

terrible conditions under which the early settlers endured. It is easy to understand why the average Pennsylvanian had little sympathy for the new government's need to collect revenue. From his perspective, the government was doing little to protect its citizens on the frontier and, to add insult to injury, it sought to tax one of the few profitable commodities produced in the wilderness. The so-called Whiskey Rebellion reached a head in 1794 when President Washington sent in troops to quell the opposition. Ironically, the excise tax was overturned several years later by President Thomas Jefferson.

In 1788 he uprooted his family, leaving his eldest son, Robert, behind, and traveled down the Ohio River on flatboats, loaded with household furniture, livestock, and other necessary items, including his millstones and copper still – their destination was the Kentucky District of Virginia. He landed in Limestone, present-day Maysville, KY, and made his way inland, until he found the type of land and water he sought, settling near Hopewell (Paris) and Ruddles Mill, purchasing 130 acres from Reuben Rankin – this was in Bourbon County, which had been formed in 1785. Family tradition holds that he found a big spring gushing out of a low limestone bluff, along Townsend Creek. "...Daniel Shawhan, stopped at the spring back of Mt. Carmel Church, decided it was the best water he ever tasted and that he would build a distillery on the spot, which he did."

Daniel soon had his land cleared enough to begin growing the corn, rye, and other grains typically farmed at the time; he also quickly had his still in operation. Available evidence indicates that his still and distillery were located just off of a spring behind what became Mt. Carmel Church. The abundant pure water and fertile soil soon provided the Shawhan family with a handsome harvest of grain and a functioning distillery. Daniel continued to test and experiment with his whiskey, based on the excellent grains and limestone waters available to him. His formula, as perfected, rendered with volumes, times, and temperatures, provided the signature that distinguished Shawhan

whiskey for generations to come. It is unknown as to the exact combination of grains used by Daniel in his formula, but a popular mix was 75% corn, 15% barley, and 10% rye. Daniel was very particular about his yeast culture, perhaps using the same one he found so successful in Pennsylvania.



*Thought to be Daniel Shawhan's original cabin, circa 1790. Once located just south of the village of Shawhan next to the railroad track, it was torn down in 1995.*

He and his sons recognized that the market for their produce, including their whiskey, prepared by the family's secret formula, could reach as far as the port of New Orleans, which could be reached by travel down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.

Together with other early Bourbon County pioneering distillers, such as Jacob Spears, the Ewalts, and Bedfords, Daniel would ship his whiskey, stamped Bourbon County, to New Orleans where it soon became prized for its smooth taste — it became

known by the generic name of "bourbon whiskey". The Shawhan sons often made the trip on flatboats to New Orleans, returning with Spanish doubloons jingling in a satchel across their shoulder.

No one really knows who originated bourbon whiskey. Traditionally, the Reverend Elijah Craig has been credited as the "father" of bourbon whiskey. While it is true that the good Baptist Reverend was in fact a whiskey distiller in Kentucky during the late eighteenth century (perhaps as early as 1789), no evidence exists that he was the first to make it. Sticklers on the subject contend that old Elijah didn't even live in Bourbon County (he lived slightly to the west of the border); however, this does him a disservice. He did, in fact, distill bourbon whiskey and sell it down in New Orleans by that name.

Daniel Shawhan, Jr., is a clear candidate for honors as the first bourbon whiskey maker. He was already distilling whiskey by the time Elijah Craig established his business. However, the more likely candidate is Jacob Spears, a neighbor of Daniel's who arrived in Bourbon County in 1787. Sadly, the Shawhan name is not remembered by historians except as a footnote of the Whiskey Rebellion. Jacob Spears is mentioned but only in passing.<sup>1</sup>