

WILLIAM DARKE (1736-1801)

Darke County, originally organized by legislative enactment as a civil township of Miami County, was named for William Darke, a Pennsylvanian by birth and who was wounded in the defeat of the Miami Indians in 1791. On January 3, 1809 the Legislature of Ohio, then in session at Zanesville created the county of Darke.

William Darke, born May 6, 1736, son of Joseph Darke, descended through his paternal grandmother from John Rush, one of Oliver Cromwell's commanders who became a Quaker and emigrated in 1683 to Pennsylvania. When William was only a few years old, his parents moved to Virginia, settling near Shepherdstown (now West Virginia). His military career began when he served as corporal in the Rutherford Rangers for a brief period (1758-59) during the French and Indian War.

After about fifteen years on the Virginia frontier, as a soldier-farmer, he received at the outbreak of the Revolution a commission as captain of a company raised among his neighbors and friends. Captured at the battle of Germantown in October 1777, he was confined on board a prison ship at New York until November 1780, when he was exchanged. In the spring of 1781 he recruited the Berkeley and Hampshire regiment, which rendered effective service at the siege of Yorktown. He retired from the Revolution with the rank of lieutenant colonel as a reward of distinguished service.

Darke was one of a prominent group of officers sent to the Virginia convention of 1788 to ratify the Federal Constitution. He was a member of the Virginia legislature in the session of 1791-92, but apparently served only three days, resigning to accept a military commission from the United States in order to fight the Indians under General St. Clair. He commanded the left wing of the army at the defeat on November 4, 1791, on a branch of the Wabash, where he saw his youngest son, Captain Joseph Darke, fall mortally wounded and he himself sustained a severe wound. He was rewarded for his service by being given the rank of brigadier general and a generous grant of nearly 8,000 acres of public land in Virginia.

He spent the last decade of his life on his estate near Charles Town (now in West Virginia), serving at one time as justice of the peace. Darke, with his herculean frame, was a striking figure; his manners were rough; his disposition was frank and fearless. Notwithstanding a fiery temper, he was loved as well as respected by his officers and neighbors. His wife was a widow named Sarah Delayea. She bore him three sons, all of whom died in early manhood, and a daughter who has left descendants. [Source: Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. III, edited by Allen Johnson & Dumas Malone, Charles Scribner's Sons, NY, 1959]

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"It is believed that Levi House (1755-1846) was the son of Bokavar, daughter of a Chippewa (sic) Chief, and Valentine House, a trapper and Indian trader. When the Indian tribes went west, Bokavar went with her people taking Levi with her. He spent most of his childhood with the Indian tribes, but returned later to live with his father and step-mother, Eleanor Harrod."

Note that the Chippewa (Ojibway/Anishnabeg) tribe lived around the northern Great Lakes. The Shawnee tribe are well-documented in the upper Potomac area into the 1730's, making it more likely she was Shawnee.(16)

This might explain the 1761/63 guardianship. According to the House genealogy, John Valentine House Jr. had married by 1757 to Eleanor Harrod. Sarah, aka "Bokavar", had left during the French & Indian War. Charles would have wanted to be sure someone was watching over his inheritance while he was also living away from the area. Charles's unmarried sister was still on the land and her welfare would have been of concern to him, too.

The identification of Charles Friend, and his age, entailed searching documents over several states, and a span of many years. Sometimes our ancestors seem to hide from us, but they can be found, if we aren't afraid to look far and wide.(17)

Abraham Friend (1750-1829) had a son Jesse Friend (1781-1821), whose offspring lived in Wabash Twp., Darke Co., and Shelby Co., Ohio.

Footnotes:

- (1) Will recorded 5 June 1753 in Frederick Co., Maryland, will book A, page 3; also recorded in Frederick Co., Va., book 2, page 92; Augusta Co., Va., will book 2, page 125.
Note that the photocopies I received from the probate court differ slightly in wording from the extracts that have been previously published. Many researchers have assumed that Israel died in 1753, because his will was proved then, but his inventory was taken in May 1750.
- (2) For more about Israel Friend, see:
Maryland Genealogical Society Bulletin, Summer 1999, Vol. 40, pages 411-428, article: "Friend Family of Md. & Va."
- (3) Frederick Co., Va., minute book, quoted in "Historical Records of Old Frederick & Hampshire Cos., Va." (1992) by Wilmer Kerns, page 49.
- (4) Israel Friend had been granted vast acreage by the natives in 1727, only to have it confiscated in 1736 because the Maryland governor declared natives "non-persons" and therefore unable to make binding contracts. Hence there was a very real concern that the widow, as a Native, could have the remaining estate confiscated from her without a white husband to protect her interests.
See: Maryland Historical Magazine, Volume 47, page 316.
- (5) "Scotch-Irish Settlers on the Frontier", by Lyman Chalkley, Vol. 2, page 125, his extracts from Augusta Co., Va., Circuit Court records.

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