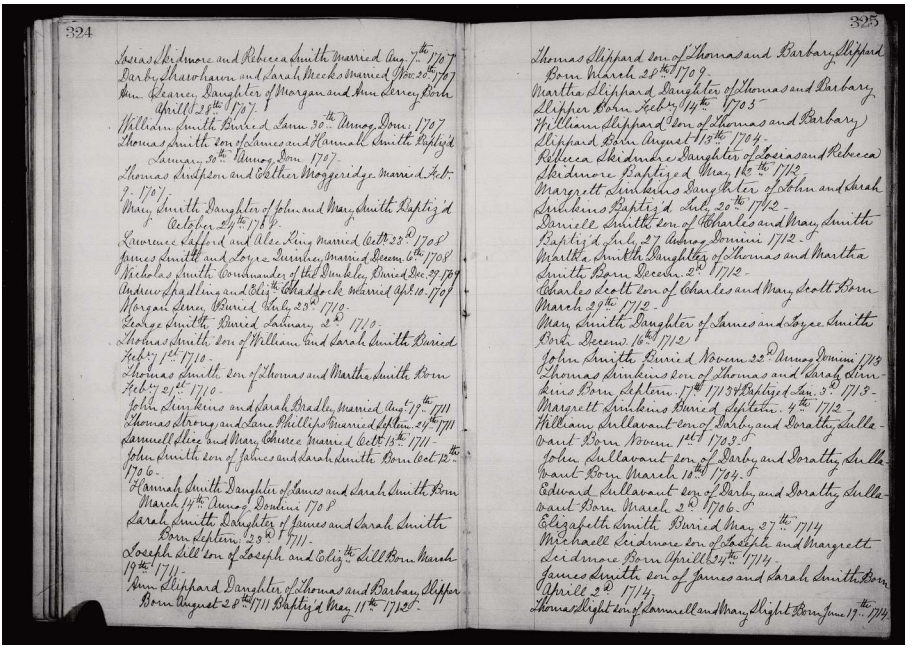


Figure 1 Kent County Marriage Register, 1707

Kent County, Maryland, register of marriages, p. 324, recording the marriage of Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks, 20 November 1707. The specific published source for this scan has not been identified; cf. Maryland Marriages, 1634–1777, p. 162 ("3 KE-324").

Chapter 1

On an ordinary Thursday in late November 1707, someone at St. Paul's Parish opened the register and wrote a single line. The ink would have been dark, the quill trimmed recently enough to leave a clean stroke. The entry itself was brief — just two names, a date, and the fact of a marriage — but it is the first moment in which Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks step into view. Before that line, the record is silent. After it, the story can begin.

The parish stood in Kent County on Maryland's Eastern Shore, a place of tobacco fields, scattered homesteads, and slow tidal rivers. Clerks in such parishes recorded births, deaths, and marriages as part of the ordinary rhythm of their work. Most entries were meant only to serve the community that produced them, not to survive centuries. Yet two separate sources preserve this one. The marriage appears in the published transcription of the St. Paul's Parish Register, printed in *Maryland Eastern Shore Vital Records 1648-1725*, where the clerk's note is reproduced exactly as it was written. A second record, the statewide index *Maryland Marriages, 1634-1777*, lists the same event: "Shawhawn, Darby, 20 Nov. 1707, Sarah Meeks — 3 KE-324." The agreement between them is complete. No contradiction, no alternate date, no competing version.

Even in this first appearance, the man's name is already shifting. The parish register uses one spelling; the marriage index uses another. "Shawhan" and "Shawhawn" point to the same groom, rendered differently by different hands. Later documents will widen the range — Shehan, Sheighane, Shawn, even "Darby Shehorne" — but the instability begins here, on

the very line that introduces him. It is a reminder that the written record in early Maryland was not a fixed mirror but a moving one, shaped by the ear of the clerk and the habits of the moment.

What the record does not offer is any trace of Darby before this day. No baptismal entry places him in a parish as a child. No birth record survives. No immigration or transport document can be tied to him with certainty. Whatever brought him to Kent County by 1707 — whatever ship, road, or circumstance carried him to the Eastern Shore — left no mark that can be confirmed. The marriage entry stands alone, the first point at which he can be named without qualification. This chapter does not reach beyond it.

Sarah enters the record in the same way: present, named, and not yet explained. She appears here as the bride beside Darby, nothing more. Her family's story, the question of which Meeks household she belonged to, and the path that brought her to Maryland all belong to a later chapter. Here she is simply the woman whose name the clerk wrote down on that November day.

The spareness of the entry is part of its force. A single line, written without commentary, becomes the anchor for everything that follows. It is the moment where two undocumented lives meet the page, where the silence before them gives way to something that can be traced. The record does not tell us how they arrived at this place, or why nothing earlier survives. It only tells us that on 20 November 1707, they stood together in St. Paul's Parish and were married.

The questions that absence leaves open — how a man with no prior paper trail reached this altar, and how remarkable it was that he reached it at all — belong to the chapters ahead. This one ends where the evidence begins.

Chapter 2

The Improbability of His Survival

The question left open at the end of Chapter 1 was simple to state and difficult to answer: how remarkable it was that a man with no prior paper trail reached the 1707 marriage record at all. The silence before that line in the St. Paul's register is not just a gap in the archive. It is a reminder that whatever brought Darby Shawhan to the Eastern Shore — whatever ship, road, or circumstance carried him into Kent County — placed him in a world where survival itself could not be taken for granted. This chapter takes up that question directly, not by trying to reconstruct his missing years, but by looking squarely at the hazards anyone in his likely position faced.

The Chesapeake into which Darby emerged was not a gentle environment. Historians describe it as a region with "a far less benign disease environment" than other colonies, one that "routinely claimed a significant proportion of the entering population through 'seasoning.'" The term was plain in its meaning: newcomers were exposed to unfamiliar pathogens, harsh working conditions, and a climate that amplified both. Some survived long enough to adapt. Many did not. Even the baseline general mortality rate used in this scholarship — 22 deaths per 1,000 people — was already elevated for the period, a sign that danger was woven into the ordinary fabric of life.

For immigrants arriving without wealth or protection, the risk was sharper still. If, as seems likely from his later status as a laborer and small planter, Darby entered Maryland under some form of servitude or unfree labor, the documented odds were stark. Lorena Walsh's study of seventeenth-century male immigrants to the Chesapeake found that 43 percent did not survive their first year, and another 4 percent died before completing their indenture. These figures describe the experience of men in Darby's probable social position generally, not his own crossing in particular, but they give the scale of the hazard. Nearly half of those who arrived under such conditions never lived long enough to finish the term that brought them there.

The Chesapeake had improved by the decades before Darby's likely arrival, but its reputation was built on earlier, even harsher years. Jamestown's first winter in 1607 saw a crude death rate of 638 per 1,000, and two-thirds of the colonists died within six months. Of the 6,000 to 10,000 people who reached Virginia between 1607 and 1624, only 1,275 survived. Conditions stabilized somewhat by the 1630s, with death rates falling to 40-50 per 1,000, comparable to European villages of the same era. But the memory of those early losses lingered, and the structural vulnerabilities that produced them — malaria, dysentery, contaminated water, and the relentless demands of tobacco agriculture — remained part of the region's reality for decades.

Even adulthood offered no guarantee of longevity. In seventeenth-century Middlesex County, Virginia, married men lived to about 48 on average, and married

women to about 39. In New England, the averages ran far higher — 64-69 for men and 62 for women — underscoring how sharply regional conditions shaped the arc of a life. To survive long enough to marry, establish a household, and raise children in the Chesapeake was itself an achievement.

And even in colonies considered milder than the Chesapeake, risk persisted. In the Philadelphia region, general mortality ran around 47 per 1,000, and recent migrants died at roughly 1.7 times that rate. Over a standard four-year indenture term, the numbers work out to a survival rate of about 79.6 percent. Better than Maryland, but still a reminder that crossing an ocean and entering a new disease environment carried dangers that no amount of hope or ambition could erase.

Step back from any one colony, and the picture becomes even clearer. In populations where the genealogical record survives well enough to measure line survival precisely, the odds of a family line persisting across centuries are far from certain. A study of Quebec’s seventeenth-century immigrant founders found that those arriving before 1681 had only about a 60 percent chance of leaving any line that survived to the modern population studied. A founding couple with just one married child had roughly a 30 percent chance of their line continuing at all. A separate study of historical Chinese patrilineages showed that even well-documented, high-status lines went 50 percent extinct within about six generations, and less-advantaged lines about 75 percent extinct over a similar span. These figures come from places where the records are complete enough to measure such things directly.

They are offered here as comparisons, not as Darby's own numbers, but they illuminate the broader truth: across time and place, survival — of individuals, of families, of lines — is never guaranteed.

Against that backdrop, the fact that Darby appears alive and marrying in 1707 is not an ordinary outcome. It is the visible endpoint of a path that must have passed through hazards we can describe but cannot reconstruct. And here the honest limit of the evidence comes into view. No single probability can be assigned to Darby's own survival, because no specific crossing, ship, or path is confirmed as his. The record does not tell us whether he arrived as a servant, a free laborer, or under some other circumstance. It does not tell us when he entered the Chesapeake, or how long he had been there before the clerk wrote his name. What can be said — what the documented figures make plain — is that every real path available to a man in his likely position carried serious, well-established risk. Whichever one he took, reaching the 1707 marriage record alive was not the expected result.

The silence that makes a precise calculation impossible is the same silence that shaped the way his name appears in the documents that follow. The instability that begins in the very line that introduces him — Shawhan in one source, Shawhawn in another — reflects the same absence of earlier anchors, the same lack of a fixed point from which clerks could work. That is where the story turns next: from the improbability of his survival to the instability of the name that survived with him.

Chapter 3

The Instability of the Surname

The silence that made Darby's survival impossible to calculate is the same silence that shaped how his name appears in the record. With no earlier anchors—no baptismal entry, no transport document, no trace of a childhood parish—every clerk who wrote his name down did so without a fixed point of reference. The instability begins in the very line that introduces him in 1707 and continues through every document that follows. This chapter takes up that thread directly: how one man's name fractured into five spellings across four transactions, and what that instability reveals about the world that recorded him.

The marriage entry of 20 November 1707 already showed the pattern. In the St. Paul's Parish Register, the clerk wrote "Shawhan." In the statewide index Maryland Marriages, 1634–1777, the same event appears as "Shawhawn." The difference is small—just a single letter and a slightly different ear—but it marks the beginning of a pattern that will widen over the next fourteen years. Chapter 1 introduced these two spellings as part of Darby's first appearance in the record. Here they serve as the starting point for a broader look at how his name moved across the page.

Two years later, the Maryland Rent Rolls recorded a land purchase that adds the third spelling. On 2 August 1709, Darby bought 100 acres of the 650-acre tract known as Shad's Hole from Francis Bellows, paying,

by the clearest surviving reading of the transaction, 3,200 pounds of tobacco for the parcel. In that entry, he appears as “Darby Shehan.” The transaction is clear, the acreage specific, and the seller named. Only the surname shifts. The clerk who wrote the Rent Rolls heard the same man whose marriage had been recorded two years earlier, but rendered his name differently—closer to the modern “Sheehan,” but still only one of several plausible phonetic attempts.

That same year, and again twelve years later, Darby’s name appears on Kent County administration bonds tied to the estates of two deceased neighbors. Both documents name Francis Collins as administrator, and both list Darby as “Darby Shehorne.” The first bond, dated 14 November 1709, concerns the estate of Edward Carroll. The second, dated 8 September 1721, concerns the estate of Edward Sammons. The spelling is identical in both cases, suggesting that the clerk responsible for these bonds had a consistent ear—but one that differed from the clerks who wrote the marriage entry and the Rent Rolls. “Shehorne” is farther from the 1707 spellings and farther still from “Shehan,” yet it refers to the same man, living in the same county, involved in the same small world of neighbors and obligations.

A fifth spelling appears in 1714, in a tax survey identifying a 50-acre property later patented as “Darby’s Desire.” In that document, the owner is listed as “Darby Sheighane.” The source text is garbled in the surviving transcription, but the reading is confirmed and consistent with the broader pattern: another clerk, another ear, another attempt to capture an unfamiliar name. The survey ties the property to Darby, and later

records confirm the patent. Only the spelling shifts, widening the range of forms his name took in the written record.

Taken together, these five spellings—Shawhan, Shawhawn, Shehan, Shehorne, Sheighane—trace back to a single linguistic root. All descend from the Gaelic surname Ó Siodhacháin, the source of the modern English “Sheehan.” In Gaelic, the name carries sounds that English clerks of the early eighteenth century would not have encountered often: a slender “dh,” a palatalized “ch,” and a rhythm unfamiliar to ears trained on English phonetics. When spoken aloud, especially by someone whose accent or dialect differed from the clerk’s own, the name could plausibly be heard in several ways.

The result was not confusion about identity but variation in spelling. Early Maryland clerks worked entirely by ear. They wrote what they heard, or what they thought they heard, guided by habit, local usage, and the conventions of English orthography. A name like Ó Siodhacháin—already transformed by the time it reached Maryland—would fracture easily under those conditions. Each rendering in the record is a phonetic attempt to capture a sound that did not map neatly onto English letters. None of the clerks were wrong; they were simply working without a stable written form to consult.

What matters for this chapter is not the number of spellings but the context that ties them together. Every instance refers to the same man. The marriage entries name the same bride, Sarah Meeks. The land purchase and tax survey concern the same

properties—Shad's Hole and Darby's Desire—located in the same county. The administration bonds involve the same circle of neighbors and the same administrator. The dates overlap tightly, forming a continuous thread from 1707 to 1721. There is no competing candidate for any of these records, no alternate Darby living in Kent County at the same time. The instability lies in the record-keeping, not in the identity of the man being recorded.

This instability is part of the larger silence that surrounds Darby's life. Without earlier documents to anchor his name, clerks had only the sound of it, spoken in the moment, to guide their pens. The result is a documentary trail that preserves him clearly but not consistently. It is a reminder that the written record in early Maryland was not a fixed mirror but a shifting one, shaped by the ear of each clerk and the circumstances under which each entry was made.

Having traced how little about Darby himself is fixed—not even the spelling of his name—the book now turns to what is well documented: the world he settled into. Part II begins with the geography of Kent and Talbot Counties, the landscape that shaped the life recorded in these unstable lines.

PART II
The Eastern Shore World Darby Entered

The record says almost nothing about the man. About the world he entered — its economy, its labor, its neighbors — it says a great deal.

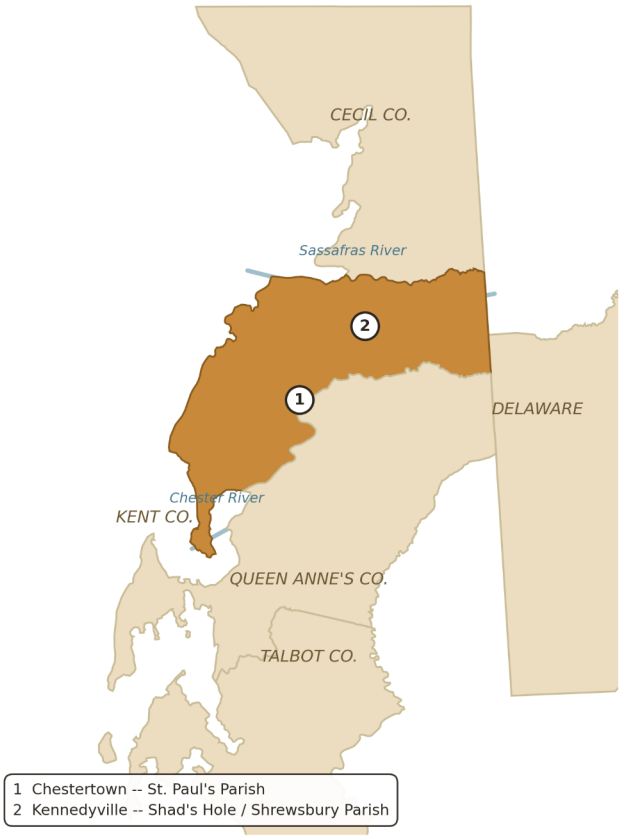


Figure 2 Shad’s Hole and Kent County
A custom-drawn orientation map showing Kent County, Maryland, relative to Chestertown (St. Paul’s Parish, where Darby and Sarah married) and Kennedyville (near Shad’s Hole, in Shrewsbury Parish, where they settled by 1709). Built from U.S. identified; cf. Maryland Marriages, 1634–1777, p. 162 (“3 KE-324”).

Chapter 4

Kent and Talbot: Geography and Demographics

The turn at the end of Chapter 3 was deliberate. Having traced how little about Darby himself is fixed—not even the spelling of his name—the book now turns to what is well documented: the world he stepped into. The record may be sparse about the man, but it is rich about the place. Kent County and neighboring Talbot formed the landscape that shaped every line in which he appears, from the 1707 marriage onward. This chapter begins there, moving from the man to the ground beneath him.

By the early eighteenth century, Kent County had been part of Maryland for more than sixty years, a jurisdiction with courts and land patents already well established before Darby ever enters the surviving record. Early settlement concentrated on the peninsula known as Eastern Neck, a long, narrow reach of land just north of Eastern Neck Island and Kent Island. The distinction mattered. Eastern Neck Island had hosted the county's earliest court sessions, but the mainland peninsula—Eastern Neck proper—became the center of settlement as population slowly increased. By the 1670s and 1680s, Kent was still thinly populated, but it was no longer an empty frontier. It had institutions, recognizable places, and a small but growing community.

One of those places was New Yarmouth, the county's first true seat of government. Built on Eastern Neck near Gray's Inn Creek, it began as a private holding: a man named Tovey purchased 100 acres called Huntingfield from Thomas Ringgold, a transaction whose names survive today as Hunting Field Point and Huntingfield Creek. The site's importance grew quickly. In 1674, Charles Calvert ordered court sessions moved from Eastern Neck Island to the mainland, and by 1679 the first Kent County courthouse stood at New Yarmouth. It served not only as a courthouse but as a commercial center and port of entry—a place where ships could anchor, goods could be exchanged, and the county's scattered residents could gather. For a time, it was the administrative heart of Kent County.

That heart shifted in 1696. As settlement crept inland and upriver, the courthouse moved from New Yarmouth to its present site on the Chester River. The relocation followed the people: Kent's population was beginning to cluster along navigable waterways rather than the older coastal points. The Chester offered easier access to the interior and better alignment with the county's emerging settlement pattern. A decade later, when Darby and Sarah established their household, they were entering a world already shaped by this river-oriented geography.

Population figures from the period reinforce the sense of a frontier filling in rather than a settled countryside. Talbot County, just south of Kent, recorded 620 taxables between 1660 and 1672—adult males and some male servants, not the full population. By 1679, that number had risen to 1,153 taxables, a clear sign of growth over roughly a decade. Kent County was

thinner. In 1679 it recorded about 300 taxables, well under Talbot’s count for the same year. Period estimates often multiply taxable counts by roughly 3.5 to 4.5 to approximate total population, but the data here does not support precise totals. The honest description is the one the sources themselves allow: a few thousand people, thinly spread across two counties.

Where those people lived mattered as much as how many there were. Settlement clustered along the rivers—the Choptank, the Chester, and the Sassafras—which offered transportation, access to markets, and the only reliable routes through the region’s dense forests. Inland areas remained sparsely occupied, with long distances between households. Most residents were smallholders, indentured servants, or tenant farmers. On the upper Eastern Shore, indentured servants outnumbered enslaved Africans until after 1680, a demographic pattern that shaped labor, land use, and the social fabric of the region.

For a household like Darby and Sarah’s, this meant living in a world where isolation was ordinary. Neighbors might be miles apart. Parish churches, courthouses, and militia musters carried outsized weight precisely because there were so few of them. Community institutions anchored life not through density but through necessity. Labor scarcity shaped how land was cleared, how tobacco was grown, and how families organized their work. The counties were not empty, but they were thinly settled, with every farm and homestead part of a landscape still being carved into shape.

This was the world Darby entered: a frontier with institutions, a geography defined by rivers, and a population just beginning to thicken along its shores. It was a place where land was available, labor was scarce, and tobacco already dominated the choices available to anyone trying to make a living. That last thread—how tobacco set nearly all the terms of work and land use—belongs to the next chapter. Here, the ground is set: Kent and Talbot, sparsely populated, river-bound, and ready to shape the life that emerges in the records that follow.

Chapter 5

The Tobacco Economy

Chapter 4 closed by naming tobacco as the force that already dominated the choices available to anyone trying to make a living in Kent and Talbot Counties. The geography shaped where people settled, the rivers shaped how they moved, but tobacco shaped nearly everything else — far more than simply a crop, it was the medium through which land changed hands, debts were settled, and labor was organized. To understand the world Darby entered, and the world in which he made his first documented step toward independence, one must begin with tobacco's role as the colony's everyday currency.

By the time Darby entered the record, coined money was chronically scarce on the Eastern Shore. A few coins circulated, but not in quantities that could sustain ordinary transactions. Instead, tobacco filled the gap. It functioned as the colony's practical medium of exchange: debts were tallied in pounds of tobacco, court fees assessed in tobacco, public levies collected in tobacco, and land purchased with tobacco rather than coin. This was no abstract economic principle but the system Darby himself used: when he purchased 100 acres of Shad's Hole from Francis Bellows in 1709, the deed recorded the price not in sterling but in tobacco. The transaction sits in the record as a concrete example of how the economy actually worked. A man without coin could still buy land if he could produce — or promise to produce — tobacco.

The system in which that transaction occurred was informal, flexible, and fragile. Later generations would know a world of inspection warehouses, standardized tobacco notes, and regulated quality grades. None of that existed in Darby's lifetime. Tobacco changed hands crop to crop, transaction to transaction, without certificates or government-backed guarantees. Its weaknesses were built into the system itself. Tobacco was difficult to move in bulk, heavy and perishable. And its value swung with each harvest. A good year meant lower prices; a bad year meant scarcity and higher value. Every debt, every payment, every land purchase carried that volatility. When Darby agreed to pay Bellows in tobacco, he was entering a system where the real worth of that payment would be determined not by a fixed standard but by the next harvest.

The price itself — by the clearest surviving reading of the transaction, 3,200 pounds of tobacco for 100 acres — reveals even more about the world he entered. In Darby's era, a single adult field hand could tend two to three acres of tobacco, producing roughly a thousand pounds of leaf per year, for a practical yield on the order of four hundred pounds per acre. Measured against that yield, a price in the range of 3,200 to 3,500 pounds — the span covered by the surviving readings of the deed — represented only about eight to nine acres' worth of annual production, a modest price either way for a tract of one hundred acres, and it strongly suggests the land was uncleared or only lightly improved. In the Chesapeake, land was cheap because labor was dear. A cleared, fenced, and planted field commanded a far higher price than raw woodland. The Shad's Hole deed almost certainly

records the sale of unimproved acreage — a tract that required years of labor before it could produce tobacco of its own.

Land access followed its own logic, but tobacco shaped that too. The counties had originally been settled through headright grants — fifty acres awarded for every person transported into the colony. That mechanism mattered for how Kent and Talbot filled in during the seventeenth century, but by the time Darby appears in the record in 1707, the headright era was largely over. More importantly, it had never been a path for men in his position. Headrights rewarded the person who paid for a passage, not the person transported. The land they generated had long since been patented, claimed, and folded into the holdings of established families.

By Darby's time, a man arriving without capital of his own gained land in a different way: by purchasing acreage already patented, already surveyed, already held by someone else. That is exactly what Darby did. The 1709 Shad's Hole deed is not only a record of a transaction; it is evidence of the route available to him. He did not claim land through a headright but bought it, and because coin was scarce, he bought it with tobacco — the system of land access and the system of exchange were not separate but two faces of the same tobacco-driven economy.

Labor fit into that same structure. Wealthier planters elsewhere in the Chesapeake had begun shifting toward enslaved labor decades earlier, driven by long-term economic calculations. But that shift was not universal, and it was not accessible to everyone.

Enslaved labor was expensive — far beyond the reach of an ordinary smallholder until slave prices fell in the early eighteenth century. On the upper Eastern Shore, indentured servants outnumbered enslaved Africans until after 1680, and that demographic pattern shaped the world a man like Darby entered. If, as seems likely, he was himself a servant or former servant by 1707, then he lived inside a labor system still organized around servitude rather than slavery. Smallholders worked their own land, hired servants when they could, and relied on family labor when they could not. The economic logic was simple: tobacco required labor, and labor was scarce.

That scarcity shaped the pace at which Darby could develop Shad’s Hole. Clearing Chesapeake woodland was slow, difficult work. One adult laborer could clear perhaps one to two acres per year, depending on timber density and soil. Planting tobacco required its own cycle of labor — hilling, transplanting, worming, topping, cutting, curing — and a single hand could manage only two to three acres of tobacco in a season. The arithmetic was unforgiving. A man who owned one hundred acres might clear only a small fraction of it in his lifetime. The deed gave Darby land, but not a plantation. The plantation would have to be made, acre by acre, harvest by harvest.

Seen together, these threads — money, land, labor — were not separate systems but one system, with tobacco as its organizing principle. Tobacco served as currency because coin was scarce. Tobacco determined land access because land was bought with tobacco. Tobacco shaped labor because the crop demanded hands and rewarded those who could

supply them. For a man starting with nothing, working through that system harvest by harvest was the path toward independence. Darby's 1709 purchase shows him crossing that distance. Two years after his marriage, he appears in the record not as a transient laborer but as a landowner, someone who had navigated the colony's tobacco economy successfully enough to secure a place of his own.

Buying the land, however, was only the beginning. Turning 100 acres of Shad's Hole into a working plantation was a different kind of work entirely — physical, seasonal, and demanding. Clearing trees, preparing fields, planting tobacco, and sustaining a household in a thinly settled landscape required labor of a kind this chapter has only gestured toward. The next chapter takes up that thread directly, moving from the economic rules of the game to the work of playing it.

Chapter 6

Land-Clearing Labor

Chapter 5 closed by drawing a sharp line between two different kinds of work. Buying land was one transaction; turning it into a working plantation was another, and a far more physical one. The deed Darby secured in 1709 gave him ownership of one hundred acres, but it did not give him a farm. What lay before him was unimproved woodland, and the work of making any part of it productive would be measured not in weeks or months but in years. This chapter takes up that thread directly, moving from the economic rules of the tobacco world to the sweat-and-tools labor that shaped daily life on the ground.

The land itself set the terms. Chapter 5 established that the price Darby paid — just over three thousand pounds of tobacco — was modest for a tract of one hundred acres, and that modesty almost certainly reflected the land's condition. It was raw or only lightly improved woodland, the kind of ground that had to be wrestled into usefulness. In the Chesapeake, land was cheap because labor was dear, and the Shad's Hole purchase fits that pattern exactly. Darby owned acreage, but what he owned was potential, not a ready-made farm. The work of realizing that potential began with clearing.

Clearing Chesapeake woodland in the early eighteenth century meant confronting trees, roots, brush, and soil with nothing more than hand tools. Two documented

methods appear in the historical record, and neither can be assigned specifically to Darby. In one, trees were felled close to the ground — about a yard above the soil — to keep the stump from sprouting and to hasten its rot. The felled timber was burned or hauled aside, and the ground between stumps and logs was broken up with a hoe. In the other, large trees were girdled, left standing to die, and the underbrush around them burned away, leaving a field dotted with dead trunks. Both methods created plantable ground, and both left behind a landscape of stumps, roots, and obstacles. The work was slow, physical, and repetitive. It was not a single task but a sequence: cutting, burning, breaking, and shaping the earth into something that could hold tobacco hills.

Every step of that process was hand-and-hoe labor. Plows did not belong to this world. They were rare even in established fields as late as 1800, six decades after Darby's death, and essentially absent from new ground in his own lifetime. The tools available to a man in his position were simple: an axe, a hoe, perhaps a mattock, and the strength to use them day after day. The absence of a plow is not a footnote; it is central to understanding the scale of the work. Every hill, every furrow, every break in the soil came from human hands.

The scale itself was unforgiving. Building tobacco hills was among the most arduous tasks in Chesapeake agriculture. Even an experienced hand could prepare no more than about five hundred hills in a day, and each hill represented only a single plant. Clearing woodland was slower still. One adult laborer could clear only one to two acres of timber in a year,

depending on the density of the trees and the stubbornness of the roots. And tending tobacco — once the ground was cleared and planted — was its own cycle of labor. A single hand could manage only two to three acres of tobacco in a season. Against a tract of one hundred acres, these numbers tell the story plainly. Full development was a lifetime's project. Most of the land Darby owned almost certainly remained woodland for years, standing behind a small cultivated core that expanded slowly, harvest by harvest.

Clearing was only the beginning. Once tobacco was planted, the work shifted from axes and hoes to the constant attention the crop demanded. The growing season stretched from February through November, and it was one continuous cycle of labor. Weeding came weekly, pushing back the growth that threatened to choke young plants. Topping redirected the plant's energy into the leaves, and suckering removed the shoots that tried to grow in the leaf axils. Hornworms appeared daily, and they had to be picked off by hand; left unchecked, they could destroy a crop in under a week. Harvest came in late summer, each plant cut by hand, each leaf handled carefully. Then came curing — four to six weeks in the barn, watching the leaf change slowly from green to brown. The rhythm of the season was relentless, and it repeated every year.

If Darby had a servant by this point — and the record allows that possibility without confirming it — the likely picture is the two of them working side by side. Servants in his economic position did not labor under distant oversight. They worked with their masters, dawn to dusk, six days a week, through the growing

season. The tools were shared, the pace was shared, and the exhaustion was shared. This was not a plantation with overseers and gangs. It was a smallholding, where every pair of hands mattered and where the distinction between master and servant blurred in the face of the work itself.

Seen together, the clearing and the tending form a single picture: a plantation taking shape slowly, incrementally, through physical labor that never really stopped. The deed marked the beginning of ownership, but the land itself marked the beginning of work. Each acre cleared, each hill built, each harvest cured was a step in a long process of turning woodland into a working farm. The pace was measured not in acres conquered but in acres maintained, season after season.

The next chapter turns from this physical labor to the human community forming around it. As Darby's cultivated core slowly expanded, he and Sarah were not alone. They lived within St. Paul's Parish, among neighbors already named in the surviving documents. Chapter 7 takes up that thread, moving from the work of shaping the land to the parish and community that shaped the lives lived upon it.

Chapter 7

Parish and Community Life

Chapter 6 closed with the plantation taking shape slowly, harvest by harvest. The work was physical, seasonal, and demanding, and it unfolded in a landscape where households stood far apart and every cleared acre represented years of labor. This chapter turns from that physical world to the human one forming around it — the parish, the institutions, and the neighbors whose names appear beside Darby's in the surviving record. If the land was slowly becoming a plantation, the world around it was slowly becoming a community.

Darby first enters the record in 1707, when he and Sarah Meeks married at St. Paul's Parish on 20 November. Chapter 1 opened with that moment, the earliest fixed point in his life, and returning to it now places the couple inside the parish's own young history. St. Paul's was not an ancient institution. It had been created only fourteen years earlier, in 1693, when a Kent County court order divided the upper part of the county into parishes following Maryland's 1692 act establishing the Church of England across the province. The parish in which Darby and Sarah married was still in its first generation, shaped by the same thin settlement and slow growth that defined the rest of Kent County. Their marriage took place not in a long-established church but in an institution still finding its footing.

The men who led that institution can be named. Rev. Stephen Bordley served as rector of St. Paul's from 1697 until August 1709. He was the parish's rector at the time of Darby and Sarah's marriage, though the record does not name the officiant and cannot confirm that Bordley performed the ceremony himself. After Bordley's departure, the parish entered a two-year gap — 1709 to 1711 — with no documented rector. The record does not explain the interval. When the next rector appears, Rev. Alexander Williamson in May 1711, he remains in office until November 1728, covering nearly all the years Darby spent clearing and developing Shad's Hole. These dates bracket Darby's documented life in Kent County: Bordley at the beginning, Williamson through the long middle, and a quiet, unexplained space between them.

The parish they served ran on the same currency Darby did. Every tithable — the same unit used for population figures in Chapter 4 — paid an annual levy toward the church. In 1711, almost exactly when Darby was beginning the slow work of clearing Shad's Hole, the vestry contracted for a new brick church, forty-by-thirty feet, to be built by James Harris. It was completed in 1713 at a cost of 70,000 pounds of tobacco. The scale of the project was large, but the medium of payment was ordinary. Tobacco funded the church just as tobacco bought Darby's land, settled debts, and underwrote nearly every transaction in the county. The public institution and the private household operated inside the same economy, drawing on the same crop and the same labor.

The levy that made this possible fell on everyone, not only Anglicans. Maryland's 1692 establishment

required every free male over sixteen — and every enslaved person over sixteen — to contribute to the parish regardless of personal belief. Some residents grumbled at supporting a church they did not attend, but the record shows little organized resistance. The parish's reach extended beyond religious practice into civic obligation. In a thinly settled county, the church was not only a religious institution but a public one, funded by the same people who cleared the land, planted tobacco, and built households miles apart from one another.

That thin settlement can be seen clearly in the parish's own early history. St. Paul's stretched from the lower end of Eastern Neck to the Kent-Cecil County line, a wide span of land with few clusters of population. Before the parish had a dedicated building, the vestry met in the homes of three different members, miles apart: Michael Miller's, at Langford's Bay; Thomas Joce's, at New Yarmouth, near the former courthouse site on Eastern Neck, a place Chapter 4 already described as once central and now fading; and Simon Wilmer's. Beyond the New Yarmouth site, the exact relation of these homes to one another isn't recorded — only that reaching all three meant real distance. They are concrete evidence of the same thin settlement described earlier in population figures: a community stretched across distance, gathering where it could.

Within that scattered world, "neighbors" meant something different from what the word suggests today. For a man like Darby, neighbors were the people whose names appear beside his own in the documentary record, nothing more. Francis and

Margaret Bellows sold him the 100 acres of Shad's Hole in 1709. Den Sullivan, J. Prigg, and Nurse Tippett witnessed that deed. Francis Collins administered the estates of Edward Carroll in 1709 and Edward Sammons in 1721, both bonds naming Darby alongside him. These seven names form the small constellation of people documented near Darby in Kent County's records. None appear in the parish's vestry history, and nothing in the surviving documents shows friendship, kinship, or any relationship beyond proximity in the record itself. In a county where households stood miles apart, documentary proximity is the only kind the evidence supports.

Seen together, these threads — the young parish, the rectors who bracket Darby's years, the tobacco levy, the scattered vestry meetings, and the neighbors who appear only in documents — sketch the human world around Shad's Hole. It was a world defined by distance, obligation, and slow institutional growth. The parish was new, the community thin, and the record sparse. Yet within that sparse record, Darby's life begins to take shape: a marriage in a young parish, a land purchase in a tobacco economy, and a handful of names that mark the edges of his world.

With the work, the economy, and the community now outlined, the book turns next to the household Darby and Sarah built together. Part III begins with the ground that household stood on — Shad's Hole itself — and the slow work of turning land into a home.

PART III
Darby and Sarah: Building a Household

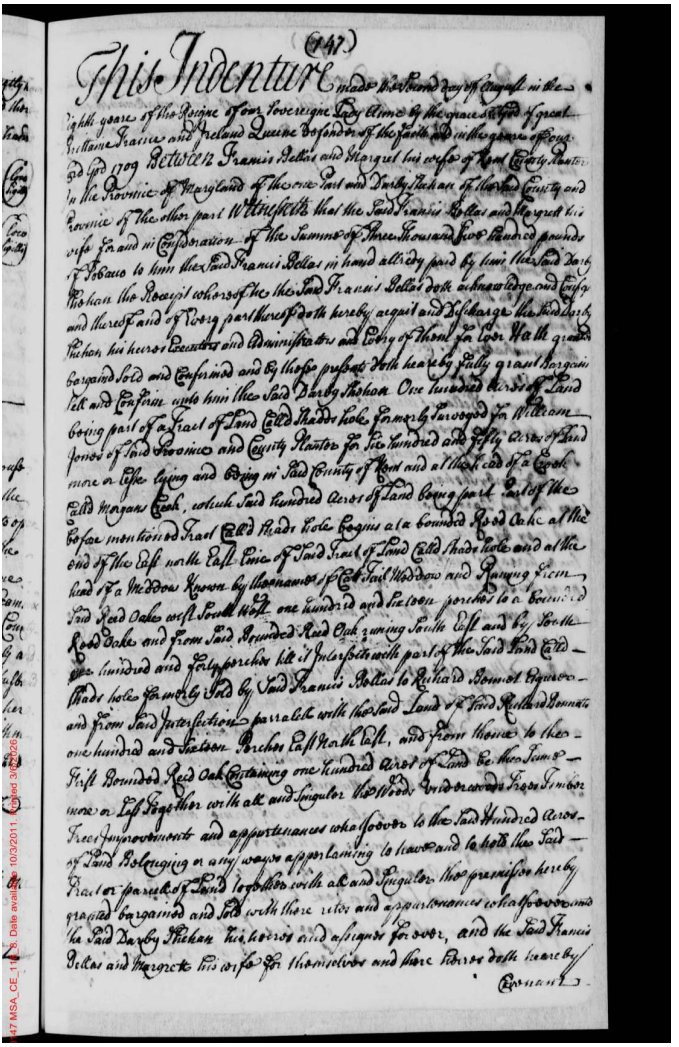
Darby and Sarah appear in the record at their marriage, after which a household took shape—land added to, eight children born, and an estate whose division left more questions than clarity.

Chapter 8

Shad’s Hole Itself

Chapter 7 closed with the human world around Darby sketched in outline — the parish that married him, the rectors who bracketed his documented years, the levy that touched every tithable, and the handful of names that appear beside his own in the record. Part III turns inward. It begins not with the community around him but with the ground he and Sarah stood on, the tract they purchased in 1709: Shad’s Hole.

On 2 August 1709, Darby bought one hundred acres of a tract called Shad’s Hole from Francis and Margaret Bellows. The deed places it at the head of a branch of Morgan’s Creek in upper Kent County, a quiet reach of land shaped by water, timber, and distance. The consideration was tobacco. By the clearest surviving reading of the transaction, the figure was 3,200 pounds, though the manuscript’s cursive is difficult enough that a second reading gives 3,500. The record supports only the span covered by the surviving range, not a settled number either way. What matters more is that the purchase was made at all. Two years after his marriage, Darby stepped into the record not only as a husband but as a landowner, someone who had secured a place of his own in a thinly settled county.


(147)
This Indenture
Between Francis Bellas and Margaret his wife of Kent County
Darby Shehan
Shadds hole
Richard Bennett Esquire
Reed Oak
Reed Oake
Reed Oak
Reed Oake
Reed Oak
Reed Oak
Reed Oak

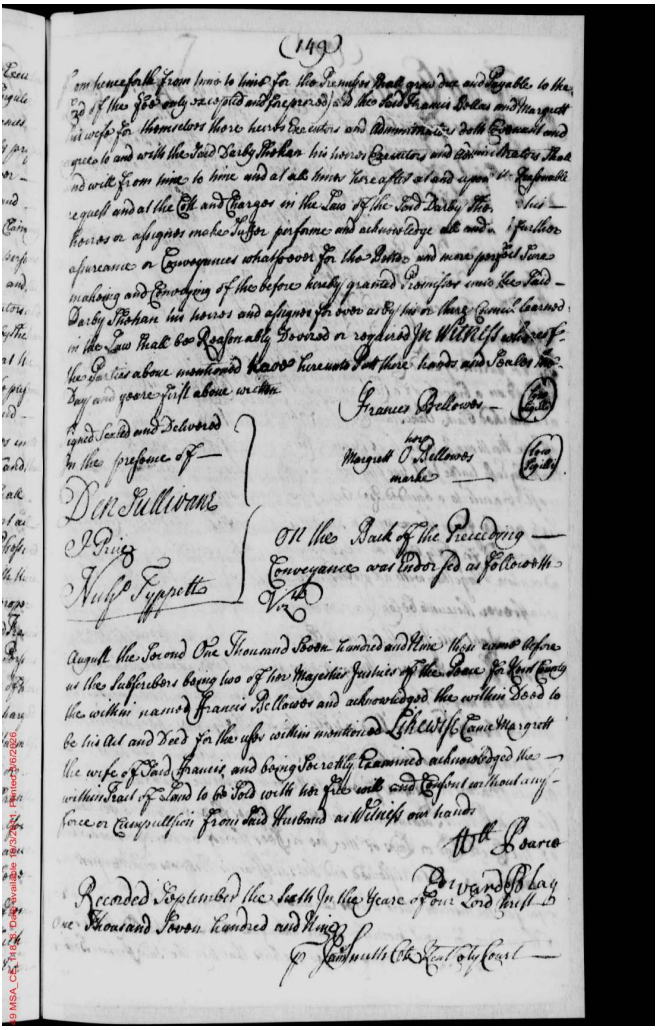


Figure 4 The 1709 Shad's Hole Deed, Signatures and Recording

Maryland State Archives, Kent County Court (Land Records), Liber "JS N," p. 149, MSA CE 118-8. Bears Francis Bellows's signature, Margaret Bellows's mark, the witnesses' names — including Ralph Tippett — and the recording note dated 6 September 1709.

Even the name of that place carried the same instability that followed Darby's own surname through the records. Shad Hole, Shads Hold, Shads Hole, Shadshold, Shadshole, Shadds Hole, Shades Hole — clerks wrote what they heard, or what they thought they heard, and the spelling shifted from document to document. The inconsistency is small, but it echoes the same pattern Chapter 3 traced through Darby's own name: a world where spelling was fluid, and where identity, whether of a man or a tract of land, was recorded in strokes of ink that did not always agree.

The land itself had a longer history. The hundred acres Darby bought were part of a larger tract originally surveyed for William Jones, who willed 650 acres of it to Francis Bellows in 1681. By the time Darby entered the picture, that parent tract had already begun to change. In 1708, Bellows sold one hundred acres to a neighbor, Richard Bennett III. The adjoining sale is the only documented connection between the two men. A year later, Bellows sold the next hundred acres — the piece that became Shad's Hole — to Darby. With the Bennett sale already made, the 1709 deed describes the remaining parent tract as roughly 550 acres. Both figures are correct, each belonging to its own moment in the chain of title. The land Darby bought was not an isolated parcel but part of a larger landscape already being divided, sold, and reshaped by the people who lived along Morgan's Creek.

That landscape sat within Shrewsbury Parish, several miles northeast of St. Paul's Parish, where Darby and Sarah had married in 1707. The difference is not a contradiction but a reflection of the same thin, scattered settlement pattern already visible in

Chapters 4 and 7. A household’s church and a household’s land could fall within two different parishes without any tension at all. Shrewsbury — originally “South Sassafras Parish” — was, like St. Paul’s, one of the thirty parishes created by Maryland’s 1692 Act of Establishment. In a county where rivers shaped movement and households stood far apart, parish boundaries were broad frameworks rather than tight enclosures. Shad’s Hole belonged to Shrewsbury, but the marriage that began the household belonged to St. Paul’s. The two threads ran alongside each other, woven through the same geography.

No surviving record describes the house Darby and Sarah built at Shad’s Hole. What can be described, with care, is the general pattern of dwellings built by small Chesapeake planters in this period. A typical house was modest in scale, perhaps twenty feet by fifteen, built with clapboard siding over a post-in-ground frame. Inside, one or two rooms opened onto a dirt floor packed hard by use. A chimney of log and clay stood at one end, its draft imperfect but serviceable. The roof might be thatch or sod, depending on what materials were at hand. Windows were narrow slits covered with waxed cloth or scraped horn rather than glass, admitting light in a softened, filtered way. Such houses were plain, functional, and built to the scale of the labor available. They were not grand structures but shelters shaped by necessity, the kind of dwelling a man in Darby’s position would have raised as he began clearing land and building a household. It is not a description of Shad’s Hole’s specific house — no source gives that — but it is the pattern into which Shad’s Hole almost certainly fit.

The household economy that grew around that house followed the same logic. Tobacco was the crop that paid for the land and would go on paying the parish levy, but it was not the only thing the household raised. Sheep provided wool; corn provided food; a small number of other livestock rounded out the work of each season. One record, not fully traceable, credits Darby with owning a cart and harness — uncommon possessions on the Eastern Shore before 1740, if the account is accurate. Whether or not that detail is correct, the broader pattern holds: a household built around tobacco but sustained by a mix of crops and animals, each contributing to the work of making a living on newly purchased land.

Land and family arrived together. Daniel, Darby and Sarah's first child, was born in 1709, the same year as the Shad's Hole purchase. The household began to grow almost as soon as it existed. Five years later, in 1714, Darby added fifty more acres — surveyed as "Darby's Desire" and patented in 1716 — a sign that the household was expanding, its footprint widening as its needs and ambitions grew. The record shows land accumulating, children arriving, and a household taking shape in the quiet reaches of upper Kent County.

With the place now made real — its name, its history, its parish, its likely house, and its early economy — the book turns next to the woman who shared it. Chapter 9 takes up Sarah Meeks herself: who she was, and what she brought to the household being built around her.

Chapter 9

Sarah Meeks Herself

Shad’s Hole, with its narrow rise of ground and its parish boundaries shifting around it, has now had its turn. The place is real enough to stand on its own: a house likely timbered from the land around it, a name that held through generations, a corner of Shrewsbury Parish that shaped the Shawhan family’s first years in Maryland. But a place is only half a story. The other half is the woman who shared it. Not the bride glimpsed briefly in the 1707 marriage entry, but Sarah Meeks herself — the person who stepped into Darby’s world and, for nearly three decades, helped make it a household.

What survives of her before that marriage is nothing at all. No baptism, no birth record, no document naming her parents. She enters the surviving record at the moment she marries, and not a day earlier. For a woman of her time and place, that is ordinary. It is also worth saying plainly. The silence is not a failure of research; it is the shape of the archive itself. The birth year often repeated for her — “c. 1677” — is only a backward calculation from the marriage date, a placeholder standing in for a record that does not exist. She arrives in the documents fully formed, already of age, already ready to marry, and already carrying a surname whose origins remain unspoken.

The question of those origins is not new. In February 1941, a query printed in the National Historical

Magazine asked directly who Sarah's parents were, and offered no answer. The silence around her beginnings has a documented history of its own, stretching back long before any modern genealogist proposed a guess. It is one of the oldest open questions in the Shawhan line.

The best current candidate traces to a Cecil County planter named Walter Meeks — not Walter himself, whose 1687 will names two daughters and accounts for both, but his eldest son, James. Walter's will makes the family's structure unusually clear. Of his four sons, three were still minors in 1687, their inheritances placed under conditions that assumed years yet to come. Only James was already independent, receiving his 250-acre share outright. He is therefore the only one of the four who could plausibly have fathered a daughter by about 1677. Two separate lines of reasoning, developed independently of each other — one from analysis of the will, another from a manuscript claim whose editors flagged its citation as missing — converge on James. Convergence strengthens a hypothesis. It does not turn it into proof.

Set against James is a real obstacle. Sarah's own 1707 marriage record carries a citation code pointing to Kent County, while every document tied to Walter's and James's family — the will, the land, the whole of their documented life — belongs to Cecil County. The mismatch is not a small matter. An entirely separate Kent County Meeks family, unrelated to Walter and requiring far fewer assumptions, remains the simplest explanation. It is the counterweight that keeps the James hypothesis honest, and it belongs in the narrative with equal force.

One candidate can be closed outright. Walter's will names a daughter Sarah Randall, and for a moment her shared given name made her seem a possibility. She is not. Married under the Randall surname by 1687, she would have had to be bearing children as late as 1728 to match the Shawhan household's timeline — well past any plausible childbearing age for the period. The question was tested, and it is settled.

A single document offers texture, if not an answer. In June 1675, a Maryland land patent describes "Walter Meeks of Baltimore County" transporting his wife Sarah, daughters Sarah and Elizabeth, and son James into the province. Twelve years later, Walter's will confirms the same family, the same acreage, the same eldest son. The daughter Sarah named in the patent is already accounted for as Sarah Randall, so the patent does not move the parentage question forward. What it does offer is a glimpse of the world a Meeks connection would place Sarah's grandfather in: a family arriving in Maryland during the years when county lines were still settling, when Baltimore, Kent, and the newly created Cecil County overlapped in practice. The administrative lag in the patent's county naming is the same kind already seen in the Kent-Queen Anne's boundary shift around Shad's Hole. It is context, not evidence.

What remains, after all of it, is not an answer but a shape of uncertainty that can be stated plainly. An old question, still open. One leading candidate, unproven. One real alternative that cannot be ruled out. A silence that has lasted as long as the record itself.

Chapter 9

Whatever her origins, Sarah Meeks stepped into the surviving documents in November 1707, and within two years was raising the first of eight children at Shad's Hole — the household the next chapter takes up.

Chapter 10

The Children’s Early Lives

Whatever Sarah’s own origins, she married into the record in November 1707, and within two years was raising the first of eight children at Shad’s Hole. The household that grew around her and Darby over the next nineteen years is documented only in glimpses — a list of names, a set of birth years recalled later, the shape of a family visible mostly in the spacing between its children. It is a quiet record, but it is enough to see the outline of a life lived in full.

Daniel came first, in 1709. John followed in 1711, Dennis in 1713, and Sarah in 1715 — four children in six years, each arriving roughly two years apart. Then the rhythm broke. No surviving record explains why Elizabeth did not appear until 1722, seven years after her nearest sibling. The gap stands as an observed pattern, nothing more. After Elizabeth, the pace resumed: Darby Jr. in 1724, David in 1726, and William in 1728, three more children in four years. Eight in all, born across nearly two decades, their names repeated in every source that preserves the family’s shape.

Almost nothing describes any of them as children. No baptism entries survive, no anecdote of childhood at Shad’s Hole, no document that says what it was like to grow up in a house whose boundaries were still being sorted out by the parish. Like their mother before them, they enter the record only at the moments that generated paperwork — a birth year noted in a later

document, a name in a will, eventually a marriage entry of their own. The silence is not unusual for the period. It is simply the way the archive holds the lives of children.

Even so, the size of the household mattered. Other colonial founding populations — Quebec's, the most thoroughly documented — show how large families functioned as a hedge against high mortality and uncertain long-term survival of a family line. In that population, the number of children who lived to marry and raise children of their own was the strongest predictor of whether a founder's line endured at all. Maryland kept far thinner records than Quebec's parish registers, so the parallel is only an illustration of the pressures families faced, not a measurement of Darby and Sarah's own odds. But it helps make sense of the scale of the household they built: eight children were, among other things, a wager on the future.

By the time William, the youngest, was born in 1728, the household already spanned nearly two effective generations. In 1736, when the record next speaks clearly, Daniel was twenty-seven and John twenty-five — grown men with households of their own. Dennis, about twenty-three, and Sarah, twenty-one and already married, were adults. Elizabeth, fourteen, stood near the edge of adulthood by the period's standards. And Darby Jr., twelve; David, ten; and William, eight were still children, the last of the family still living at Shad's Hole.

By April of that year, the household's two builders were gone, dying within about a week of each other. The wills they left behind belong to the next chapter, but

one part of Sarah’s will belongs here: what became of the three youngest sons. Darby Jr., David, and William were placed in the guardianship of Edward Dial, married to their sister Sarah, until each turned twenty-one. Their schooling was specified — one year for Darby, two for David. William’s schooling was not named, though he was included in the guardianship clause. Elizabeth, fourteen and not named among the three, does not appear in that arrangement. The surviving record does not say what became of her in 1736, and there is no evidence to carry the question further.

What the record shows, in the end, is a household that outlived its builders: eight children at very different stages of life, left to carry a family name whose spelling had never quite settled, on land whose own history was still being sorted out. The land they left behind — its boundaries, its burdens, its division — is where the book turns next.

Chapter 11

Land, Debt, and the Will

Chapter 10 left a household still standing after its builders were gone—eight children, each at a different stage of life, still rooted on land whose own story had not yet been fully told. This chapter turns to that ground: how it was assembled, what the record says about its burdens, and how it was finally divided when both Darby and Sarah died in 1736.

The story begins, as it must, with Shad's Hole. In 1709 Darby secured one hundred acres there, a purchase that marked the moment his household crossed from labor alone into landholding. It was the first piece of ground that could be called theirs. But the holding did not stay fixed. Five years later, on 27 November 1714, another fifty acres were surveyed for him, and on 10 September 1716 patented as Darby's Desire. The name carried a flourish, but the land itself lay within the same Shad's Hole tract. Together the two parcels—one bought, one patented—gave Darby a nominal 150 acres within the first years of his marriage. It was enough to sustain a growing family, enough to mark him as a man with a stake in Kent County's future.

The record shows that his standing rested not only on acreage but on trust. Twice Darby appears on administration bonds, both times as surety for Francis Collins, who was settling the estates of Edward Carroll in 1709 and Edward Sammons in 1721. These were not Darby's debts. They were the county's way of

ensuring that an estate’s administrator had reliable men behind him—men whose word and property could guarantee proper handling. Darby served in that role twice, twelve years apart. It is a small detail, but it carries weight: he was a man neighbors could rely on. The coincidence of the first bond with the year of the Shad’s Hole purchase sits quietly in the record, a pairing of dates rather than a story.

One other document fixes Darby in time with unusual clarity. On 20 November 1733 he gave a deposition in Kent County and stated his age as sixty. No surviving page says what the deposition concerned or why he was called to speak. The record preserves only the statement and the age it yields. From that single line comes the birth year—about 1673—that anchors every timeline in this book. The occasion itself has slipped away.

A family-history essay adds a thread that the official record does not confirm. Eric Shawn writes, without citing a source, that Darby and Sarah still owed Francis Bellows money at the time of their deaths in 1736. No surviving bond, deed, or court record names such a debt, and nothing in the Kent County files supports it. The claim is offered here as an uncited secondary account, treated as referring to the original 1709 purchase but not documented as a continuing obligation. A separate detail in the same essay—payments “transferring” to Daniel by 1738—belongs to Maryland’s routine quitrent ledgers, the annual rent charged to landholders. Those ledgers do show Daniel as responsible after inheriting, but they do not corroborate the Bellows claim. The two documented

bond appearances remain what they are: markers of Darby's standing, not evidence of debt.

When the will was settled, the land passed in a way that leaves its own unanswered question. The dwelling plantation is described as "part of a tract of Land called Shad's Hole, containing one hundred and ten acres," and it was left jointly to sons Darby Jr. and David after Sarah's life estate. That figure—110 acres—matches neither the original 100-acre purchase nor the 150 acres created when Darby's Desire was added. No dated chain-of-title record explains the gap. Unlike the acreage puzzle resolved in Chapter 8, this one remains open. The record allows the numbers to be stated plainly, but not reconciled.

Another absence is equally clear. Nothing shows any land, by dower or otherwise, passing to Edward Dial, the son-in-law who had taken on guardianship of the three youngest sons. Later documents show his widow, her brother, and her daughter continuing to lease property "formerly rented by" him. They do not show ownership. The negative finding stands: no land is documented for Edward Dial.

The will named Sarah as sole executor, but she did not settle the estate. Instead, Daniel—twenty-seven years old—was formally appointed Administrator and received "one long gunn and no more" by the will's own terms. The likeliest explanation, offered as reasonable inference rather than fact, is that Sarah died within days of Darby, before she could carry out the duties the will assigned her. A court would then have appointed the eldest son to complete the work. The record

supports the outcome, not the moment that produced it.

These loose ends—an acreage figure, an unconfirmed debt, an estate settled by someone other than the executor named—are not flaws in the story. They are the story. A family’s hold on its land in early-eighteenth-century Maryland was real but imperfectly recorded, shaped as much by what survives in the archive as by what does not. With the land secured, the debts noted, and the estate settled, Darby’s story now turns outward. Part IV steps from the household into the wider imperial world that surrounded it, the policies and pressures that shaped Kent County as surely as tobacco and timber shaped the farm itself.

Chapter 11

PART IV
Life Under Empire

Across these years an empire shifted hands, money changed form, and three conflicts unsettled the Chesapeake he called home, yet Darby's own record remains silent. The documents that describe his life offer only an outline, a faint shape set against the larger turmoil moving around him.

Chapter 12

Imperial Policy as Context

Chapter 11 ended with the mechanics of one family's hold on its land: tobacco turned into acreage, bonds taken on for neighbors, an unresolved debt, and an estate settled by a son rather than the widow named to do it. Part IV steps back from that household. The ground beneath Darby's life did not stand still. Maryland's government changed hands, its currency changed form, and the rules that shaped its politics shifted more than once. None of these changes appear in Darby's own voice; the record does not show him reacting to them. But they formed the world he lived in, and they touched the very documents his family carried.

Maryland began as a proprietary colony, not a royal one. In 1632 the Crown granted the Calvert family the right to govern, tax, and grant land as their private possession. The colony's political authority rested in one family's hands, not in the Crown's. That arrangement lasted for more than fifty years, long enough to become the colony's ordinary condition. But it was not permanent, and its interruption fell within living memory of Darby's own adult life.

The Glorious Revolution of 1689, and Maryland's own Protestant Revolution that followed it, stripped the Catholic Calverts of their governing authority. From

1689 to 1715 Maryland was run by royal governors appointed by the Crown. Those years span the beginning of Darby's adult life: his marriage in 1707, his first land purchase in 1709, and the early growth of his household all took place under royal rule. The colony's political center of gravity had shifted from a proprietary family to London, and it remained there for more than a quarter century.

The Calverts did not accept that loss as final. Benedict Calvert, heir to the barony, converted to Anglicanism in 1713—a deliberate step toward recovering his family's authority. He became the 4th Baron Baltimore in February 1715 and petitioned at once for Maryland's return. He died two months later, before living to see the petition succeed. On 15 May 1715 King George I restored proprietary political control to the family, not to Benedict but to his fifteen-year-old son, Charles Calvert, the 5th Baron Baltimore. Charles would not personally take charge of the colony until coming of age in 1721, but the political hinge had already turned. Maryland was once again governed by the family that owned it.

That hinge falls, by coincidence, across Darby's own land record. The fifty-acre addition to Shad's Hole—Darby's Desire—was surveyed on 27 November 1714, while Maryland was still a royal colony, and patented on 10 September 1716, after proprietary rule had been restored. Nothing in the surviving record suggests that the political change affected how the patent was processed; the same colonial Land Office handled it throughout. But the dates sit on either side of a real turning point in the colony's history. The paper Darby

held carries the imprint of that moment, not as cause and effect, but as timing.

Not everything changed with the government. The quitrent owed on Maryland land—the same annual obligation that would later show Daniel as the responsible party after his parents' deaths—was the Calvert family's private property right, granted by the original 1632 charter. It continued flowing to them without interruption through the entire royal period. The 1715 restoration changed who governed Maryland. It did not change who collected the rent.

The tobacco economy that shaped Darby's entire working life reached a breaking point in the years before his death. Tobacco had long served as currency, but its value was unstable, its grades inconsistent, and its use for tax payment costly. Between 1725 and 1728 prices fell by roughly a quarter to a third, straining a system already awkward for everyday exchange. In 1733 the Assembly adopted a remedy: Maryland issued its first paper currency, distributing new bills to taxpayers in exchange for physically destroying a portion of their tobacco. The Act created money and shrank the old commodity-money supply in the same stroke. Darby lived three more years after the Act took effect—long enough to see the ground beneath his own economy begin to shift, even if the record shows nothing of his personal response.

One more thread belongs to the same policy world. After 1689, Assembly law barred Catholics from voting or holding office in Maryland. The restriction shaped the colony's politics for decades. Nothing in the

surviving record establishes Darby's own religion or shows whether the law touched his household. It stands here as one more facet of the world he lived in, not as a claim about his own beliefs.

These changes—political authority passing from family to Crown and back again, currency shifting from tobacco to paper, and Assembly rules narrowing who could participate in government—formed the backdrop to Darby's life. They reached into Kent County without leaving marks on his own voice, but they shaped the world in which his family worked its land and paid its obligations. The next chapter turns from policy to conflict. The same decades that brought restoration and reform also brought danger to the Chesapeake frontier, and the world around Darby's household would not remain peaceful for long.

Chapter 13

Early-1700s Conflict as Context

The decades that reshaped Maryland's government and currency also carried a sharper edge. Political change was only one part of the world Darby Shawhan lived in. Running alongside his documented life were three different kinds of conflict — a distant imperial war, a long frontier pressure, and a violent border dispute — none of which appear in any surviving document naming Darby or his family, but all of which marked the wider Chesapeake as contested ground rather than settled country. They form the backdrop to the years in which Darby married, acquired land, raised children, and eventually signed the will that closed his life.

England's declaration of war against France and Spain in May 1702 opened what the colonies called Queen Anne's War. The fighting itself unfolded far from Maryland: in New England, Acadia, Newfoundland, and along the Carolina and Florida borderlands. No battle reached Maryland's soil. Yet the war reached the colony all the same, carried not by soldiers but by the Atlantic tobacco trade that underwrote the Chesapeake's economy. French privateers prowled the shipping lanes, raising the cost and risk of sending tobacco to European markets. Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania all felt the strain, and several war years brought poor harvests on top of the shipping pressure. The full span of the conflict — from 1702 until the Peace of Utrecht in 1713 — covers the years in which Darby married (1707) and made his first land purchase (1709). The tobacco economy described earlier in this

book was operating under real wartime pressure during the very years his household was taking shape.

Alongside that wartime strain ran a different kind of conflict, older and slower, rooted in the long history of English settlement on Maryland's Eastern Shore. By 1700 the Nanticoke and Choptank were the last Native communities still living on the Shore, bound to Maryland by a tributary relationship formalized through a series of treaties beginning in 1668. In the early 1700s the colony set aside roughly 3,000 acres for the Nanticoke at Broad Creek, in what is now Sussex County, Delaware. But settlers steadily occupied reservation land under a claimed "right of occupancy," and the pressure on Native land did not ease. It built across the length of Darby's lifetime and continued after his death. Broad Creek lies a full hundred miles south of Kent County, and the encroachment there belongs to the frontier condition of the Eastern Shore generally during his lifetime, not to the specific experience of his household.

The Chesapeake's waters carried their own hazards in these same years. In the fall of 1717, Edward Teach — Blackbeard — and Captain Benjamin Hornigold captured the sloop Betty off Cape Charles, at the mouth of the bay, a full 150 miles from Kent County. Blackbeard himself was killed by Royal Navy forces the following year. The incident is one vivid reminder that the Chesapeake was not immune to piracy, but it remained a distant event, part of the wider environment in which Darby's life unfolded rather than a threat to the quiet rivers and creeks of Kent County.

The most direct conflict of Darby's later years was not with a foreign power or a Native nation but with Pennsylvania. A boundary ambiguity in Pennsylvania's 1681 charter left a disputed strip of land along the Susquehanna River claimed by both colonies. By 1730 the dispute had turned violent. Raids, evictions, and militia incursions escalated through the mid-1730s, and the conflict became known as Cresap's War or the "Conojocular War." The contested ground lay roughly seventy miles northwest of Kent County, on the Susquehanna's west bank. The dispute was already escalating during Darby's last years, and its timing overlaps with the final documents of his life. In September 1736 Maryland sent roughly 300 militiamen under Colonel Nathaniel Rigby into the disputed valley — a mobilization that came months after Darby's death. His will was signed in October 1735 and proved in April 1736. The overlap is coincidence, not consequence, and belongs to the broader story of Maryland's contested borders rather than to the personal history of the Shawhan household. A ceasefire proclaimed by King George II in 1737 and a peace agreement signed in London in 1738 ended the immediate violence, though the boundary itself would not be fully settled until decades later.

Across these three anchors — a war fought far away, a frontier pressure unfolding slowly across the Shore, and a border dispute erupting within Maryland's own borders — the pattern is consistent. They shaped the province around Darby, even if they left no mark on the documents that record his life. A targeted search for Kent County-specific conflict in his years turned up nothing, and the quiet of the local record stands in contrast to the contested landscape beyond it. The honest state of the evidence is that Darby's household

lived through a period when Maryland and the wider Chesapeake were genuinely unsettled, even if Kent County itself remained largely untouched by the conflicts that defined the era.

This chapter closes Part IV by marking the world around Darby rather than the actions of Darby himself. The conflicts that shaped the Chesapeake during his lifetime form part of the environment in which his household made its way, but they do not appear in the documents that name him. The story now turns back to that household — to the document that closed his life, and to the family left to carry it forward.

PART V
Divergence

Darby and Sarah's lives closed together—two wills within days, two deaths within a week—an ending as sharply drawn as their beginnings were dim. What followed drifted wide: eight children carrying the name forward.

Chapter 14

Darby's Last Years

Chapter 13 closed by marking the wider Chesapeake as contested ground, a landscape of pressures and disputes that never reached into any surviving document naming Darby Shawhan. The story now turns back to his own household for the last time. Part V opens not with conflict or policy but with two wills, written four days apart in October 1735, and two deaths, about a week apart in April 1736. After a life that entered the record late and without explanation, Darby's final months are documented with unusual clarity: two signatures, two sets of bequests, two probate dates, and the quiet closing of a household that had grown steadily from the 1707 marriage onward.

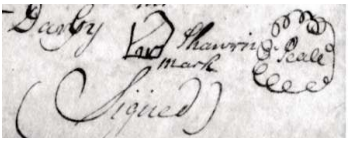


Figure 5 Darby Shawhan's Mark, 1735
Cropped from Darby's will: "Darby Shawn his [D] mark, Signed." Kent County Register of Wills, Liber Wills No. 2, 1735–46, pp. 44–45.

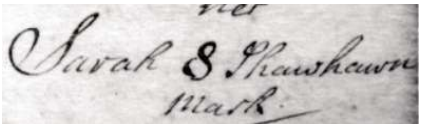


Figure 6 Sarah Shawhan's Mark, 1735
Cropped from Sarah's will, written the day after her husband's: "her Sarah S Shawhawn Mark." Kent County Register of Wills, Liber Wills No. 2, 1735–46, p. 51.

On 16 October 1735, Darby signed his will. He described himself as "sick in body but of good and perfect memory," a phrase common in Kent County probate language but unmistakable in its meaning: he knew he was failing, and he knew it was time to put his affairs in order. Four days later, on 20 October 1735, Sarah wrote her own will, opening with "in perfect sence but weak in body." The pairing is striking. Husband and wife, within the same week, each set down a final record of their intentions. The documents are independently dated in their own text; nothing in the surviving record explains why they were written so close together, and this book does not speculate. But the proximity of the two signatures gives this moment its shape. After decades of documentary silence at the beginning of Darby's life, the end arrives with two voices, side by side, each speaking in the formal language of Kent County wills.

Darby's will follows the ordinary structure of a planter of modest means. He named Sarah his sole executor and granted her a life estate in all his lands. Then he turned to his children, naming each one in turn. Son Daniel received a long gun; son John received a sow and a pig; son Dennis received a horse, four years old,

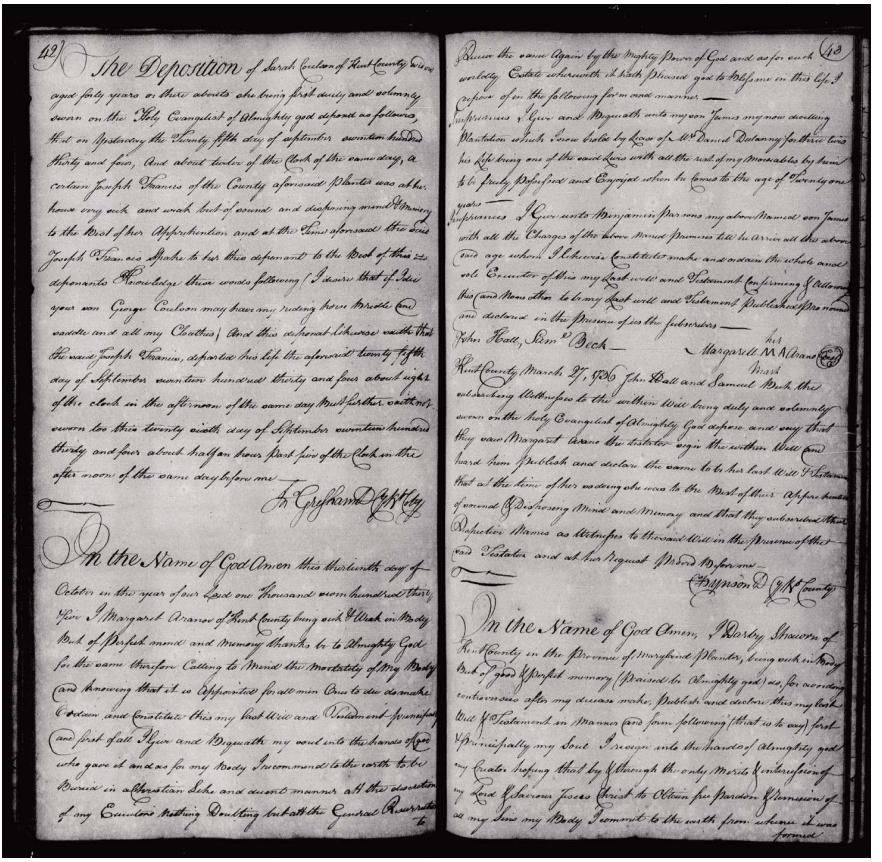


Figure 7 Darby Shawhan's Will, Opening Page
Kent County Register of Wills, Liber Wills No. 2, 1735–46, pp. 42–43. Signed 16 October 1735, proved 3 April 1736.

called Doctor. Daughter Sarah, already married to Edward Dial, received a heifer. Daughter Elizabeth received a calf, a cow, and a lamb, to come to her when she reached sixteen. The dwelling plantation itself — the 110 acres of Shad's Hole — was to pass jointly to sons Darby Jr. and David after Sarah's death. The guardianship of the three youngest sons, Darby Jr., David, and William, was placed with Sarah until

they reached twenty-one. Both the land bequest's own puzzle and the guardianship arrangement that followed belong to earlier chapters of this book; here they appear simply as part of the will's structure, the way Darby chose to name and provide for each of his eight children.

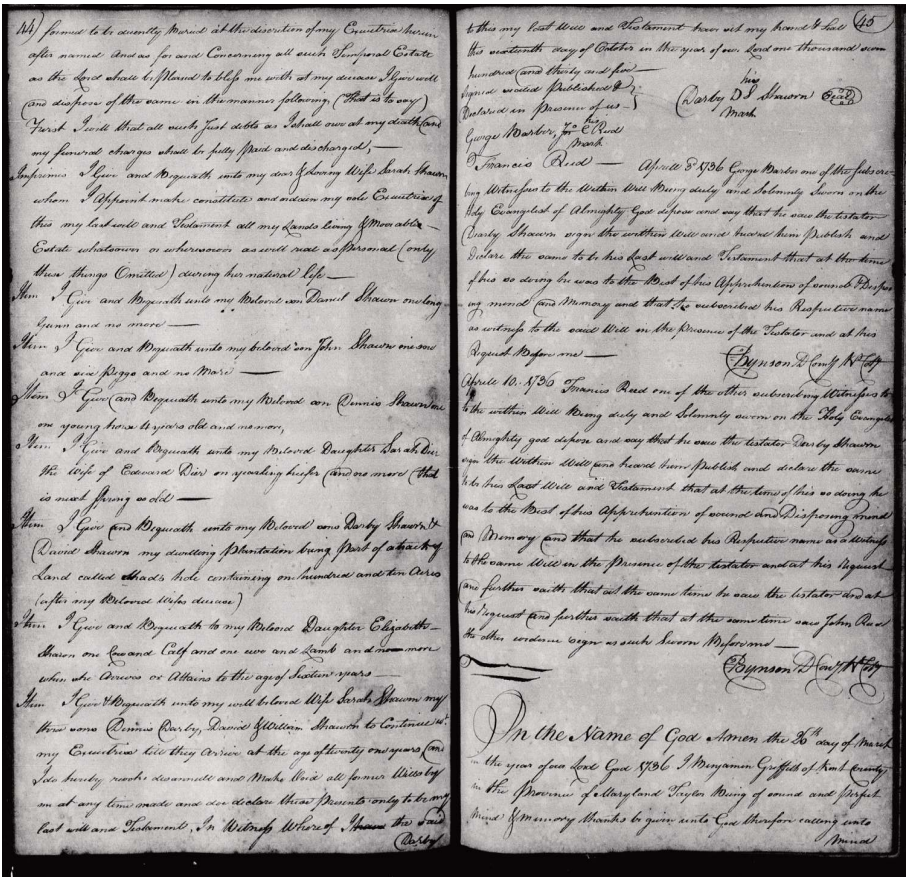


Figure 8 Darby Shawhan's Will, Bequests and Signing
Kent County Register of Wills, Liber Wills No. 2, 1735–46, pp. 44–45.

The ordinariness of the document is its own counterpoint to the beginning of this book. Darby entered the record with no birth, no immigration record, and nothing certain before a single marriage date in 1707. He leaves it in the most formulaic of ways: a will that looks much like any other Kent County probate document of the 1730s. Yet its plainness is precisely what makes it meaningful. It names every person who mattered to him. It sets out, without flourish, the shape of a household that had grown from silence into a family of eight children. After the long gaps that marked the first half of his life, the ending is fully visible.

Sarah’s own will, written the day after her husband’s, is not an appendix to his but a document in its own right. She left to her son Dennis his father’s clothes and saddle. To her daughter Sarah, now Sarah Dial, she left her own saddle. Her three youngest sons — Darby Jr., David, and William — she placed with her son-in-law Edward Dial “to the age of one and twenty or during the life of his wife Sarah” — the will’s own words, left as the condition it states rather than resolved here. She specified schooling: one year for Darby Jr., two years for David. To Elizabeth and to William she left ten pounds apiece. Elizabeth appears in the bequest but not in the guardianship clause, despite being not yet fourteen. The record simply does not say who was responsible for her care, and no surviving document fills the gap. It remains one of the small, honest silences in the archival trail.

A single name threads through both wills. The witness depositions taken on Darby’s will in April 1736 name George Borden, Francis Reed, and, in the 10 April deposition, a third witness, John Reed. Sarah’s own

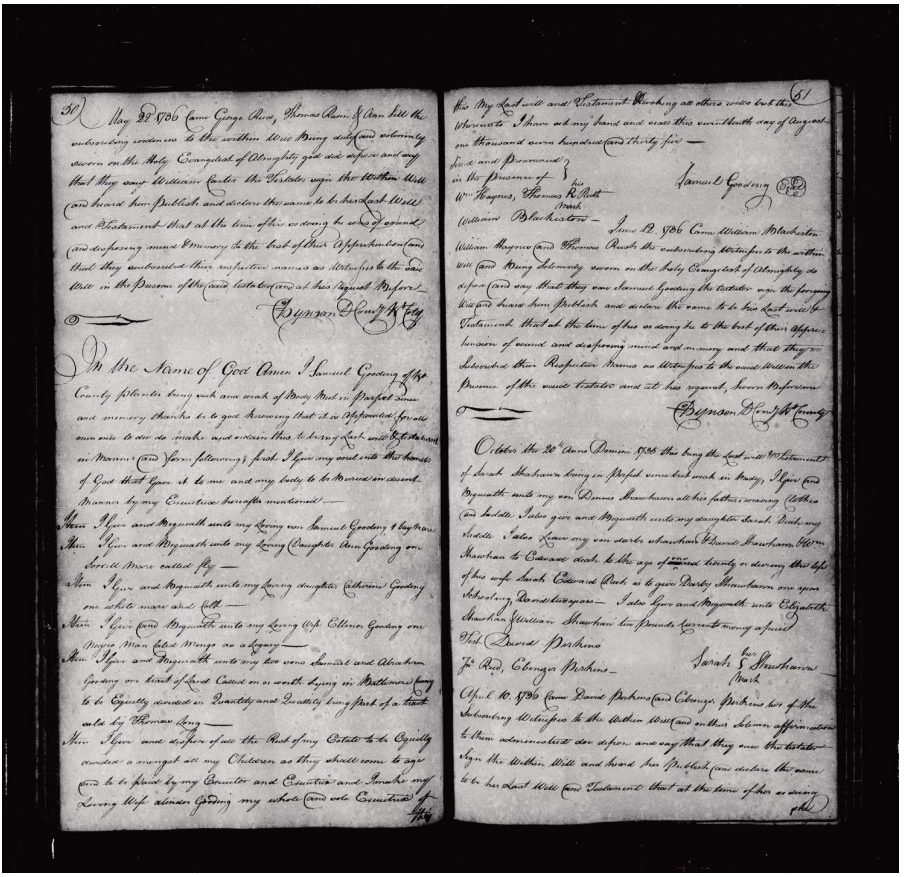


Figure 9 Sarah Shawhan's Will
Kent County Register of Wills, Liber Wills No. 2, 1735–46, pp. 50–51. Written 20 October 1735, proved on or about 10 April 1736.

will is witnessed by David Parkins, John Reede (by mark), and Ebenezer Parkins. "John Reed" and "John Reede" are almost certainly the same man — a small but concrete sign that the same Kent County neighbor stood behind both documents. It is one of the few places where the two wills touch directly, beyond their dates and their shared household.

The close of their lives is dated precisely. Darby's will was proved on 3 April 1736. Sarah's own was proved about a week later, on or about 10 April 1736. She outlived her husband by roughly a week — long enough to become his widow and his named executor, not long enough to carry that duty through to completion. Daniel, their eldest son, was appointed Administrator instead, as Chapter 11 already describes. The probate dates mark the end of a household that had grown steadily from the 1707 marriage to these final signatures in 1735 and the two deaths in April 1736.

Independent corroboration comes from an unexpected place: a reader-submitted query in the February 1941 issue of the DAR's National Historical Magazine. The query sought Darby's and Sarah's parentage, a question still open today, but in asking it the writer listed the bare facts known at the time — Darby's 1673–1736 dates, Sarah's 1736 death, the 1707 marriage, and all eight children's names and birth years. Compiled decades before modern genealogical work on this family, the query confirms the essentials of the household that these two wills describe.

Two wills, written four days apart. Two deaths, about a week apart. Eight children named and provided for. It is a quiet, formal ending for a life that began in total documentary silence. Part V opens here, with the household closing, and now turns to what became of those eight children — to the years ahead, when their paths begin to diverge.

Chapter 15

The Children’s Divergence

The household ended in the ordinary way: two wills written four days apart, and two deaths that followed six months later, about a week apart in April 1736. Chapter 14 closed that story, the last moment when all eight of their children still lived under one roof. What came next had no single document to hold it together. The youngest of them, Elizabeth, was not yet sixteen. The oldest, Daniel, had already begun to make his own way. And from that point forward, their paths no longer ran alongside one another. This chapter takes them one at a time, in the order they were born, because after 1736 there is no longer a single thread to trace through all eight.

Daniel — the one who left

Daniel, born in 1709, was never one of the two sons named to inherit the family’s dwelling plantation. An earlier reading of the will had placed him among the land heirs, but the record corrected itself: the joint inheritance belonged to his younger brothers, Darby Jr. and David. What Daniel did hold was a smaller piece of the same ground—about fifty acres—acquired from David by a route the surviving documents do not explain. In October 1740, he sold that land to his brother John. It was a clean break, and it marked the beginning of the family’s first westward move. Daniel took his own household to Frederick County, Maryland, and then farther still, into Hampshire County, Virginia.

His siblings' lives would remain clustered around Kent County for decades, but Daniel's path bent away early and never returned.

John — the one who stayed

John, born in 1711, lived the opposite kind of life. He remained in Kent County from childhood to old age, one of only two of the eight children who never left it. He married Elizabeth Peach, bought Daniel's fifty acres in 1740, and farmed the same ground his parents had known. When he wrote his will on 1 August 1783, he described himself as "sick and weak in body," and he died at or near that same date. The book's earlier record had taken the proving date—15 October 1783—as the date of his death, but the correction stands: John died in early August. His descendants, some using the later spelling "Shawn," still live on Maryland's Eastern Shore today, carrying forward the branch that never left home.

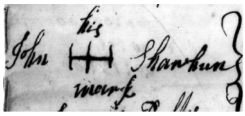


Figure 10 John Shawhan's Mark
The exact document this mark was cropped from has not been identified; used here as general illustration of the pattern of signing by mark continuing into the next generation. Source: Eric Shawn, Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks: Some Historical Considerations, pp. 20–21.

Dennis — farmer

Dennis, born in 1713, named his occupation plainly in his own 1770 will: farmer. Earlier notes had called him a laborer, but the document corrects that assumption. By 1746 he was leasing 114 acres from George Garnett, and through the 1760s he appeared regularly in Kent County's courts, sometimes as plaintiff, sometimes as defendant. His life was rooted in the ordinary work of land, debt, and obligation.

In 1767, his younger brother Darby Jr. fell gravely ill. Darby spent his last six months in Dennis's home, cared for there until he died. The will that followed left Darby's entire estate not to Dennis, who had nursed him, but to a nephew, Joseph. Dennis sued Joseph over the cost of that care. Three years later, when Dennis wrote his own will, he named only two children—Bathsheba and Isaac. Other names sometimes attached to him in family notes do not appear in the document itself, and no wife is named. The record here is narrow, and the chapter keeps to what it actually says.

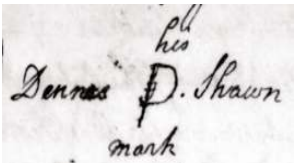


Figure 11 Dennis Shawn's Mark
The exact document this mark was cropped from has not been identified; used here as general illustration. Source: Eric Shawn, Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks: Some Historical Considerations, pp. 20–21.

Sarah — who held the household together

Sarah, born in 1715, was already married by the time her parents wrote their wills in October 1735. Both documents call her “Sarah Dier” or “Sarah Dial,” and her mother placed the three youngest brothers directly into her husband Edward Dyer’s care. That moment belongs to Chapter 10, and this chapter mentions it only in passing: Sarah was the one old enough, settled enough, to hold the household together when the parents died.

Two daughters followed, born in 1738 and 1745. Sometime in the late 1740s, Sarah was widowed. The surviving record disagrees on the year—1747 or 1749—and may even be confusing her death with Edward’s. The ambiguity stands. What is clear is that Sarah administered Edward’s estate herself and continued leasing land jointly with her brother David and her own daughter. She remained active in Kent County’s records for years after her husband’s death, but the documents do not settle when her own life ended.

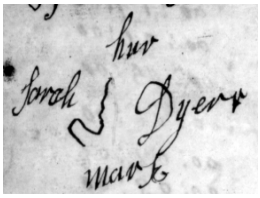


Figure 12 Sarah (Shawhan) Dyer’s Mark
The exact document this mark was cropped from has not been identified; used here as general illustration. Source: Eric Shawn, Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks: Some Historical Considerations, pp. 20–21.

Chapter 15

Elizabeth — barely recorded at all

Elizabeth, born in 1722, is the child the record does not follow. Beyond her birth year and the conditional bequests in her parents' wills, nothing more is known. No marriage appears, no death, no children, no later trace in Kent County's registers. The silence is genuine, not an oversight. Her beat is short because the record is short, and stating that plainly is more honest than filling the gap with speculation.

Darby Jr. — who never married

Darby Jr., born in 1724, never married. Along with his brother David, he stood to inherit the family's 110-acre dwelling plantation once their mother's life estate ended—a fact already developed in earlier chapters and mentioned here only as context. In 1759 he was taxed as an unmarried man over twenty-five. His final months were spent in Dennis's home, gravely ill, and it was there, in Kent County, that he died in 1767.

What he left behind he left to a nephew, Joseph, not to Dennis. The choice was sharp enough that Dennis took Joseph to court. The documents do not explain Darby's reasoning, and the chapter does not speculate. It records only what the record shows: a man who never married, who died young, and whose estate moved in a direction his caregiver did not expect.

David — and the land that moved again

David, born in 1726, never married either, though he fathered a son, Frederick, with Jane Greenwood. A Kent County fornication case from March 1761 confirms that the two were not wed, correcting an earlier assumption in the family notes. Like Darby Jr., David was a joint heir of the dwelling plantation. But by the time he died in 1766, his share of that land had already passed to Daniel by a route the record does not explain. His brother John administered the estate.

Among the property listed in David's 1766 inventory was an enslaved man named Pompey. This chapter states the fact plainly and leaves it there. The family's relationship to slavery belongs to whichever future work takes up that subject directly, not to this chapter's narrower purpose.

William — the migration no one had traced

William, born in 1728, left almost no record at all after 1736 until this research pass. What the documents do show is a marriage, to a woman named Mary, and a death in Bourbon County, Kentucky, in 1790, at the age of sixty-two. Between his birth in Kent County and his death hundreds of miles west, sixty years pass with no surviving trace. Whether his path to Kentucky had anything to do with his brother Daniel's descendants, who reached the same county a generation later, is a question the record raises but does not answer. The chapter keeps it open.

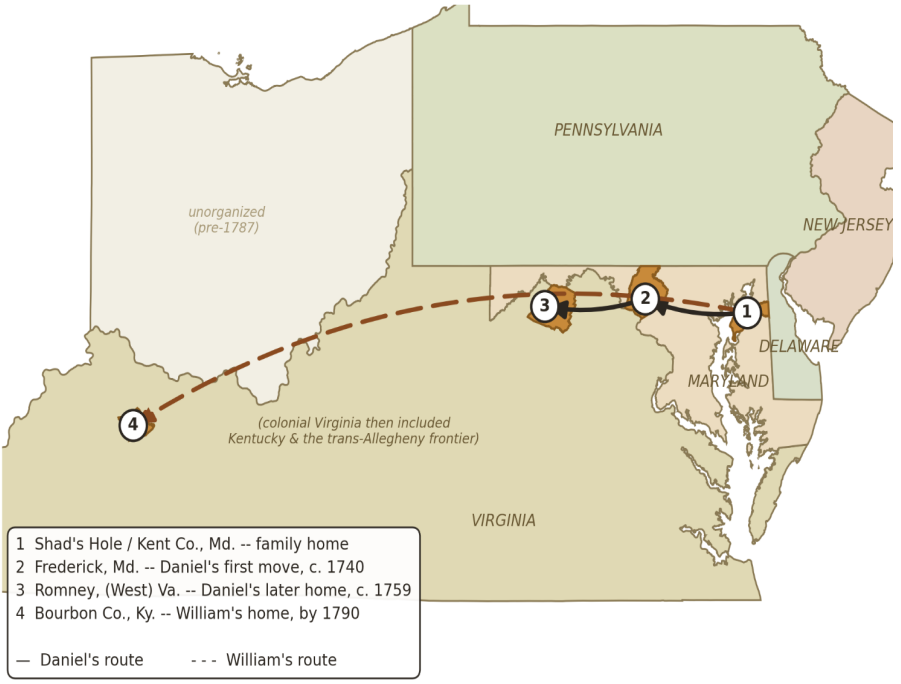


Figure 13 Where the Children Went

A custom-drawn regional map tracing Daniel's move from Kent County to Frederick County, Maryland (c. 1740) and on to Hampshire County, Virginia (c. 1759), and William's move to Bourbon County, Kentucky, by 1790. Political groupings reflect eighteenth-century colonial affiliation, not modern state lines; point locations are approximate.

Closing

Two of the eight children stayed on the land their parents left behind. One sold his share and moved west. One never married and died in a brother’s house. One left almost no record at all. One migrated so far and so quietly that his life surfaced only at its end. Eight children, eight different outcomes, and no single thread running through them beyond the household they were born into.

What came after them—their own children, their own migrations, the family’s next two centuries—is a story for another day. This book ends here, with the generation that began in one Kent County household and scattered, in the end, from Maryland’s Eastern Shore to Virginia and Kentucky, each carrying the name forward in its own way.

Epilogue

What came after them—their own children, their own migrations, the family's next two centuries—is a story for another day. This book ends here, with the generation that began in one Kent County household and scattered, in the end, from Maryland's Eastern Shore to Virginia and Kentucky, each carrying the name forward in its own way.

The Epilogue is the one allowed step beyond that threshold. Not a continuation, not a promise of more, but a final glance at what the record lets us see. It begins where the book itself began: with a man who surfaced suddenly in a 1707 entry, unnamed in the crossing that carried him, bearing a surname that shifted five times within his own lifetime alone—Shawhan, Shawhawn, Shehan, Shehorne, Sheighane—each clerk hearing the same uncertain name a little differently.

From the first chapter onward, the book has lived inside that uncertainty. Darby's survival could never be measured for him alone; the record does not permit it. What it could offer was a comparison drawn from another 17th-century founder population, where only about sixty percent left any line that reached the present at all. It was a way of saying that survival, in that world, was never guaranteed.

The withheld detail from that same study belongs here, at the end. Among the founders whose lines did endure, their presence in later generations grew far beyond their small beginnings. In a mid-20th-century Quebec cohort, more than half of the maternal lineages and nearly half of the paternal ones traced

back to those early arrivals. Survival, where it happened, tended to gather strength as it went—quietly, steadily, almost invisibly.

This book cannot offer a comparable measure of its own. To do so would require knowing the size of some later population to set against Darby and Sarah's descendants, and the record does not supply it. What it can offer is the one number the sources do allow: a count from a single branch, traced clearly enough to be seen. Daniel—the son who sold his share of Shad's Hole and kept moving west—left a line that has been followed forward twelve generations in a modern family register, documenting at least 1,217 people who carry his branch of the name. It is one branch of eight, measured because the record makes it possible. The others remain open, known to continue but not yet counted.

Even narrowed to that single line, the number turns back toward the dedication that opened the first volume: "For Darby — who built a family from a crossing that left no record, and for every generation set in motion by his silence." The count is what that silence looks like when it is tallied instead of imagined—an accumulation of lives, places, and years that began with a man whose arrival left almost nothing behind.

The geography that closed Chapter 15 remains visible here, but only as far as the book has already gone. Daniel's westward path—from Kent County to Frederick, then to Hampshire—was the opening move of the branch traced twelve generations forward in the register. This chapter does not follow it farther. It

names the motion and lets it rest, like a map folded at the edge of what is known.

The limit belongs in the ending as plainly as it did in Chapter 2. This book does not promise another volume, and it does not claim to know how many more generations will carry the name forward. Later generations lie beyond its reach.

Out of Silence

A single undocumented crossing set the line in motion. Centuries later, one branch alone runs to twelve hundred names and more. What the record can offer, in the end, is only the part that can be counted; the rest—whatever crossings and silences still lie ahead for the family—remains unwritten. Out of that first silence came a family, a name, and, eventually, a number. This book ends with what could be measured, and leaves what could not, as it began: for another day.



Figure 14. The Town of Shawhan, Kentucky, modern day

A modern satellite view of Shawhan, a small community in Bourbon County, Kentucky, that carries the family name into the present. Its own history lies beyond this book's scope.

Bibliography

Source Notes and Bibliography
From Shad's Hole: Out of Silence
Spencer S Shawhan

Note on Sources

This narrative rests on a small number of primary documents — two original wills, a marriage record, a land deed, and a probate index — supplemented by published transcriptions and secondary scholarship. Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks's documented life begins abruptly in 1707 and is comparatively well attested through their deaths in 1736; the sources listed here represent everything that has been identified and confirmed as of the time of writing. Where the record is silent, or a secondary source's claim could not be independently verified, that uncertainty is flagged in the annotations below and, where relevant, in the text itself.

I. Primary Sources — Archival Records

Maryland State Archives. Kent County Register of Wills. *Liber Wills No. 2, 1735–46.* pp. 43–45 (will of Darby Shawhan) and p. 51 (will of Sarah [Meeks] Shawhan). Annapolis, Maryland. Located via FamilySearch, "Maryland, Register of Wills Records, 1629–1999."

Direct images of the original probate record for both Darby's and Sarah's wills — the highest-reliability source held for this book. Downloaded and reviewed 2026-09-04; settled two points that two earlier secondary transcriptions had disagreed on (the joint land heirs are Darby Jr. and David,

not Daniel; the will was signed 16 October 1735, not the 19th).

Maryland Marriages, 1634–1777. p. 162: “Shawhawn, Darby, 20 Nov. 1707, Sarah Meeks — 3 KE-324.”

The marriage record for Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks. Book One cites this same 1707 marriage from a different published index (Wright’s Maryland Eastern Shore Vital Records); both give the same date.

Maryland State Archives. Kent County Court (Land Records). Liber “JS N,” pp. 147–149. MSA CE 118-8. Cross-referenced in Kent County Court (Land Records Index, A–Z), MSA CE 119-1, p. 22.

The 1709 deed conveying 100 acres of “Shad’s Hole” from Francis and Margaret Bellows to Darby Shehan. The consideration is given in tobacco; the manuscript’s own figure (three thousand five hundred pounds) could not be reconciled with the 3,200-pound figure given in two secondary sources — noted in the text as an open discrepancy rather than resolved one way.

Maryland. Prerogative Court. Will Books, *Wills*, Vol. 4–10, 1670, 1676–1679, 1682–1700, p. 20. Walter Meekes will, proved 7 August 1688. *Maryland, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1635–1777* [database online]. Lehi, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015.

The will of Walter Meekes of Cecil County. Whether he was Sarah Meeks’s grandfather is an unconfirmed hypothesis raised in the text, not an established fact — this document does not itself settle the question.

“B-‘41. (b). Shawhan-Meeks.” Genealogical Queries. *The National Historical Magazine* [Daughters of the American Revolution] 75, no. 2 (February 1941): 58.

An independent 1941 confirmation of the 1707 marriage date, both spouses’ death years, and all eight children’s names and birth years — and evidence that the question of Darby’s and Sarah’s own parentage was already open, unanswered, and being asked by researchers decades before this book.

II. Published Transcriptions and Finding Aids

Cotton, Jane Baldwin, ed. *The Maryland Calendar of Wills.* Vol. 2: 1685–1702. Baltimore, 1906.

A published abstract of Walter Meekes’s will, used to correct its writing date to 8 October 1687 after an earlier enlarged-scan reading had suggested 1685.

“The Descendants of Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks.” RootsWeb. sites.rootsweb.com/~shawhan/volumeone/genealogy.pdf.

An independent transcription that corroborated the corrected will-signing date (16 October, not the 19th) before the primary probate image became available to confirm it directly.

FamilySearch. “Maryland, Register of Wills Records, 1629–1999.” Database and images online.

The browse-only collection through which the Liber Wills No. 2 images above were located, using the volume’s own internal alphabetical index rather than a name search.

III. Maps and Figures

The fourteen figures placed in this manuscript appear below in the order they occur. Two are maps custom-drawn for this book from public boundary data; the rest are direct images of primary-source documents, most already cited more fully in Section I above.

Kent County, Maryland, register of marriages, p. 324. Provenance of this particular scan not identified; cf. *Maryland Marriages, 1634–1777*, p. 162 ("3 KE-324"), Section I above. [Figure 1, Chapter 1]

The marriage entry itself, in the original register hand, among dozens of other Kent County marriages, births, and burials from the same years.

Shawhan, Spencer S. "Shad's Hole and Kent County." Custom-drawn orientation map, 2026-09-06. [Figure 2, Part II opener]

Built from U.S. Census Bureau county-boundary data (TIGER/Line-derived shapefiles via the plotly-geo package), rendered fully offline. Kent, Queen Anne's, and Talbot Counties were all organized in roughly their current form by 1707–1709, so modern county lines are a reasonably close stand-in for this period; town, parish, and river locations are approximate and schematic.

Maryland State Archives. Kent County Court (Land Records). Liber "JS N," p. 147. MSA CE 118-8. [Figure 3, Chapter 8]

The opening page of the 1709 deed conveying Shad's Hole from Francis and Margaret Bellows to Darby Shehan; see Section I above for the full citation.

Maryland State Archives. Kent County Court (Land Records). Liber “JS N,” p. 149. MSA CE 118-8. [Figure 4, Chapter 8]

Signatures, witnesses — including Ralph Tippett, already documented as a neighbor in Chapter 7 — and the 6 September 1709 recording note.

Maryland State Archives. Kent County Register of Wills. *Liber Wills No. 2, 1735–46,* pp. 44–45 (Darby Shawhan’s mark). [Figure 5, Chapter 14]

*A tighter, higher-contrast crop of the mark on Darby’s will than the full-page image (Figure 8, below); extracted from Eric Shawn’s essay, *Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks: Some Historical Considerations*, pp. 20–21.*

Maryland State Archives. Kent County Register of Wills. *Liber Wills No. 2, 1735–46,* p. 51 (Sarah Shawhan’s mark). [Figure 6, Chapter 14]

Same treatment as Figure 5, for Sarah’s will (Figure 9, below); same source essay.

Maryland State Archives. Kent County Register of Wills. *Liber Wills No. 2, 1735–46,* pp. 42–43 (Darby Shawhan’s will, opening page). [Figure 7, Chapter 14]

Signed 16 October 1735, proved 3 April 1736; see Section I above for the full citation.

Maryland State Archives. Kent County Register of Wills. *Liber Wills No. 2, 1735–46,* pp. 44–45 (Darby Shawhan’s will, bequests and signing). [Figure 8, Chapter 14]

Names each of Darby and Sarah’s eight children in turn.

Maryland State Archives. Kent County Register of Wills. *Liber Wills No. 2, 1735–46,* pp. 50–51 (Sarah Shawhan's will). [Figure 9, Chapter 14]

Written 20 October 1735, proved on or about 10 April 1736; see Section I above for the full citation.

Shawn, Eric. *Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks: Some Historical Considerations,* pp. 20–21 (John Shawhan's mark). [Figure 10, Chapter 15]

The exact document this mark was cropped from has not been identified; used as general illustration of the pattern of signing by mark continuing into the next generation.

Shawn, Eric. *Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks: Some Historical Considerations,* pp. 20–21 (Dennis Shawn's mark). [Figure 11, Chapter 15]

Same provenance caveat as Figure 10.

Shawn, Eric. *Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks: Some Historical Considerations,* pp. 20–21 (Sarah [Shawhan] Dyer's mark). [Figure 12, Chapter 15]

Same provenance caveat as Figure 10.

Shawhan, Spencer S. "Where the Children Went." Custom-drawn regional map, 2026-09-06. [Figure 13, Chapter 15]

Built from U.S. Census Bureau county/state boundary data (TIGER/Line-derived shapefiles via the plotly-geo package), rendered fully offline. Political groupings reflect eighteenth-century colonial affiliation, not modern state lines — Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky are grouped as a single "Virginia" for this era, and Ohio is shown as unorganized territory. Point locations for

Frederick, Romney, and Bourbon County are approximate.

Satellite/road map of Shawhan, Bourbon County, Kentucky. Modern aerial imagery; source and date of capture not recorded. [Figure 14, Epilogue]

Used as a closing image gesturing toward the family name's later imprint on the landscape; the town's own history lies beyond this book's scope.

IV. Secondary Sources — Historical Context

The following sources informed the historical background of this book but are not all directly cited by name in the narrative prose itself.

Kupperman, Karen Ordahl. "Apathy and Death in Early Jamestown." *Journal of American History* 66, no. 1 (1979): 24–40.

Source for Chapter Two's Jamestown mortality figures. The original article was only reachable as a non-searchable scanned copy, so the exact wording of the cited figures could not be verified word-for-word — see A Note on the Nature of the Evidence, below.

Rutman, Darrett B., and Anita H. Rutman. *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650–1750.* New York: Norton, 1984.

Source for Chapter Two's Middlesex County life-expectancy comparison. Same verification caveat as above.

Tomlins, Christopher. "Reconsidering Indentured Servitude: European Migration and the Early American Labor Force, 1600–1775." *Labor History* 42, no. 1 (2001): 5–43.

Source for the Chesapeake-versus-Philadelphia mortality contrast, and for "seasoning" as a named, recognized phenomenon in the scholarship.

Haines, Michael R. "Fertility and Mortality in the United States." In *EH.Net Encyclopedia*, edited by Robert Whaples, March 19, 2008.

Cited for its explicit acknowledgment that the colonial South, including the Chesapeake, is the least-documented American region for mortality data — the reason this book's demographic claims are hedged as carefully as they are.

Land, Aubrey C. *Colonial Maryland: A History.* Millwood, N.Y.: KTO Press, 1981.

Source for the 1689–1715 royal-colony period and 1715 restoration of proprietary government to the Calvert family, and for the continuity of the Calvert family's quitrent revenue straight through that political transition. The standard general history of the colony; specific passages not independently checked.

Grubb, Farley. "Creating Maryland's Paper Money Economy, 1720–1740: The Confluence of Political Constituencies, Economic Forces, Transatlantic Markets, and Law." *Journal of Early American History* 9, no. 1 (2019): 34–.

Source for Maryland's 1733 paper-currency act, used as background for the world changing around Darby in his final years.

V. A Note on the Nature of the Evidence

The documentary record for Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks is denser than the one Book One worked with, but it opens just as abruptly. It begins in 1707, with their marriage at St. Paul's Parish, and thickens quickly: a 1709 deed places them at Shad's Hole within two years, and the paired wills of 1735–36 — written within days of each other and proved within a week — give a detailed accounting of the family's own understanding of itself, in both parents' own words. Between those points, and before them, the record is thinner. Sarah's own origins are the clearest gap: her possible connection to Walter Meeks of Cecil County is raised in this book as a hypothesis, not a fact, and it is one that genealogists were already asking about, and not answering, as early as a 1941 magazine query — the parentage of both Darby and Sarah has been an open question in this family's own record for at least eighty-five years. Chapter Two's mortality figures for Jamestown and Middlesex County are drawn from published academic scholarship (Kupperman 1979; Rutman and Rutman 1984) that could only be reached, at the time of writing, as non-searchable scanned copies — the substance of the figures is well attested elsewhere in the historiography, but the exact wording attributed to those two sources here has not been checked word-for-word against the originals.

Readers interested in further primary research are encouraged to consult the Maryland State Archives (Annapolis), which holds the probate, land, and court records this book relies on most heavily, and FamilySearch's "Maryland, Register of Wills Records, 1629–1999" collection, through which the primary images of Darby's and Sarah's wills were located.