

TWO ROADS FROM MUNSTER

Spencer S Shawhan

Two Roads from Munster

Irish Origins Across the Atlantic World

Spencer S Shawhan

For Darby —

*who built a family from a crossing that left no record,
and for every generation set in motion by his silence.*

Acknowledgments

This book stands on the work of researchers who traced the earliest fragments of the Shawhan story long before this narrative took shape. Their persistence in archives, courthouses, and libraries made it possible to reconstruct a life that left only the faintest marks in the record.

Eric Shawn devoted years to assembling the primary documents and mapping the family's earliest appearances across multiple repositories. His monograph, *Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks: Some Historical Considerations*, is the foundation on which this project rests — the first careful gathering and evaluation of the evidence. Robert E. Francis, co-author with Ronald T. Shawhan and Eric Shawn of *The History and Genealogy of the Shawhan and Related Families, Volume One*, contributed the broader genealogical framework that supports the family's later generations. William G. Hills, whose 1939 notes survive him by nearly a century, deserves recognition for work undertaken long before digital archives made such research possible.

The Maryland State Archives, the Barbados Department of Archives, and the Norman B. Leventhal Map and Education Center at the Boston Public Library each hold primary materials essential to this book. Their stewardship of fragile records ensures that stories like this one can still be told.

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

Spencer S Shawhan
March 2026

P.S. The narrative and analytical text of this book was developed with the assistance of AI writing tools. Claude, produced by Anthropic, contributed to the drafting and shaping of the prose across multiple working sessions. Microsoft Copilot provided additional support during research and revision. The historical framework, evidentiary judgments, and all conclusions drawn from primary sources remain my own.

Preface

A Note on Method, Evidence, and Inference

Every family history begins with a fixed point — a name in a register, a signature on a deed, a record that survived when so many others did not. For the Shawhan family, that point is a single entry in the register of St. Paul's Parish, Kent County, Maryland: the marriage of Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks on November 20, 1707.

Before that date, nothing is certain. No birth record, baptismal entry, indenture contract, or ship manifest places Darby in colonial America before his marriage. He enters the archive as an adult, already shaped by experiences the documents do not reveal, with origins that can only be approached through the wider historical record of his time.

This book is an attempt to approach those origins with honesty and clarity.

It is built on three kinds of statements. The first are documentary facts — names, dates, and events preserved in primary sources. The second are historically grounded inferences — conclusions that follow reasonably from the evidence and from what is known about migration, community structures, and

colonial demographics. The third are speculative reconstructions — plausible scenarios that illuminate the world Darby likely inhabited when the documents fall silent.

These categories are not interchangeable. They are signaled deliberately through phrases such as “the record confirms,” “the evidence suggests,” and “one plausible scenario.” A reader who attends to these signals will always know whether they stand on firm documentary ground or on a careful reconstruction of a world whose records have largely been lost.

Much has been lost. The seventeenth-century Atlantic did not preserve the lives of the poor, the Catholic, or the young with any consistency. Irish servants and transported laborers left thin traces — a name on a headright list, a signature on a militia roll, a brief will written in haste. Women appear even more rarely. Children, unless they generated headright value, often do not appear at all.

The silence of the archive is part of the story. It is not a failure of research but the expected shape of these lives. This book does not attempt to fill that silence with false certainty. It seeks instead to illuminate it — to reconstruct the world around the gaps so that the

people who lived through them can be seen, however partially, within it.

What This Book Is

Two Roads from Munster is a genealogical narrative — a work at the intersection of family history, historical scholarship, and informed speculation. It traces the world that produced Darby Shawhan: the collapse of Gaelic Ireland under Cromwellian conquest, the mechanisms that carried Irish families across the Atlantic in the late seventeenth century, and the two most historically plausible routes by which a Munster child could have reached colonial Maryland. It does not claim to resolve what the records cannot resolve. It claims instead to reconstruct the world of possibilities that shaped a life before the documents catch up with it.

One route leads through Barbados, where fragmentary evidence places an Irish Catholic man bearing the Sheehan name in St. Thomas Parish in 1679 — a fixed point from which a plausible household, and a plausible child, can be reconstructed. The other leads directly across the Atlantic, aboard a documented ship carrying Irish laborers to the Chesapeake that same year, among them two men whose surnames mark an

early Sheehan presence in Maryland. Both paths begin in Munster's collapse. Both end in Maryland's stability.

Neither can be proven. Each illuminates a different facet of the Atlantic world that shaped Darby Shawhan before the record finds him — married, landowning, and rooted in Kent County, Maryland, in 1707.

How This Book Handles Uncertainty

The central commitment of this book is transparency. Where documents exist, they are cited precisely. Where the record is silent, that silence is acknowledged rather than obscured. The goal is not to impose certainty on an uncertain past but to show clearly where evidence ends and interpretation begins.

The seventeenth-century Atlantic left incomplete records — ships departed without manifests, parish registers were lost, indenture contracts discarded. The poor and the young, especially Irish Catholics, rarely appear at all. This book works within those limits, using the surviving fragments to reconstruct the world in which Darby's life unfolded, recognizing that the gaps are themselves part of the story.

A Note on Names and Spelling

The family surname presents an immediate challenge. “Shawhan,” as it appears in the 1707 marriage register,

is an anglicized rendering of an Irish name that colonial clerks spelled with remarkable inconsistency. Across the records consulted for this book, the name appears as Sheehan, Shahan, Shahane, Sheehane, Shehan, Shehawne, and Shawhan — a progression that reflects phonetic drift, clerical interpretation, and the gradual stabilization of spelling over generations.

This book uses the spelling most appropriate to each context. When quoting or referencing primary sources, the original spelling is preserved. When referring to the family as a general entity, “Sheehan” is used for the Irish and early colonial period, and “Shawhan” for the Maryland family from Darby’s generation forward. The variations are not errors; they are evidence.

For Whom This Book Is Written

This book is written for the descendants of Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks — for those who have wondered where Darby came from, how he reached Kent County, and what kind of world shaped him before the record begins. It is also written for readers interested in the broader Irish diaspora of the seventeenth century and in the methods by which family historians work when the documents run thin.

Genealogical research of this kind is never finished. New documents are digitized every year. New indexes

open records once inaccessible. New scholarship sheds light on the communities and migration patterns that shaped individual lives. This book represents the most careful account that can be made from what is currently known. It is a foundation, not a final word.

Darby Shawhan married in 1707 and died in 1739, leaving behind a family that grew into the American interior over the generations that followed. He left no account of where he came from or how he arrived. He left only descendants, and the traces that careful research can find in the records of the Atlantic world he crossed.

This is an attempt to trace them.

Spencer S Shawhan

March 2026

Contents

Preface	iii
A Note on Method, Evidence, and Inference	iii
What This Book Is	v
How This Book Handles Uncertainty	vi
A Note on Names and Spelling	vi
For Whom This Book Is Written	vii
Part I	1
The World Before Departure	1
CHAPTER 1	3
Ireland in Collapse	3
Ireland Before the Fall	3
A Country Unmade	6
Munster: A Homeland Under Siege	7
Figure 1. The Province of Mounster, John Speed (1611)	9
Figure 2. Cromwell's Impact on Land Ownership in Ireland (1641–1703)	10
The Human Cost	11
Setting the Stage for Departure	11
CHAPTER 2	12
Leaving Ireland: The Atlantic World Opens	12
<i>The Irish Exodus in Context</i>	13

CHAPTER 3	14
Mechanisms of Removal: How Irish People Crossed the Ocean	14
<i>Voluntary Indenture</i>	14
<i>Forced Transport</i>	15
<i>Spiriting and Kidnapping</i>	15
<i>Criminal Transportation</i>	15
<i>Kinchain Migration</i>	16
<i>Age Patterns and Vulnerability</i>	16
CHAPTER 4	17
Two Destinations: Caribbean and Chesapeake... 17	
The Caribbean: The First Great Irish Colony 17	
<i>The Chesapeake: Maryland and Virginia</i> 17	
Comparing the Two Worlds.....	18
<i>Why Munster Families Could End Up in Either Place</i>	19
CHAPTER 5	19
The Window of Migration (1650s–1690s)	19
<i>The Caribbean Wave (1650s–1670s)</i>	19
<i>The Chesapeake Wave (1670s–1690s)</i>	20
<i>The Overlap Period</i>	20
<i>Setting Up the Two Plausible Paths</i>	20
Part II	21

The Barbados Path	21
CHAPTER 6	23
A Name in the Archive	23
<i>Daniel Sheehan in Barbados</i>	23
<i>The Irish in the Sugar Colony</i>	23
<i>Daniel's First Appearance</i>	25
<i>The 1679 Will</i>	26
CHAPTER 7	27
A Plausible Household	27
<i>Daniel and Mary</i>	27
<i>The Problem of Missing Records</i>	28
Why Mary Moynihan Fits	29
A Plausible Marriage	29
A Child in the 1670s	31
CHAPTER 8	31
The Possibility of Darby.....	31
A Child.....	32
Childhood in Barbados	32
Daniel's Death and Its Aftermath	33
Pressures Toward Departure.....	33
Figure 3. Barbados, c. 1686	34
CHAPTER 9	36
Widowhood and Decision.....	36

Mary's Crossing	36
Options for Survival	36
The Chesapeake as Opportunity	37
A Household at a Crossroads	38
PART III	40
The Maryland Path	40
CHAPTER 10.....	42
Arrival in the Chesapeake: A New Beginning and a Hard Reality	42
First Sight of the Chesapeake	42
The Structure of Service	42
Servant Age at Arrival — Typical Term of Service	43
Irish Community and Survival	43
CHAPTER 11.....	44
Paths to Freedom and Stability.....	44
Completing an Indenture.....	44
Marriage and Community Formation	44
Why the Chesapeake Offered a Real Future	45
Chesapeake Advantages	45
CHAPTER 12.....	46
The <i>Encrease</i> Scenario: One Possible Mechanism	46

The Ship Encrease in Context	46
Cornelius and Thomas Sheehan	46
A Plausible but Not Exclusive Path	47
CHAPTER 13	48
The Window of Arrival (1680s–1690s).....	48
Irish Migration into Maryland	48
Age and Timing.....	48
Irish Networks in Kent County.....	49
PART IV.....	50
Convergence.....	50
CHAPTER 14	52
First Maryland Appearances	52
A Man Steps Into the Record.....	52
What the Marriage Tells Us	52
The Silence Before 1707	54
CHAPTER 15	54
Land, Marriage, and Stability.....	54
Shad’s Hole and Darby’s Desire	54
A Household Takes Shape	56
The Arc of an Irish Chesapeake Life.....	57
CHAPTER 16	58
The Two Paths Reunited.....	58
Barbados and Maryland as Parallel Origins.....	58

What the Records Allow Us to Say.....	59
Why Both Paths Matter	60
A Life That Endured	60
PART V.....	62
Epilogue	62
CHAPTER 17.....	63
What the Records Reveal, and What They Cannot	63
Reconstructing a Life from Fragments	64
The Value of Multiple Paths.....	65
Loss, Endurance, Legacy	68
Notes	70
Bibliography	73
Source Notes and Bibliography	73
I. Primary Sources --- Archival Records	74
II. Published Transcriptions and Finding Aids	75
III. Maps and Figures	76
IV. Secondary Sources --- Historical Context.....	77
V. A Note on the Nature of the Evidence.....	78

Part I

The World Before Departure

*The roads out of Munster were not chosen. The land was
cleared of its people.*

CHAPTER 1

Ireland in Collapse

Ireland Before the Fall

Munster in the early seventeenth century was a world that moved to recognizable rhythms. Families farmed the river valleys of Cork, Kerry, and Limerick, their lives shaped by the turning of seasons, the demands of cattle and tillage, and the dense web of kinship that held communities together. Surnames rooted in the land — Sheehan, Moynihan, Sullivan, McCarthy — had been carried across the same hills for generations. The Catholic faith organized the year: its feast days, its obligations, its quiet continuities. Parish life, Gaelic speech, the authority of local lordships — these were not abstractions but the fabric of daily existence, as ordinary and sustaining as the land itself. It was a world that felt, to those living within it, like something permanent.

It was not.

The Ireland that Munster families inhabited had been fraying long before Cromwell's armies arrived. For nearly a century, the southwest had endured a relentless cycle of rebellion, retaliation, and political

upheaval that pressed harder with each passing decade. Ordinary life continued — harvests came in, children were baptized, disputes were settled — but always in the shadow of a conflict that could erupt without warning and leave nothing unchanged.

One episode, more than any other, captured the brutality Munster families came to expect. In 1580, during the Second Desmond Rebellion, one of the period's most infamous massacres unfolded at Dún an Óir near Smerwick on the Dingle Peninsula. Six hundred Italian, Spanish, and Irish soldiers fighting under the papal banner surrendered to English forces — and were slaughtered.¹ The memory of Smerwick lingered for generations, a whispered reminder of English ruthlessness and Irish vulnerability — and of how quickly the world that felt permanent could be unmade.

The violence did not end with the rebels at Smerwick. Even the great powers of Europe left their mark on Munster's coastline. Eight years later, the shattered remnants of the Spanish Armada limped past the Kerry coast. Storms drove several ships toward the Blasket Islands, where some found shelter and others were wrecked. Survivors were hunted, captured, or killed.² For Munster families, these events were not distant news but scenes unfolding on their own shores

— reminders that even foreign empires could bring danger to their doorsteps.

The early seventeenth century brought no relief. During the Nine Years' War, the O'Sullivan Beare clan joined the rebellion against English rule. In 1602, their stronghold at Dunboy fell after a brutal siege. Donal O'Sullivan Beare led nearly a thousand followers on a desperate winter march toward Ulster; only a handful survived.³ Their suffering became part of Munster's oral history, retold in kitchens and farmyards long after the bodies were buried. These episodes were not isolated shocks but part of a continuous unraveling that left Munster families living with a constant sense that the world around them could shift without warning.

By midcentury, the cycle of rebellion and retaliation returned with even greater force. In the 1640s, Kerry was engulfed again in conflict during the Irish Rebellion of 1641. Donagh MacCarthy, Viscount Muskerry, led the uprising in the region, and his son — the Earl of Clancarty — held out through the Confederate Wars. Their final stronghold, Ross Castle near Killarney, surrendered in 1652, one of the last to fall to Cromwell's forces. By then, the old Gaelic order was not merely weakened — it was collapsing.

A Country Unmade

By the time the Cromwellian invasion began in 1649, Munster was already under strain. Cromwell's campaign, however, was not simply another chapter in a long conflict — it was a social and demographic earthquake. English forces crushed the last remnants of Gaelic resistance, seized vast tracts of land, and imposed a punitive settlement on the Catholic population. Entire counties — especially in Munster and Leinster — were depopulated as families were driven from their homes to make way for English soldiers and Protestant settlers.⁴

For families rooted in the hills and river valleys of Cork, Kerry, and Limerick, the upheaval was total. Ancestral lands held for generations were suddenly forfeit. Political leaders were dead, exiled, or stripped of power. Parish churches were shuttered. The Irish language, once dominant, was pushed to the margins. Children entered a narrower, harsher world shaped by poverty, displacement, and the quiet disappearance of traditional protections.

Dispossession created the conditions for something even more far-reaching: the mass removal of people themselves. The English Parliament's solution to the "Irish problem" was blunt — transportation. Tens of

thousands of Irish men, women, and children were forcibly removed or pressured into indenture, shipped to the Caribbean and the American colonies to supply labor for England's expanding empire.⁶ The term "transported" encompassed a wide range of people — from convicted rebels to the poor and landless swept up under vagrancy laws.

Some were sentenced for rebellion, others seized for unpaid rents or tithes, and many were children caught in the chaos and sold into indentured servitude. The result was a scattering of Munster families along multiple Atlantic routes, their surnames appearing in distant places where their stories would later be pieced together from fragments. The surviving records capture only a fraction of this movement, leaving modern researchers to reconstruct lives from scattered traces rather than continuous documentation.

Munster: A Homeland Under Siege

Seventeenth-century Munster was a patchwork of small farms, market towns, and Gaelic lordships — a landscape where kinship shaped identity and where Catholicism infused daily life. Surnames such as Sheehan, Moynihan, Sullivan, and McCarthy were deeply rooted in the region, appearing frequently in

seventeenth-century records. As families were scattered, these surnames began appearing across multiple Atlantic destinations — from Barbados to the Chesapeake — mapping the widening reach of the Munster diaspora.

Kinship networks once anchored in shared land and parish life now appeared only as dispersed fragments, evidence of a social order in collapse. The effects of that collapse were felt daily — in shrinking landholdings, in the presence of English soldiers, in the erosion of traditional protections, and in the growing sense that an inherited world was slipping away.

In such a climate, even staying put required courage; leaving became an act of survival.⁹

What vanished was not only land or status but the everyday patterns of life that had long held Munster communities together. The rhythms of farming, worship, and kinship were unsettled by confiscation, military occupation, and the slow, grinding pressure of poverty. For many families, the question was no longer whether they would leave, but when — and by what means.

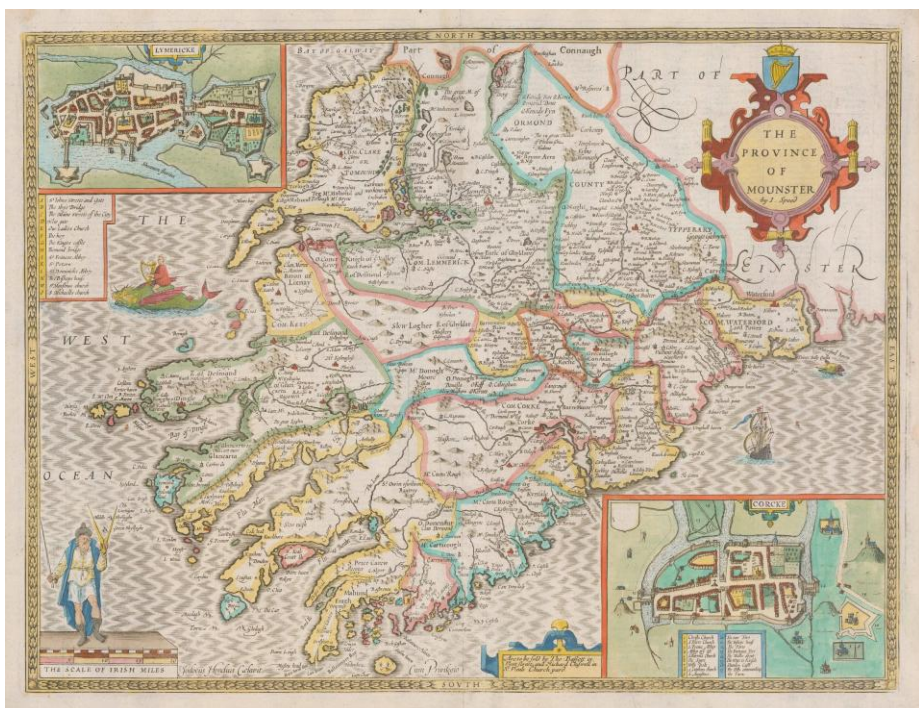


Figure 1. The Province of Mounster, John Speed (1611)

Speed, John. "The Province of Mvnster." 1611. In *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine*.

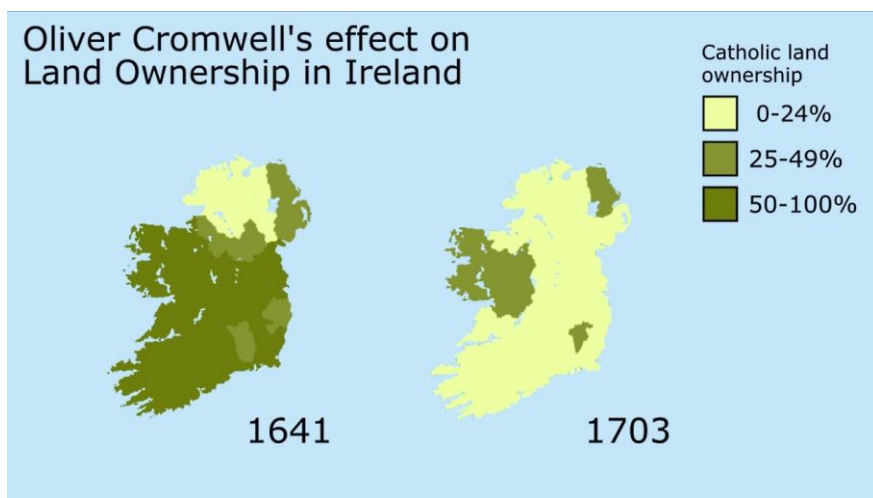


Figure 2. Cromwell's Impact on Land Ownership in Ireland (1641–1703)

Source: The Ireland Story, www.irelandstory.com

Two Roads from Munster

The Human Cost

Statistics alone cannot capture what this collapse meant inside ordinary homes. Behind every confiscated farm or shuttered church was a family trying to make sense of a world that felt smaller, harsher, and increasingly uncertain. A young man might watch neighbors disappear from their fields, hear rumors of ships bound for distant colonies, and realize that his own prospects in Ireland had narrowed to almost nothing. A teenage girl might see the same unraveling — families scattered, protections gone — and understand that the stability her parents once knew was no longer possible.

Whether families were forcibly transported or left voluntarily under crushing economic pressure, the result was the same: they were swept into the vast Irish diaspora that reshaped the Atlantic world. For many, leaving was not a choice at all but the final consequence of a century of loss.

Setting the Stage for Departure

By the late seventeenth century, these pressures converged into a single reality: departure had become the defining feature of Irish life. After a century lived in the shadow of conflict, Ireland was bleeding people

at a pace that could no longer be ignored. The collapse of the Gaelic order, the devastation of war, and the tightening of English control created a world in which departure became inevitable.

Munster families — especially the poor, the landless, the orphaned, and the politically vulnerable — found themselves drawn into a widening Atlantic system that demanded labor and offered only the faintest hope of stability. Some would be carried to the Caribbean, others to the Chesapeake, and still others would leave through voluntary indenture or the desperate choices forced by poverty — paths that would later converge in the fragmented records of families like the Sheehans.

The mechanisms that carried them out of Ireland — legal, illegal, voluntary, coerced — form the subject of the next chapter, where the machinery of removal comes into full view.

CHAPTER 2

Leaving Ireland: The Atlantic World Opens

Two Roads from Munster

The Irish Exodus in Context

By the late seventeenth century, Ireland was bleeding people. The Cromwellian wars had shattered the old Gaelic order, and the decades that followed brought little relief. Land loss, punitive rents, and the collapse of traditional patronage networks pushed thousands toward the Atlantic.

Some were driven by desperation. Others were forced. Many were simply swept along by circumstances they could not control.

While the Caribbean absorbed many Irish migrants earlier in the century, the Chesapeake colonies — Maryland and Virginia — also became common destinations in the 1670s–1690s. The Atlantic world was not a single path but a web of routes, each shaped by labor demand, imperial policy, and the vulnerability of Irish families.

Economic pressures weighed heavily on rural households. Harvest failures, enclosure, and the tightening of English commercial controls left many with few viable paths forward. Political instability added another layer: Catholic families lived under suspicion, their mobility restricted, their prospects limited. Religious marginalization ensured that even

Two Roads from Munster

those with skills or education found themselves boxed out of local advancement.

Against this backdrop, the Atlantic appeared in Irish imagination as both threat and possibility. It was a place where labor was desperately needed, where land was theoretically attainable, and where the rigid hierarchies of home might loosen — but only after years of grueling service. For the poor, the orphaned, or the politically vulnerable, the Atlantic represented a narrow but real chance at survival.

CHAPTER 3

Mechanisms of Removal: How Irish People Crossed the Ocean

Voluntary Indenture

Some Irish migrants signed indentures willingly, exchanging four to seven years of labor for passage, food, and the faint hope of land at the end. These contracts were often harsh, but they offered a structured path out of poverty. Young adults, especially those with few prospects at home, saw indenture as a gamble worth taking.

Two Roads from Munster

Forced Transport

Others had no choice at all. In the wake of rebellion, confiscation, and economic collapse, thousands of Irish men, women, and children were forcibly transported to the Caribbean and the American colonies. Some were prisoners of war. Others were swept up under vagrancy laws or seized as collateral for unpaid rents. Children were especially vulnerable — easy to take, easy to sell, and unlikely to be missed by authorities.

Spiriting and Kidnapping

Illegal but common, spiriting involved the kidnapping or coercion of the young, the homeless, or the unprotected. Spiriting gangs operated in Irish ports and market towns, targeting those least able to resist. Many Irish children who appeared in colonial records had no idea they were leaving Ireland until they were already at sea.

Criminal Transportation

Petty theft, vagrancy, or political defiance could result in a sentence of exile. Convicts were shipped to the Caribbean or Chesapeake and sold into service upon arrival. For many, the line between criminality and

Two Roads from Munster

survival was thin; hunger could be enough to trigger a sentence.

Kinchain Migration

Not all migration was coerced. Some families followed relatives who had already crossed, relying on letters, rumors, or the simple knowledge that someone familiar waited on the other side. These kin networks helped Irish communities take root in both the Caribbean and the Chesapeake.

Age Patterns and Vulnerability

The age profile of Irish migrants skewed young. Children as young as eight or ten were indentured, their labor valued precisely because they could be shaped into obedient workers. Teenagers were even more common, swept up in the Atlantic labor market at the moment when they were strong enough to work but too young to resist.

Family groups traveled together as well, though less frequently. Mortality risks were high: disease, shipwreck, and the brutal conditions of early service meant that only a portion of those who left Ireland survived long enough to build new lives.

In this world of vulnerability and flux, countless Irish children — poor, orphaned, or semiorphaned — found themselves carried into the Atlantic system, whether by choice or by force.

CHAPTER 4

Two Destinations: Caribbean and Chesapeake

The Caribbean: The First Great Irish Colony

By the 1650s, Barbados and other Caribbean islands had become major destinations for Irish labor. The sugar boom demanded workers, and the English government was eager to supply them. Ships left Cork, Kinsale, and Waterford carrying human cargo alongside barrels of beef and butter.

Irish servants in the Caribbean faced brutal conditions, high mortality, and limited prospects — but they also formed tight communities, preserving fragments of language, faith, and kinship.

The Chesapeake: Maryland and Virginia

By the 1670s and 1680s, the Chesapeake emerged as another major destination. Tobacco plantations

Two Roads from Munster

required constant labor, and Irish servants — voluntary and transported — filled the ranks. Conditions varied widely: some masters were fair, others brutal. Yet the Chesapeake offered something Ireland increasingly did not: a path to independence after service.

Comparing the Two Worlds

	Caribbean	Chesapeake
Labor Regime	Sugar cultivation was brutal and deadly.	Tobacco work was harsh but more varied and less lethal.
Survival Odds	Low	Higher
Post-Service Prospects	Limited opportunities	A real chance at land or wages that could support independence
Irish Community	Large early presence	Growing Catholic enclaves

Two Roads from Munster

Both destinations reshaped Irish identities. Both absorbed Munster families. Both produced Sheehans, Sullivans, McCarthys, and Moynihans.

Why Munster Families Could End Up in Either Place

Shared departure ports, shared mechanisms of removal, and shared vulnerability meant that Munster families' Atlantic destinations were often a matter of timing, opportunity, and chance rather than deliberate choice. Surname patterns — Sheehan, Sullivan, Moynihan — appear in both regions, and fragmentary records obscure the exact paths taken. The Atlantic world did not divide families neatly. It scattered them.

CHAPTER 5

The Window of Migration (1650s–1690s)

The Caribbean Wave (1650s–1670s)

The Cromwellian transport program sent thousands of Irish people — especially from Munster — to Barbados and other islands. Many of the earliest Irish colonial communities formed here.

Two Roads from Munster

The Chesapeake Wave (1670s–1690s)

As Caribbean labor needs shifted and the Chesapeake expanded, Irish servants increasingly arrived in Maryland and Virginia. Children and teenagers were especially common, their labor prized in a colony hungry for workers.

The Overlap Period

Between 1670 and 1690, both routes operated simultaneously. Families could be split across destinations. Surnames appear in both regions. The Sheehan/Shahan/Shawhan pattern is one example among many.

Setting Up the Two Plausible Paths

By the end of the seventeenth century, two clear paths existed for Munster families: the Caribbean Path — forged by Cromwellian transport and sugar labor — and the Chesapeake Path, shaped by indenture, transport, and opportunity. Both are historically plausible. Both are deeply rooted in Munster's collapse. Both will shape the story that follows.

Part II

The Barbados Path

Two Roads from Munster

The Atlantic did not divide families neatly. It scattered them along routes shaped by war, labor demand, and the narrow possibilities left to the poor.

CHAPTER 6

A Name in the Archive

Daniel Sheehan in Barbados

In the summer of 1679, a man named Daniel Shahan set his name — or had it set for him — to a document in St. Thomas Parish, Barbados. The document was a will. It is short, naming cousins and a godparent, noting small bequests, and closing with the ordinary formalities of the era. No wife is mentioned. No child. Within weeks of signing it, Daniel was dead.

That will, alongside a single entry on the St. Thomas Parish militia roll from the same year, constitutes everything the surviving record preserves of Daniel Sheehan's life in Barbados. It is not much. But in a world where Irish Catholics rarely appeared in the colonial archive at all, it is something — a fixed point from which the surrounding world can be reconstructed.

The Irish in the Sugar Colony

Irish migration to Barbados unfolded within a complex web of labor demands, political upheaval, and shifting imperial priorities. By the 1650s, the island had become

Two Roads from Munster

a major destination for Irish indentured laborers — some transported forcibly during the Cromwellian campaigns, others driven by economic necessity or coercive recruitment. The Irish left a faint documentary footprint. Anglican parish registers rarely captured their marriages or baptisms, and surviving civil records tend to list them only when taxation, punishment, or property were involved.

Irish laborers typically lived on the margins of plantations, in small clusters of dwellings known as tenancies — settlements along estate boundaries or on less productive land that became centers of Irish social life. Within them, families and neighbors shared labor, exchanged resources, and maintained cultural practices that were difficult to sustain under plantation conditions.

Kinship networks played a central role in this world. Irish migrants relied on cousins, siblings, and extended family to navigate the harsh conditions of indenture and the uncertainties of early freedom. Godparent ties often reflected close kinship or longstanding community bonds, serving as a stabilizing force in a setting where formal institutions offered little support. By the 1670s, surname clusters — Donohoe, Shahan, Mahoney, Moynihan — suggest the presence of

extended kin groups who had weathered the transition from servitude to freedom.

Daniel's First Appearance

It is within this world that Daniel Sheehan becomes visible. His appearance on the St. Thomas Parish militia roll in 1679/80 is the earlier of his two surviving records, and it tells us something precise: militia service in Barbados was restricted to free adult men. Indentured servants could not be mustered. Daniel's inclusion on the roll therefore confirms that he had completed any term of indenture by that date — and that he was recognized as a free, adult resident of his parish.

The transcription published in Brandow's *Oaths of Allegiance and Militia Rolls, 1639–1775* lists Daniel as “Dan. Shahan,” appearing among eleven enrolled men of St. Thomas Parish alongside John Brome, William Hunte, Thomas Weekes, Richard Gibbs, John Roach, Henry Peers, James Worrell, Francis Jordan, and Edward Walcott. His name is unremarkable on the page — one entry among many — but its presence is significant. It places him in the parish, confirms his freedom, and anchors him in the historical record a few months before his death.

Two Roads from Munster

Given typical Irish indenture lengths of four to seven years, his freedom by 1679 suggests arrival on the island no later than the early 1670s — placing him in Barbados during the same decade that witnessed heavy Irish migration from Munster.

The 1679 Will

Later that same year, Daniel drew up his will. It is a brief document — recorded on 28 June 1679 and proved on 22 August 1679, preserved in the Barbados Department of Archives at RB6/9, p. 515. Its brevity is not unusual for a man of modest means. What it contains, however, is revealing: Daniel names two cousins — Cornelius Shahan and Dennis Dunnoho — and his “gossip,” Jore Donnas. In the usage of the period, gossip meant godparent, a tie that in Irish Catholic communities typically reflected close kinship or longstanding association. These are the people closest to him at the end of his life. No wife. No child.

Daniel did not write his name. He signed the document with an X mark — a detail that tells us something about the man. He was almost certainly illiterate, as were many Irish laborers of his generation and circumstance. His mark was witnessed by William Bird, Morris Layne, and Thomas Rogers — men whose

names may repay further research as windows into his social world.

The absence of a wife and child in the will is not proof that none existed. Wills were often drawn in haste, particularly when a man felt death approaching suddenly. A wife with no claim to his modest property, or a very young child, might simply not appear. The will does not close the question. But it does open the record — offering the names of Daniel's closest associates and framing the social world in which he lived.

Taken together, the militia roll and the will offer a rare glimpse of Daniel's position in Barbados: a free man, rooted in St. Thomas Parish, embedded in a small Irish Catholic kinship circle, and dead before the year was out.

CHAPTER 7

A Plausible Household

Daniel and Mary

Daniel Sheehan's will names no wife. Mary Moynihan appears nowhere in the Barbados record at all. These absences are not exceptional — they are the norm for

Two Roads from Munster

Irish Catholic families in the colonial Caribbean. Understanding why requires stepping back from the documents themselves and looking at the world that produced them.

The Problem of Missing Records

Irish Catholics in Barbados existed largely outside the Anglican recordkeeping system. Their marriages unfolded in spaces the parish register never saw — yards, small dwellings, and community gatherings where kin and neighbors served as witnesses. Their baptisms went unrecorded. Their deaths were noted only when property or debt made documentation necessary. The archive reflects the priorities of the plantation hierarchy, not the lives of the Irish poor.

Mary Moynihan's absence from the surviving documents is therefore not a contradiction but a reminder that the archive preserves only part of the story. Women were less often documented than men, especially if they were Catholic, poor, or without property. Reconstructing their presence requires reading across patterns — kinship structures, naming conventions, community geography, and the social logic of the world they inhabited.

Two Roads from Munster

Why Mary Moynihan Fits

Although Mary Moynihan does not appear in the surviving documents, her surname places her within the same Munster networks that shaped Irish life in Barbados. Moynihan families from Kerry and Cork were part of the broader Irish presence on the island, and Irish migrants tended to form small, mutually supportive clusters built around shared origins. The Moynihan name — sometimes rendered as Mahaday, Mahoney, or Mahony by English clerks — appears in Barbados records during the same decade.

Within such a community, a marriage between Daniel Sheehan and a woman like Mary would have been ordinary, even if it left no trace in the Anglican record. Irish Catholic marriages in Barbados occurred outside the parish system, witnessed by kin and neighbors rather than clergy. The ceremony itself was not what the archive recorded. What the archive recorded was property, taxation, and death.

A Plausible Marriage

Daniel's 1679 will is the one document that reveals the contours of his social world. The cousins he named — Cornelius Shahan and Dennis Dunnoho — and his godparent, Jone Donnas, point to a small, cohesive

Two Roads from Munster

Irish Catholic network connected through shared labor and mutual obligation. In Irish Catholic communities, godparent ties often reflected close kinship or longstanding associations, making the godparent named in Daniel's will an important clue to his social world.

Other individuals bearing Donohoe and Dunnoho surname variants appear in Barbados tax and parish records during the 1670s, suggesting that Daniel's cousins were part of a broader Irish presence on the island that had taken root over several years. Owen Donohoe appears in St. Thomas land and tax records; Patrick Donohoe in the St. James levy list; Teague Donohoe in Christ Church vestry records. These are not Daniel's cousins by name — no document links them directly — but their presence across multiple parishes suggests a broader surname community within which Daniel's kinship circle was embedded.

If Daniel married, it would almost certainly have been within this circle. A woman like Mary Moynihan — rooted in the same Munster traditions, part of the same parish networks — fits the social logic of that community. The will does not name her. But it outlines the world in which she would have lived.

A Child in the 1670s

A child born to Daniel and Mary in the early 1670s would have entered the world within this kinship circle — a world shaped by the rhythms of plantation labor, the constraints of a Protestant colonial society, and the enduring ties of Irish origin and family. A boy named Darby — an Anglicized form of the Gaelic *Diarmuid* — would have carried a distinctly Irish identity into this environment.

The name itself is a form of evidence. Darby was not a planter's name. It was not a common English servant's name. It signaled a cultural inheritance deliberately preserved: a name chosen from memory and belonging, in a world that offered little formal space for either.

These patterns do not prove that Darby existed in Barbados. They outline the world in which he could have lived — and from which the next chapter traces the forces that would eventually carry him north.

CHAPTER 8

The Possibility of Darby

Two Roads from Munster

A Child

The world Daniel and Mary inhabited in Barbados shaped the childhood of any child they may have had there. A boy named Darby would have grown up within the fragile Irish community described in the previous chapter — where kinship and godparent ties formed the backbone of daily life and where identity persisted quietly, through custom rather than record.

Childhood in Barbados

Childhood in Barbados was shaped by labor, instability, and the constant pressure of survival. Irish families lived in small dwellings near the edges of plantations — a placement determined by their status as poor Catholics outside the island's Anglican hierarchy. Children in such households moved between the worlds of Irish servants, enslaved Africans, and free people of color, absorbing elements of daily life from each.

Mortality rates were high. Disease, labor demands, and the harsh environmental conditions of the sugar economy meant that many children born on the island did not survive to adulthood. Those who did emerged shaped by a particular kind of resilience — one forged

in the margins of a plantation world that had little use for sentiment.

Daniel's Death and Its Aftermath

Daniel Sheehan's death in 1679 would have marked a turning point in the life of any child he left behind. A boy of six would have been old enough to remember his father, yet young enough to be shaped entirely by what followed. Daniel's will — drawn up on 28 June 1679 and proved on 22 August 1679 — names the people who remained: cousins, a godparent, the small network that constituted Daniel's social world.

Within this same kinship circle — the cousins, godparents, and clustered Irish households visible in Daniel's will — a child like Darby would have found his earliest sense of belonging. Kinship networks often provided practical support in the aftermath of a death, helping widows and children navigate the precarities of plantation life. But kinship alone could not shield Irish families from the island's tightening hierarchy.

Pressures Toward Departure

By the late 1670s and into the 1680s, the conditions shaping Irish life in Barbados were shifting. The

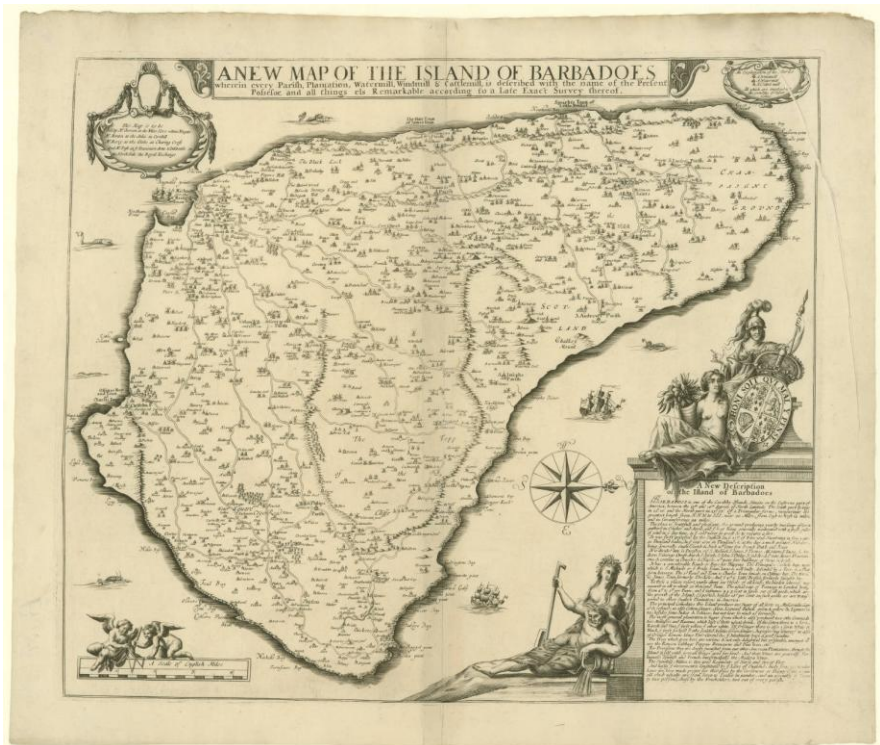


Figure 3. Barbados, c. 1686

“A New Map of the Island of Barbados.”

Forde/Lea/Sellers, London, c. 1686.

Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center.

Two Roads from Munster

island was becoming increasingly stratified, with large sugar estates consolidating power and fewer opportunities remaining for the free poor. The Chesapeake colonies, by contrast, offered land, labor demand, and a more fluid social structure. Irish arrivals into Maryland in the same years — including Cornelius Sheehane, who arrived aboard the ship *Encrease* in 1679 — demonstrate the active movement of Irish families between the Caribbean and the Chesapeake during this transitional period.

Whether Darby left Barbados as a child or a teenager, the forces shaping his early life would have prepared him for the uncertainties of migration. The documentary trail — Daniel's 1679 will, the 1679/80 militia roll, and clustered Irish arrivals such as Dan Shahan, Dearman Shahane, and Teague Shahan — places Darby's early life squarely within this transitional moment.

The name he carried into that wider world — Darby — stood as a quiet continuity: an Irish name, preserved across the Atlantic, that would eventually appear in the records of colonial Maryland. This chapter closes with a child on the cusp of change — rooted in Irish identity, shaped by the harsh realities of Barbados, and poised to enter a new world altogether. The next chapter follows the woman most likely responsible for that

crossing: Mary Moynihan, widowed and facing a decision that would shape everything that followed.

CHAPTER 9

Widowhood and Decision

Mary's Crossing

When Daniel Sheehan died in 1679, Mary's position became precarious. As an Irish Catholic widow with no documented property, she had little practical legal standing in the eyes of the colonial government. Barbados law offered limited protection to women in her situation. By the 1680s, the island was crowded and dominated by large sugar estates, leaving little room for free poor families to advance. Survival depended on kinship, community, and swift decision-making.

Options for Survival

Irish widows in Barbados faced a narrow set of choices. Remarriage provided economic stability, social protection, and a place within a household, and it was the most common path. But it was not the only one. Some widows remained within their kin networks,

relying on cousins, godparents, or neighbors for support. Others left the island entirely — widows with young children were among those who most frequently departed, seeking places where land and labor were more accessible.

Mary's options would have been shaped by the people around her. Daniel's will names two cousins — Cornelius Shahan and Dennis Dunnoho — and a godparent, Jone Donnas. These individuals formed part of the social world in which Mary lived. Their presence in the record hints at a small but meaningful network of support at a moment when her future was most uncertain. For a widow navigating the uncertainties of plantation life, these relationships were not abstract ties but practical lifelines — people who could pool resources, arrange passage, or facilitate migration.

The Chesapeake as Opportunity

The Chesapeake offered opportunities that Barbados did not. Land was more accessible, labor was in demand, and the social hierarchy was less rigid. Maryland, in particular, had a growing Catholic population and a more flexible religious environment than the Anglican-dominated islands of the Caribbean.

Two Roads from Munster

Irish migrants who had endured the Caribbean found in the Chesapeake a place where their faith was less of an obstacle and their labor more directly rewarded.

Irish arrivals into Maryland during these same decades — including men bearing the Shahan and Sheehane names — demonstrate the active movement of Irish families into the Chesapeake. For a woman like Mary, these broader patterns were not abstract trends but the backdrop against which she had to choose a path forward.

A Household at a Crossroads

The timing of Mary's departure is uncertain. If Darby was born around 1673, she may have left Barbados anytime between 1680 and the mid-1690s. The decision to migrate would not have been taken lightly. It required funds, connections, and a willingness to face the risks of an Atlantic crossing — risks that were real and not forgotten by anyone who had already crossed the ocean once.

The kin named in Daniel's will may have been among those who helped her take the next step: offering guidance, resources, or companionship as she weighed her options. Whether she traveled alone, with kin, or

as part of a larger community movement, her decision set the stage for the next phase of Darby's life.

The precariousness that followed Daniel's death now gave way to a different kind of uncertainty — one shaped not by loss, but by possibility. Mary's decision would carry Darby into a very different world: one shaped by tobacco, frontier settlements, and the shifting politics of Maryland. It is a world already introduced in Part I, and one that Part III will now explore from the inside — through the eyes of those who arrived not from Barbados, but directly from Ireland.

PART III

The Maryland Path

*To understand the full range of possibilities for a Munster
child in this era, we turn now to the second major route:
the Maryland Path.*

CHAPTER 10

Arrival in the Chesapeake: A New Beginning and a Hard Reality

First Sight of the Chesapeake

For Irish servants arriving in Maryland, the first sight of the Chesapeake was a mixture of relief and dread. The voyage was over, but the years of service were just beginning. The Chesapeake was a world of tobacco fields, scattered plantations, and a labor system hungry for young workers.

Indentured servants occupied a liminal status: not enslaved, but not free. Their time belonged to their masters, who controlled their labor, movement, and discipline. The law defined their obligations with precision — and their rights with caution.

The Structure of Service

The length of service varied by age at arrival. Adults typically served four years; teenagers five to six; children often seven years or more. The younger the servant, the longer the term. Children were valued precisely because they could be shaped into obedient workers and because their labor could be stretched across more years.

Two Roads from Munster

Conditions depended heavily on the household. Some masters were fair; others were brutal. Servants worked tobacco fields, tended livestock, cut timber, or performed domestic labor. Punishments for disobedience could extend their terms.

Servant Age at Arrival — Typical Term of Service

- **Adults:** Four years
 - **Teenagers:** Five to six years
 - **Children:** Seven years or more
-

Irish Community and Survival

Despite the hardships, Irish servants formed bonds with one another. Shared language, faith, and memory created small pockets of community within a system designed to isolate them. Catholic worship persisted quietly, often in private homes or in the woods.

Survival required resilience. Those who lived through their terms of service — especially those who reached their twenties — had a real chance at stability. The Chesapeake was filled with stories of former servants who became landowners, parish leaders, or respected members of their communities.

CHAPTER 11

Paths to Freedom and Stability

Completing an Indenture

Finishing a term of service was a turning point. Freed servants could hire themselves out for wages, lease land, purchase small tracts, or marry and establish households. The Chesapeake offered opportunities that Ireland increasingly did not. Land was the great magnet. Even a small tract represented autonomy, stability, and the chance to build a family legacy.

Marriage and Community Formation

Former servants often married quickly. Irish Catholic networks — though small — provided support, information, and social cohesion. These networks helped newcomers find work, land, and marriage partners.

In counties like Kent, Irish surnames clustered together: Sheehan, Shahan, Shehan, Sullivan, McCarthy, and others. These clusters reflected both

Two Roads from Munster

kinship and the fluidity of spelling in a world where clerks wrote names as they heard them.

Why the Chesapeake Offered a Real Future

Compared to Barbados, the Chesapeake provided measurably better conditions for those who survived their indenture. The contrast shaped the decisions of Irish families throughout this period.

Chesapeake Advantages

- **Survival Rates:** Higher than in the Caribbean
- **Land Availability:** Real tracts attainable after service
- **Post-Service Opportunity:** Wages, leases, land purchase
- **Plantation Hierarchy:** Less rigid than Barbados
- **Catholic Community:** Growing enclaves in Kent and other counties

For many Irish migrants, Maryland was the first place where long-term stability felt genuinely attainable —

not a promise, but a real possibility within reach of a determined former servant.

CHAPTER 12

The *Encrease* Scenario: One Possible Mechanism

The Ship *Encrease* in Context

In 1679, the ship *Encrease* sailed with a cargo of Irish prisoners and laborers bound for the Chesapeake. The vessel was part of a broader system that moved coerced Irish labor across the Atlantic in the decades after the Cromwellian wars. Its passengers were young, overwhelmingly male, and drawn from the poorest and most vulnerable strata of Irish society.

The *Encrease* represents one of the clearest documented mechanisms by which Irish Sheehans entered Maryland.

Cornelius and Thomas Sheehan

Among the passengers were Cornelius and Thomas Sheehan — two young Irishmen whose names appear on the transport list. Their ages, status, and likely

origins place them squarely within the Munster Irish world that produced many Sheehans.

Their presence in Maryland in 1679 establishes a Sheehan foothold in the colony decades before other Sheehans appear in the record. It is a foothold that invites careful attention, even if it cannot be linked by documentation to what follows.

A Plausible but Not Exclusive Path

The possibility of kinship between these men and a younger child cannot be dismissed. Cornelius and Thomas may have been cousins, uncles, or older brothers to a child whose name never made it onto a surviving list. The absence of a record does not rule out a connection; it merely reflects the fragmentary nature of seventeenth-century documentation.

But the *Encrease* scenario is one among several mechanisms by which a Munster child could reach Maryland:

- voluntary indenture
- forced transport
- spiriting
- orphan migration

- kinchain movement

The Chesapeake was a mosaic of these routes. Any one of them — or a combination — could account for a child arriving in Maryland during the 1680s or 1690s.

CHAPTER 13

The Window of Arrival (1680s–1690s)

Irish Migration into Maryland

The 1680s and 1690s saw steady Irish migration into Maryland. Transported laborers continued to arrive, alongside voluntary migrants seeking work or land. Children and teenagers were especially common, their labor prized in a colony hungry for workers.

This was the world into which many Munster children entered — whether through indenture, transport, or family movement. The decades form a window of arrival that aligns precisely with the demographic patterns visible in later Maryland records.

Age and Timing

A child born in the early 1670s would have been between seven and twenty-five during this window. Their absence from the records until adulthood is not

unusual; servants rarely appear in official documents until they marry, acquire land, or enter legal disputes.

An arrival between 1680 and 1698 aligns with both the demographic patterns and the broader currents of Irish migration into the Chesapeake.

Irish Networks in Kent County

Kent County contained overlapping clusters of Irish surnames — Sheehan, Shahan, Shehan — reflecting both kinship and the fluidity of spelling in colonial records. These networks provided support, information, and marriage partners. They also offered a sense of belonging in a colony where Catholics were increasingly marginalized.

A child arriving young enough could be absorbed into these networks, shaped by them, and eventually emerge as a stable adult within them. The marriage of Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks in 1707 at St. Paul's Parish, Kent County — documented in the parish register — is the first fixed point at which the record becomes clear. Everything before it must be reconstructed from context, pattern, and probability.

PART IV

Convergence

Parts I through III traced two routes out of seventeenth-century Munster — one through the sugar islands of Barbados, one across the Atlantic directly to the Chesapeake. Both carried Irish families into bondage and servitude. Both produced Sheehans. For most of those decades, the two lines ran, leaving almost no record of the people who traveled them.

Part IV is where the silence ends. A marriage entry in a Maryland parish register, dated 1707, is the first clear trace of a man named Darby. It says nothing of where he came from. It only confirms that he was there — rooted, recognized, and ready to build a life. From this single record, a family becomes visible.

CHAPTER 14

First Maryland Appearances

A Man Steps Into the Record

After decades of silence, the first clear trace of a man named Darby appears in Maryland in 1707. The record is simple: a marriage to Sarah Meeks, entered in the St. Paul's Parish register with the matter-of-fact brevity typical of the era. Yet this brief entry marks a profound shift. It is the moment when a life that had unfolded in obscurity becomes legible to history.

By 1707, Darby was an adult — old enough to marry, stable enough to form a household, and established enough to be recognized by the community. Everything before this moment is hidden behind the veil of servitude, migration, and the fragmentary nature of seventeenth-century documentation. But from this point forward, the pieces begin to align.

What the Marriage Tells Us

Marriage in the early Chesapeake was not a casual milestone. It required a man to have completed his indenture or term of service, to be capable of supporting a household, and to have earned

acceptance within the local community — access to a network of kin, neighbors, or co-religionists who would vouch for him and welcome the union. A man who could not demonstrate these things did not marry; he continued to labor at the margins of other men's households.

Darby's marriage to Sarah Meeks signals that he had achieved precisely that kind of stability — something impossible for a newly arrived servant or a transient laborer. He was rooted. He was known. He had done whatever was necessary, across however many silent years, to become a man his community recognized as ready to build a life.

Sarah herself came from established Kent County stock. Her father was almost certainly James Meeks, son of Walter Meeks and his wife Sarah, who had come to the county from Virginia in 1674. The Meeks family had been in the county for a generation by the time of the marriage; they witnessed wills, served on juries, and worked on neighboring plantations. To marry Sarah Meeks was not simply to take a wife — it was to join a family already woven into the fabric of Kent County life.

The Silence Before 1707

The absence of earlier records is not unusual, and it should not be read as failure. Servants rarely appear in legal documents unless they commit a crime, run away, or become entangled in a dispute. Most leave no trace until they marry, acquire land, or die. The colonial archive was not designed to record the lives of the poor, the young, or the unfree — only the moments when such lives intersected with property, law, or the concerns of those who held power.

Darby's silence before 1707 fits the pattern of a child who arrived young, a servant whose early years were swallowed by the labor system, and a migrant shaped by forces that left no paper trail until he was ready to step into the light of the record. His emergence in 1707 is not the beginning of his story. It is simply the first surviving line of it.

CHAPTER 15

Land, Marriage, and Stability

Shad's Hole and Darby's Desire

In August 1709 — just two years after his marriage and with two young children already at home — Darby

Two Roads from Munster

purchased one hundred acres of a larger tract known as Shad's Hole from Francis Bellows and his wife Margaret, paying 3,200 pounds of tobacco for the parcel. The timing was not auspicious. The Chesapeake economy was deep in a decade-long depression; tobacco prices had collapsed, and many small planters were being driven from the trade entirely. That Darby could complete this purchase under those conditions speaks to a degree of financial steadiness, or community credit, that a man without roots could not have mustered.

The land lay in Shrewsbury Parish, in the part of the Sassafras River country that would shortly be redrawn into Kent County as Queen Anne's County was carved out of the old boundaries in 1706. It was good country for tobacco, close to the creek systems that connected small planters to markets, and not far from the St. Paul's Parish community where Darby and Sarah had married.

Five years later, in November 1714, Darby surveyed an additional fifty acres of the same Shad's Hole tract, on the north side of a branch of Morgan's Creek. He named this parcel **Darby's Desire**. The name carries weight. It is not a purely functional label — it speaks to aspiration, to memory, and to the hard-won sense of place that a man who had arrived in this country with

Two Roads from Munster

nothing might finally allow himself to feel. In September 1716, the fifty acres were formally patented. Together, Shad's Hole and Darby's Desire formed the farm where Darby and Sarah would live out their lives, raise eight children, and eventually be buried.

A Household Takes Shape

With land and marriage came the formation of a household that grew steadily across the following decades. Daniel was born in 1709, John in 1711, Dennis in 1713, Sarah in 1715, Elizabeth in 1722, Darby Jr. in 1724, David in 1726, and William in 1728. The gaps in the children's birth years suggest the losses that were common to every colonial household — pregnancies that did not survive, infants who did not live to be recorded.

Darby appears in the county records across this period not as a man of prominence but as a solid, recognized member of his community. In November 1709 his name appears on a bond for Francis Collins, administrator of the estate of Edward Carroll. He appears again in a similar capacity in September 1721. In November 1733, in a deposition taken in Kent County, Darby gave his age as sixty years — the closest thing to a self-reported birth date the record offers.

These are not dramatic appearances. They are the quiet marks of a man embedded in the legal and social fabric of his county, called upon to witness, to vouch, to participate in the ordinary administration of community life.

The Arc of an Irish Chesapeake Life

Darby's trajectory — arriving young, enduring years of undocumented service, marrying soon after achieving freedom, acquiring land, integrating into a local community of kin and neighbors, and leaving descendants who carried his name forward — mirrors the broader pattern of Irish migrants who rebuilt their lives in the Chesapeake. His story is not an exception. It is a representative example of how the Atlantic labor system, brutal as it was, could be survived and transcended.

The Chesapeake offered men like Darby something that post-Cromwellian Ireland no longer could: the possibility of land. Not certainty — land had to be purchased, surveyed, patented, and defended against competing claims. But the possibility existed, and Darby seized it. Shad's Hole and Darby's Desire were not grand estates. They were a working tobacco farm, modestly inventoried at Darby's death — an old mare,

three feather beds, some wool, iron pots, axes, a frying pan, a cart, two cows, nine sheep. But they were his. They were named by him. And they endured in the family for nearly a century after his death.

CHAPTER 16

The Two Paths Reunited

Barbados and Maryland as Parallel Origins

By this point in the narrative, two plausible paths have been traced toward the man who married Sarah Meeks in 1707. The Barbados path runs through Daniel Sheehan — documented in the St. Thomas Parish militia roll in 1679 and dead by August of that year — and the possibility that a child born into his household was carried north through the Barbados-to-Chesapeake migration corridor after his death. The Maryland path runs through Cornelius Shehane and Thomas Shehawne, who stepped off the *Encrease* at the Maryland shore in March 1679, almost certainly kin to one another and possibly guardians of a six-year-old boy who generated no headright value and left no mark on either manifest.

Both paths are grounded in evidence. Both are historically plausible. Both begin in Munster's collapse and end in Maryland's stability. The documents do not adjudicate between them.

What the Records Allow Us to Say

The surviving documents do not reveal which path Darby traveled. They do not name his parents, describe his childhood, or record the years between his birth around 1673 and his marriage in 1707. What they do reveal is a man fully formed in the life he had built: the county where he lived, the woman he married, the land he claimed and named, the community he joined, and the eight children whose names and births were recorded in the parish register he had entered. The legacy he left — in land records, in wills, in the descendants who carried his surname forward across Maryland, Kentucky, Ohio, and beyond — is unmistakable.

The silence before 1707 is not a void. It is the space where both paths remain open, and where the honest work of genealogical reconstruction reaches its limit. To acknowledge that limit is not a failure. It is, as this book has argued throughout, the truest form of fidelity to the record.

Why Both Paths Matter

The goal of this narrative has never been to force a single answer where the records do not provide one. The goal has been to reconstruct the world of possibilities that shaped Darby's life — to illuminate the forces that drove Munster families into the Atlantic, the mechanisms that carried children across the ocean, the communities that absorbed them, and the ways Irish identities were reshaped in the New World. Both paths serve that purpose equally.

Darby's story is not diminished by uncertainty. It is enriched by the breadth of the world he might have traveled through. A boy who survived Barbados's sugar fields and the passage north, or a boy who crossed the Atlantic in the hold of the *Encrease* and grew up in the shadow of Cornelius's indenture on the Eastern Shore — either life would have produced the man the records show us: steady, rooted, named for desire.

A Life That Endured

Whether he came through Barbados or arrived directly in Maryland, Darby's life followed the arc of survival, adaptation, and quiet resilience that defined so many

Two Roads from Munster

Irish Chesapeake stories. He carved out a place for himself in a colony that offered both hardship and opportunity. He built a family. He bought land and named it after himself. He lived long enough to see his oldest children grown, to give a deposition in open court about his own age, to write his will in October 1735, and to die in April 1736 — within seven days of Sarah, the two of them buried together on the farm they had made.

PART V

Epilogue

CHAPTER 17

What the Records Reveal, and What They Cannot

The seventeenth century left behind a paper trail that is both tantalizing and incomplete. Parish registers burned. Plantation records vanished. Ships' manifests were lost, damaged, or never created at all. The lives of servants, children, and the poor were rarely documented unless they intersected with the concerns of the powerful.

For families like the Sheehans, this means that the earliest chapters of their Atlantic story survive only in fragments: a name on a transport list, a land patent, a marriage entry, a stray reference in a court record. These fragments are not failures of the archive. They are the archive.

The silences are part of the story.

What survives is enough to trace the outlines of a life, but not enough to fill every gap. The task, then, is not to force certainty where none exists, but to understand the world that shaped the possibilities.

Two Roads from Munster

Reconstructing a Life from Fragments

Reconstructing the life of someone like Darby requires a different kind of historical work. It is not the work of assembling a complete biography. It is the work of contextual reconstruction — placing a single life within the broader patterns of migration, labor, and survival that defined the Irish Atlantic world.

The landscape of that reconstruction has already been traced in these pages. Munster's collapse — the relentless cycle of rebellion, confiscation, and displacement that hollowed out the old Gaelic order across Cork, Kerry, and Limerick — created the human pressure that forced families into the Atlantic. The machinery of removal that followed was indifferent to circumstance: voluntary indenture, forced transport, spiriting, criminal exile, and the quieter pull of kinship networks already taking root in distant colonies all swept people out of Ireland by different hands and toward different shores. Children were especially vulnerable, their labor valued and their resistance irrelevant. A boy of six or eight had no more agency in the system than a barrel of salt beef loaded into the same hold.

What the Caribbean and Chesapeake offered those who survived was not comfort but possibility — a narrow, contingent chance at something Ireland no

Two Roads from Munster

longer provided. Barbados shaped its Irish laborers harshly, binding them to the sugar economy and the mortality rates that came with it; Maryland offered harder-won but more durable footholds, where a man who completed his years of service might claim land, marry, and begin again. Darby Shawhan did exactly that. The fragments become meaningful when placed in this landscape. We cannot see the boy. We can see the world he moved through — and that world makes his emergence in Kent County in 1707, married and acquiring land, not surprising but inevitable.

The Value of Multiple Paths

The Barbados Path and the Maryland Path are not competing theories. They are complementary windows into the same historical moment. Each illuminates forces that shaped the Irish diaspora: coercion and opportunity, loss and adaptation, survival and reinvention.

Both paths begin in Munster's collapse. Both paths end in Maryland's stability. Both paths reflect the lived experience of thousands of Irish migrants.

The absence of a single definitive origin does not weaken the story. It strengthens it.

Two Roads from Munster

Consider what the two paths share. Both center on men carrying variants of the same rare Irish surname — Sheehan, Shehane, Shehawne, Shahan — in the same narrow window of time, moving through the same Atlantic system, and arriving in the same corner of the Chesapeake. Daniel Sheehan died in Barbados in 1679, the same year Cornelius Shehane and Thomas Shehawne stepped off the *Encrease* at the Maryland shore. The convergence is striking even if it cannot be made definitive.

Cornelius and Thomas present their own interpretive puzzle. They traveled on the same ship, out of the same Irish port, assigned as headrights to landowners in neighboring counties on the same Maryland shore. The odds that two men sharing so unusual a surname, from the same departure point, bound for the same region, were strangers to one another are remote. They were almost certainly kin — brothers, cousins, or neighbors from the same County Cork townland — part of the chain migration that carried Irish Catholic families across the Atlantic in clusters rather than alone.

Where does Darby fit within that cluster? He could not have been the child of either man conceived in Maryland; he was born around 1673, six years before the *Encrease* sailed. But a younger sibling, a nephew, a

Two Roads from Munster

ward — a boy of six traveling with an older kinsman who had no headright value to offer the colonial record-keepers — is entirely plausible. Children generated no headright, and so children often left no trace.

What the Maryland path offers, then, is not just a mechanism of arrival but a social world: an Irish Catholic kin network, already forming on the Eastern Shore, into which a child named Darby could have been absorbed and raised. Cornelius's indenture likely concluded around 1683 to 1686. Post-indenture records have not yet been located. But the world he entered was one where Irish surnames clustered in the same parishes, witnessed each other's documents, and knit themselves into communities that outlasted the Atlantic crossing.

The Barbados path offers something different but equally important. It offers a name — Daniel — that echoes forward. Darby's firstborn son was named Daniel. Whether that naming honored a grandfather who died in Barbados, or simply reflected the common Irish Catholic naming tradition of honoring a paternal grandfather, cannot be known. But the resonance is there, in the record, for anyone willing to sit with it.

Two Roads from Munster

To hold both paths is not to be unable to decide. It is to recognize that the seventeenth-century Atlantic world did not organize itself for the convenience of later genealogists. Families were scattered. Records were partial. Names shifted with the ears and quills of English clerks. The wonder is not the silence of the record — it is that a man like Darby left any trace at all.

To hold multiple paths is to honor the truth of the era.

Loss, Endurance, Legacy

What endures is not the certainty of a single route, but the arc of a life rebuilt.

Darby emerges in Maryland as a man who survived the Atlantic system, who married, patented land, raised a family, became part of a community, and left descendants who carried his name forward. His story mirrors the stories of countless Irish migrants who endured hardship, seized opportunity, and carved out a place for themselves in the New World.

The details of his childhood may be lost, but the shape of his life is clear. He was part of a generation that transformed loss into legacy.

Two Roads from Munster

That legacy reaches beyond the record — into what his story reveals about the world that made him.

In the end, this book is not only about where Darby came from. It is about what his story reveals: the resilience of Munster families, the brutality and possibility of the Atlantic world, the ways ordinary people navigated extraordinary upheaval, and the quiet endurance that allowed them to build new lives.

Darby's origins may remain open to more than one path, but his legacy is unmistakable. He stands as a testament to the countless Irish men, women, and children whose names flicker briefly in the records and then disappear — yet whose lives shaped the communities that followed.

The story does not end with certainty. It ends with understanding.

And sometimes, in the study of the seventeenth century, that is the truest form of knowledge we can claim.

Notes

Footnotes

Parts I--III

1. Modern scholarship notes that while the massacre at Dún an Óir was unquestionably brutal, the precise number of those executed varies across contemporary accounts.
2. Although many Armada survivors were hunted down, some found refuge among Irish families who risked punishment to shelter them.
3. Estimates of how many began and survived the march vary, though all accounts agree it was one of the most harrowing episodes of the era.
4. While "depopulated" was the language used in contemporary English reports, the reality was a forced displacement of large portions of the Catholic population rather than complete abandonment.
5. Much of the confiscated land was distributed not only to soldiers but also to English creditors and "Adventurers" who had financed earlier campaigns.
6. Historians differ on the exact number of Irish sent to Barbados, with estimates ranging from several thousand

Two Roads from Munster

to over ten thousand during the mid seventeenth century.

7. Not all indentures were coerced; some Irish signed contracts voluntarily, though often under economic conditions that left little real choice.

8. Despite English pressure, Irish remained the dominant spoken language in much of Munster for generations after these events.

9. Although many Catholic churches were shuttered or repurposed, clandestine worship persisted in fields, barns, and private homes.

10. In many cases, the distinction between forced and voluntary migration was blurred, as economic collapse left families with few viable options.

11. Although the Irish formed a significant portion of the early labor force, they were soon outnumbered by enslaved Africans as sugar production expanded.

12. While Irish community ties were strong, daily survival often required cooperation with English overseers, African laborers, and other indentured groups.

Part IV

13. Kent County Court Land Records, JS N, pp. 147–150 (Maryland State Archives, MSA CE 1188); deed records purchase price of 3,200 pounds of tobacco. On the Chesapeake depression of this period, see Eric Shawn,

Two Roads from Munster

Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks: Some Historical Considerations (2003), 14.

Bibliography

Source Notes and Bibliography

Two Roads from Munster: Irish Origins Across the Atlantic World

Spencer S Shawhan

Note on Sources

This narrative rests on a small number of primary documents supplemented by published transcriptions and secondary scholarship. The evidentiary record for Darby Shawhan and his possible antecedents is sparse by nature: the seventeenth-century Irish Catholic diaspora left few written traces in either Irish or colonial American archives. The sources listed here represent everything that has been identified and confirmed as of the time of writing. Where the record is silent, this work has relied on contextual reconstruction from parallel historical patterns rather than invented fact. The distinction between documented evidence and reasoned inference is maintained throughout the text.

I. Primary Sources --- Archival Records

Barbados Department of Archives. Will of Daniel Shahan. Written June 28, 1679; proved August 22, 1679. Record Book RB6/9, page 515. Holetown, Barbados: Barbados Department of Archives.

Daniel Shahan signed with an X mark, indicating likely illiteracy. Witnesses: William Bird, Morris Layne, Thomas Rogers. The will does not mention a spouse or children. Transcription published in Brandow (see below).

Dorchester County Patent Records. Headright assignments from the ship *Encrease*, March 1679. Liber WC, folio 129. Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Maryland.

Two headright assignment lists from the same voyage: List 1 (March 19, 1679), 20 persons, rights sold to John Stevens of Dorchester County, includes Cornelius Shehane; List 2 (March 28, 1679), 46 persons, rights sold to William Sharpe of Talbot County, includes Thomas Shehawne. Notes by William G. Hills, 1939; located by Ron Shawhan, 1982, DAR Headquarters, Washington, D.C., p. 128.

St. Paul's Parish Register. Marriage record of Darby Shawhan and Sarah Meeks, November 20, 1707. Kent County, Maryland. Published in Wright, F. Edward, *Maryland Eastern Shore Vital Records 1648--1725*, 2nd ed. (see below).

Two Roads from Munster

This is the earliest confirmed documentary record for Darby Shawhan in North America.

St. Thomas Parish Militia Roll, Barbados, 1679--1680.

Entry for "Daniel Shahan." Transcribed in Brandow (see below).

II. Published Transcriptions and Finding Aids

Brandow, James C., ed. *Omitted Chapters from Hotten's "Original Lists of Persons of Quality"... Census Returns, Parish Registers, and Militia Rolls from the Barbados Census of 1679/80.* Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1982.

Primary source for the St. Thomas Parish militia roll entry for Daniel Shahan and the transcription of his will. Used throughout Part II.

Wright, F. Edward. *Maryland Eastern Shore Vital Records 1648--1725.* 2nd ed. Westminster, Maryland: Family Line Publications, 1990.

Source for Darby Shawhan's 1707 marriage record from St. Paul's Parish Register, Kent County, Maryland.

Ancestry.com. "U.S. and Canada, Passenger and Immigration Lists Index, 1500s--1900s." Database online. Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010.

Secondary finding aid used to identify Sheehan/Shahan name variants in Barbados arrival records, 1679--1680. Underlying data derived from published genealogical compendia;

Two Roads from Munster

primary sources cited independently where available.

Ancestry.com. "Caribbean, English Settlers in Barbados, 1637--1800." Database online. Lehi, UT: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2007.

Secondary finding aid identifying will records for Daniel Shahan (will written June 28, 1679; proved August 22, 1679) and John Shahan (will July 29, 1689; proved September 22, 1692). Primary archive: Barbados Department of Archives, RB6/9.

III. Maps and Figures

Speed, John. "The Province of Mvnster." 1611. In *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine*. London, 1611--1612. [Figure 1, Chapter 1]

"Cromwell's Effect on Land Ownership in Ireland, 1641--1703." *The Ireland Story*. www.irelandstory.com. Used with permission; attribution required. [Figure 2, Chapter 1]

Forde, Richard (surveyor); Lea, Philip, and John Sellers (publishers). "A New Map of the Island of Barbados." London, c. 1686. Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center, Boston Public Library (Call number: G1015 .C651 1630). [Figure 3, Chapter 7]

The first printed economic map of an English American colony. Used to illustrate the Barbados plantation landscape at the time of Daniel Shahan's presence on the island.

IV. Secondary Sources --- Historical Context

The following sources informed the historical background of Parts I through V but are not directly cited in the primary narrative. They are listed here for readers who wish to pursue the broader context of Irish migration, Barbados plantation society, and the Chesapeake colonial world.

Akenson, Donald Harman. *If the Irish Ran the World: Montserrat, 1630--1730.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997.

Beckles, Hilary McD. *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627--1715.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989.

Coldham, Peter Wilson. *The Complete Book of Emigrants, 1607--1776.* 4 vols. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1987--1993.

Dobson, David. *Irish Emigrants to North America, 1671--1820.* Baltimore: Clearfield, 2004.

Horning, Audrey. *Ireland in the Virginian Sea: Colonialism in the British Atlantic.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013.

Lockley, Timothy James. "The Irish in the British Atlantic." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World, 1450--1850*, edited by Nicholas Canny and Philip Morgan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Menard, Russell R. "From Servants to Slaves: The Transformation of the Chesapeake Labor System." *Southern Studies* 16, no. 4 (1977): 355--390.

O'Callaghan, Sean. *To Hell or Barbados: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ireland*. Dingle: Brandon, 2000.

V. A Note on the Nature of the Evidence

The documentary record for Darby Shawhan begins in 1707 with his marriage in Kent County, Maryland. Everything before that date---his birth, his origins, his passage across the Atlantic---is reconstructed from inference, parallel patterns, and the suggestive but unconfirmed presence of Sheehan and Shehane names in Barbados and Dorchester County records from the 1670s and 1680s. The two candidate paths explored in this book (the Barbados path via Daniel Shahan, and the direct Maryland path via Cornelius and Thomas Shehane on the Encrease) are not mutually exclusive, but neither has been conclusively proved.

Readers interested in further primary research are encouraged to consult the Maryland State Archives (Annapolis), the Barbados Department of Archives (Holetown), and the DAR Library (Washington, D.C.), all of which hold records relevant to this inquiry.

