

Lucile Wilkens of Kennett Square PA has painstakingly compiled and sifted the available information on the brothers George and Nicholas Shinn(s)/ (Shanes). All the conundrums facing the genealogist of an immigrant colonial family on the American frontier are here: the various spellings of the surname, the repeated use of the same given names in the early generations, the jurisdictional overlap between Colonies (soon to be States), competing landowner claims, and the private arrangements within families and among neighbors as to the use and disposition of land. Ms. Wilkens's full study, with supporting documents, is available at the CGS Library.

Notes on the Brothers Nicholas and George Shins/Shanes

I am Lucile Shanes Wilkens, descended from George Shins/Shanes, and would like to share my research on the "Shanes" brothers, Nicholas and George. I believe they were the first in the family line to immigrate to America, based on an obituary for Mary Shanes, George's granddaughter. The obituary links the two brothers (with Nicholas the great-grandfather of John Shanes, and George the grandfather of Mary) and says they came over from Ireland. This fits with a possible Scotch-Irish heritage (also common in the Monongalia frontier area at that time). Also, Shanes is a name that is found in County Down, Ireland, so that, too, fits well. Overall, this information would suggest the two brothers likely had a significant accent which could have easily been misunderstood and initially recorded as Shins, etc. Thus, I believe there was no real name change associated with their families, but rather a clarification and perhaps some further anglicization of their name as Shanes. I am also unsure as to whether these brothers could read and write. There was considerable illiteracy in those days, so that could have contributed to their being recorded as Shin/Shins as well. As to the often repeated claim that they came from New Jersey and descended from the Quaker Shinn family, I believe to be a mistaken assumption. To my knowledge, no such link has been found. I studied "*The History of the Shinn family in Europe and America*" by Josiah Shinn and also found no connection, nor found any later indication that these two brothers were Quakers.

These brothers likely came to America about 1769 or 1770 based on information I could find about their early settlements. In the "Old Defenders" article, Glenn Lough refers to some original settlements in Virginia/West Virginia and gave some information on where they were located. However, I see a few differences in how he put the scenario together versus the data that I was able to find. The first settlement I was able to find was along Limestone Creek in 1771 (see *History of Harrison County, WV*, by Henry Haymond, p. 25) and only the name George Shin was listed, in which he assigned some land to Daniel Davisson. So it would appear this initial settlement was likely just the two brothers together. Next they moved to the Dunkard Creek area where each made a settlement in 1772 (*History of Monongalia County* by Wiley, p. 38-39). I have found records of the original certificates (land entry books, adjustments of claims to unpatented lands 1773-1786...) for both Nicholas and George.

Although several historians seem to imply that George had some land that he was swindled out of prior to the brothers' Dunkard Creek settlements, I think they are most likely referring to the Shinn vs Dean court case. This case was prolonged (settled in 1808, a full discussion included under separate tab at the CGS Library) and refers to George, the son of Nicholas, being swindled, not the original brother George. I have seen no evidence that the original George was ever swindled out of any property. Thus, as of 1772, Dunkard Creek seems to have become the home of both George and Nicholas up until the time they enlisted to serve in the Revolutionary War in 1778 (*PA Archives*, Series 3, vol. 23, pp.208,285,317)

Each brother married and started a family. Nicholas was said to have a wife named Catherine and two daughters, Elizabeth and Mary (based on information in the Shinn vs. Dean case), who were likely born during this

time. George, too, married, and, as best I can tell, his wife was Elizabeth Hoover (as listed in Family Search). This fits with the fact that the Hoovers had land across the Creek from the Shins/Shanes brothers. The Old Defenders article mentioned that the original George had a son named Nicholas, so I assume this Nicholas would have been born sometime prior to 1778, perhaps around 1775. Since there is no later mention of him (not listed in George's will), I believe this son, Nicholas, must have died in childhood.

Shortly after their service in the War, there was a change in the state boundaries. Whereas the brothers' Dunkard Creek land was originally in Virginia, the new boundary, as of 1780, divided their Dunkard Creek property between Pennsylvania and Virginia. And, because of the War, Virginia had delayed and not yet verified their land ownership of a defined (and surveyed) 400 acres each, so there was some confusion in the transition. Ultimately, less than 100 acres for each brother ended up on the VA side (96 acres for Nicholas, 81 acres for George), and their cabins were on the PA side. Technically they were now Pennsylvanians.

I have seen ample data that George Shins paid taxes in PA from 1781 onward (ancestry.com has a collection titled PA Tax and Exonerations), thus verifying his living in PA, but found no PA tax data for Nicholas. Nicholas must have been living in Virginia, likely the land along the Monongahela River referred to in the Shinn vs Dean case. This Shinn vs. Dean case indicates that Nicholas owned the referenced tract of land in Monongalia County, VA as of 1779, so he could have very well been living there as of that date. This would explain why Nicholas was not seen paying taxes in PA after the boundary change. The land is a little south of Morgantown. And since I am not aware of any other VA land owned by Nicholas (or George) at this time, it seems most likely that Nicholas and wife Catherine started living there right after he returned from the War. It would have also been the place where their son George was born.

Unfortunately, Nicholas died young, about 1784, so trying to discern very much about his whereabouts and living habits (VA had scant property taxes in place at the time) has proven difficult. But we do know that after Nicholas's death, his wife Catherine moved back to the Dunkard Creek area (PA), and we see her paying taxes there as well. [I have compiled a document that tallies the tax information I found in ancestry.com for both George Shins and Catherine Shins—available at CGS.]

After the War, the elder George had several more children which he seemed to love dearly as recorded in his will. One of them was his namesake, George. Thus, there were ultimately three Georges living at the same time, so it is a little tricky keeping them all straight. This George Shanes (Jr.) married a Sarah and had a daughter named Mary (see 1850 census listing). And thanks to her obituary we have knowledge of Nicholas and George having come from Ireland and being the immigrant ancestors for two Shanes lineages.

I doubt that I am the first to put this information together, but I haven't seen it shared anywhere else. I am happy to share my research with the hopes that it may prove helpful to others who have traced their ancestry back to these early settler brothers, Nicholas and George Shins/Shanes.