

## 5 generations of the Matthews family with historical context

by Gregory Blann

This is the story of five generations of Matthews in America who are descended from Thomas Matthews of Talbot County, Maryland, told with historical context. Also included are the Troy and Kirby families who are connected to the Matthews line through marriage. The author's website contains the genealogical source data and analysis upon which this account draws at <https://blannng.wixsite.com/blannwattsgenealogy/matthews-family-page>

The earliest confirmed patriarch of the Matthews line of Talbot County, Maryland, is Thomas Matthews, who was born in Talbot County about 1748 and died in 1797. The earliest known Matthews recorded as living in Talbot County was also named Thomas (he lived roughly 1635-1685), and though early documentation is sparse and incomplete, a plausible path can be inferred from this Thomas to the descendant named Thomas Matthews who was born in 1748, which we will recount as a starting point, with the caveat that these early generational connections rely more on probability due to proximity and age than on documentary proof. For only proven ancestors of the Matthews line, go directly to Thomas Robinson, born in 1748.

**Thomas Matthews**--During the earliest generations of the Matthews family, the land that would later become Talbot lay within Kent County, a vast jurisdiction on the Eastern Shore with very few white settlers and a scattered, semi-frontier population. English settlement here in the mid-17th century was thin, river-oriented, and dependent on tobacco cultivation, indentured labor, and fragile relationships with Indigenous peoples. Records from this period are sparse, uneven, and often indirect, making early family reconstruction an exercise in probability rather than proof.

The earliest known Matthews on the Eastern Shore was Thomas Matthews who was likely born between about 1625 and 1640 in Kent County, the bottom half of which became Talbot County in 1662. Thomas appears in Talbot County records in the mid 1660s petitioning for reimbursement of tobacco paid to William Poware for teaching his son (tobacco being the favored currency of the time). Though the son is unnamed, this record provides our first generational link and places Thomas among the earliest European settlers with sufficient means to value education, at a time when formal schooling was rare and often arranged privately. A further Talbot County record from 1680, informs us that Jane Matthews was the widow and administratrix of a deceased Matthews man, who might be Thomas. If so, it would provide a wife and otherwise unknown death year for him.

During the early 1600s, English settlement on the Eastern Shore clustered along navigable waterways, such as the Miles, Wye, and Tred Avon rivers, since there were few roads and commerce moved almost entirely by boat. Households were isolated, neighbors distant, and government presence minimal. The economy of this early period revolved almost entirely around tobacco. Indentured servants still formed the backbone of agricultural labor, though enslaved Africans were becoming increasingly common by the late 1600s.

**William Matthews Sr.**--The reference to a school-aged son named Matthews in the mid 1660s implies a child born around 1655. This unnamed son of Thomas in Talbot County represents the second generation of the family during a time when there are still few Matthews settlers on the Eastern shore. If William is not Thomas' school-aged son then his birthday might be at the latest 1680, yet there is no evidence suggesting another Matthews generation on the Eastern Shore between Thomas's son and William Senior. Given the absence of competing Matthews households in Talbot County during this early period, it is likely that Thomas' school-aged son remained in the region and fathered the next known Matthews generation. One further record mentioning William Matthews places him in nearby Dorchester County, Maryland, in 1702. He is probably our William Sr. of Talbot County, however, William and Thomas are extremely common names for Matthews men in Maryland during the colonial period, names that are well represented in this line.

By around 1670-1700, various other Matthews men begin to appear in Maryland records (such as the 1676 probate of a Thomas Matthews of Charles County, on the Western shore of Maryland, who represents a separate Matthews line). As more records begin to appear, William Matthews Senior emerges as the most likely candidate to be Thomas' son, a man who is well documented in Talbot County Parish records and dies on Oct. 29, 1726. Regardless of William's paternity, he is the most compelling candidate to be the grandfather of Thomas Matthews (b. 1748), our earliest documented ancestor.

Church records from St. Peter's Episcopal Parish document that William Matthews (Sr.) and his wife, Anne, were the parents of a son named William Jr., born in Talbot County on Aug. 21, 1707, and a daughter named Anne, who was born on May 7, 1709. This suggests that William married Anne around 1706. By the turn of the 18th century in Talbot County, the Anglican Church, through parishes such as St. Peter's, became the central organizing institution of community life. Parish vestries functioned as local government, overseeing roads, poor relief, and moral order. Life expectancy was fairly short and multiple marriages were common. Sometime after 1709, William's wife, Anne, died, after which William remarried Margaret, who survived him and administered his estate. His will, written and proved in 1726, left his personal property to Margaret and named no children, a silence that is consistent with his children by Anne already being provided for or of age.

**William Matthews Jr.**-The fourth generation of the Matthews family comes into clearer focus through parish, court, and vestry records of the mid-18th century. William Matthews Jr., born in 1707, appears repeatedly in St. Peter's Parish registers as the father of Mary Ann (born 1730) and John (born 1740), with a wife named Mary. He was active in Talbot County court matters through the 1740s and may have lived into the Revolutionary period; a William Matthews took the Maryland Oath of Fidelity in 1778.

William's lifespan and documented family make him the strongest candidate to be the father of Thomas Matthews, born in 1748. However, around this time other Matthews men of similar age begin to appear in the St. Peter's parish records, who could possibly be sons of William Matthews Sr. by one or both of his wives, or they might be cousins. There is a Charles Matthews who dies in nearby Queen Anne's County in 1740 who could be a close relative. More notably, records show a Thomas Matthews of Grubby Neck (an area of Talbot consistent with the area in which William Sr. lived) and a Joseph Matthews, both of whom held church offices in the early 1760s, who both might be brothers of one another, and possibly sons of William Sr. There is also a 1731 Talbot county marriage record for a Thomas Matthews and Rebecca Henricks which might be Thomas of Grubby Neck. Records show that he served as church warden and died in 1765, while Joseph was sexton of the Chapel of Ease, both appointed in 1761. The shared parish affiliation and overlapping timelines strongly imply kinship, however there is no record showing whether either of them had children. While Thomas of Grubby Neck is of the right age to possibly be the father of Thomas Matthews (b. 1748), and shares his first name, there is a somewhat stronger case for William Matthews Jr. who was a documented father, with other children born in the 1730-40s not long before Thomas' birth. That Thomas Matthews (b. 1748) named his first son William, possibly after his father, further supports the case for William Matthews Jr.'s paternity.

William Jr.'s first wife, Mary, gave birth to a daughter named Mary Ann in 1730 and apparently died not long after Mary Ann's birth. Only after a 10 year gap is William's next known child, John, born in 1740. A 1745 court case helps explain the gap, and shows that William has remarried another Mary, who is the widow of George Sale, who died in 1732, and she was the administratrix of his estate. This suggests that William and Mary Sale married in the middle to late 1730 and Mary Sale was the mother of John, born in 1740. If William Jr. was the father of Thomas (b. 1748), then Mary Sale would be his mother. William Matthews' listing in the 1778 Oath of Fidelity for Talbot County was probably the last record to name him before his death, as William does not appear in the 1790 census. Born in 1707, William was 61 in 1778. He and his wife probably died during the 1780s around the time of the Revolutionary War.

**Thomas Matthews**- Thomas was born in 1748 in Talbot County and is the earliest proven ancestor of his line. His birth year is established by a 1791 court record in which he testified at age forty-three. He came of age during the final decades of colonial Maryland, when tobacco prices fluctuated, soils were

increasingly exhausted, and many farmers diversified into grain and livestock. Thomas married around 1767, and with his first wife, whose name is now lost, he raised seven children. Their births span years of uncertainty, inflation, and political change. Thomas first appears in the 1776 census as a married man with young children and he took the Oath of Fidelity to the State of Maryland in 1778. In the 1776 census, he and his wife have two sons and one daughter all under age 16. Their first child was named William (possibly after Thomas' father) and was born about 1768 and Thomas' namesake, Thomas Matthews Jr., was born around the start of the Revolutionary War in 1775.

Most of Thomas' children were born during the 1770s, an era of uncertainty and risk, with American Loyalists and Patriots with opposing allegiances. Thomas was 28 at the beginning of the Revolutionary War but he does not appear on the muster rolls as a soldier. Although Talbot County did not experience large-scale fighting, political allegiance was very important. The Oath of Fidelity to the thirteen colonies of the United States not only established which men were of fighting age, but signing it was a legal requirement for holding land, suing in court, or participating in civic life.

The next record in which Thomas appears is the 1790 Talbot Co. census in which he is listed with several sons and daughters and his wife, who dies in the early 1790s. After his first wife's death, Thomas remarried Rachel Robinson on Dec. 6, 1796, linking the Matthews family to another local lineage just before his own death in 1797 at the age of 59. Rachel Matthews appears as a widow, over age 45, in the 1800 Talbot County census along with two teenage girls. Records show that Rachel remarried by 1802 to Joseph Rathill, and the couple was appointed as administrators of Thomas' probate. Court disruptions after the war contributed to a nine year delay in Thomas' probate hearing. The April 18, 1806 probate describes the contents of Thomas' will and names all seven of his children: William (ca. 1768), Elizabeth Warner (ca. 1771), Thomas Jr. (ca. 1775), Susanna Stewart (ca. 1777), John (ca. 1778), Rebecca (ca. 1780), and Nicholas Matthews (1784).

**Nicholas Matthews-** The youngest son of Thomas Matthews, Nicholas was born in September, 1784. His date of birth is inferred from an Orphan's Court document from 1803 which contains the following addendum: "Thomas Matthews (Jr.) was appointed guardian of Nicholas Matthews, orphan and son of Thomas Matthews, deceased, aged 19 years, September last past. Securities: Thomas Kirby & William Scott." This places Nicholas' birth date in September of 1784, and suggests that Nicholas' older brother, Thomas Matthews Jr., acted as his guardian, until he reached the age of maturity. Thomas Kirby, who is also mentioned, is probably the brother of Jesse Kirby, Nicholas' future father-in-law. The 1800 census lists Thomas Matthews (Jr.) with several children, including a male about 15 who is likely Nicholas. By 1810, there is no Thomas Matthews in the Talbot co. census, possibly inferring Thomas Jr.'s demise. Nicholas' oldest brother, William, shows a male about Nicholas' age, in the 1810 census, who may be him at age 25.

On Dec. 7, 1813, Nicholas married Martha "Patsy" Kirby (born in 1795), who is called "Patty" in her father's will and on the 1830 census. Patty was the daughter of Jesse Kirby (1764-1823) and likely Nancy Bewley (about 1770-1796) of Talbot County. Jesse appears to have married three times, first to an unknown wife whom he married around 1787. She died after giving birth to one daughter named Grace (1768-1795). His second short-lived marriage was to Nancy Bewley (1770-1796) on May 5, 1795, and after her death in 1796, Jesse married his third wife, Elizabeth McGinnis, on Jan. 7, 1797, who bore him a son named James around 1805. Jesse Kirby wrote his will in 1823 and in it named his three married daughters: Grace (1768-1795), Patty Matthews, and Nancy "Ann" Greenhawk, as well as his minor son, James. The probate was signed by "Nicholas Matthews and Patty, his wife." Since Patty and Nancy were born around 1795-96, they appear to be children of Nancy Bewley, for whom the younger daughter, Nancy, was probably named. Nancy was likely the daughter of John Bewley and Christina Lloyd, the only Bewley family of the time in Talbot County. Jesse Kirby's probate notes that just as he was finishing writing his will he was seized with a violent cough, followed by a discharge of blood, and he died a few minutes later. Jesse was one of nine children of William Kirby Sr. (1730-1796) and Mary Ridgaway (born 1732) of Talbot County, Maryland. Immigration records show that Mary's grandfather, William Ridgaway Sr., immigrated from England to Maryland in October, 1672.

Jesse's will bequeathed to his daughter, Patty, an enslaved female named Sarah who was to be emancipated after 15 years, according to the will. During this time, Maryland society was deeply impacted by slavery, with enslaved African Americans forming a significant part of the workforce on plantations. There were also many free African Americans who worked in various skilled trades, as white farmers increasingly began to emancipate their enslaved workers. By the early 19th century, Talbot County was experiencing a gradual decline in slavery, driven by soil exhaustion, diversification into grain farming, and changing moral and economic calculations. Enslaved labor still existed, but small farmers increasingly owned few or no enslaved people. The Matthews household's absence of enslaved persons in census records aligns with this broader shift and suggests a household economy based on family labor, tenancy or modest landholding, and seasonal work rather than plantation agriculture. Nicholas likely farmed grain, raised livestock, and supplemented income through local labor networks. This kind of economic life generated few records and little surplus but could sustain a family over generations.

Nicholas and Patty appear in the 1820 Talbot County census with one male and one female under age 10, one female 10-15, and no enslaved persons. The young male under ten can be identified as their son, Thomas, who was born around 1815, while the names of the two females are not known, the youngest of them being of the right age to be a sister of Thomas. Thomas' youngest brother, Samuel, was born around 1829-30, just around the time that Nicholas disappears from the record without a will, apparently dying in early 1830 at age 46. He and his wife, "Martha (Patty) Matthews," are last mentioned in the July 1829 probate of Jesse Kirby along with Jesse's widow and administratrix, Elizabeth Kirby.

Patty Matthews, appears as a widow in the June 1830 census, with sons, Thomas and Samuel, another young unidentified daughter, and a further son, born in 1822, who might possibly be Joseph Matthews of Talbot County, who was born in 1822. Patty appears not to have remarried and does not appear in the 1840 census, having likely died sometime in the late 1830s, also without a will. This was an era when many couples of modest means died without ever leaving a will, purchasing land or appearing in court.

Nicholas Matthews raised his family during the economic contraction that followed the Panic of 1819, the first nationwide financial crisis, or "depression" in the United States. In the years immediately after the War of 1812, farmers across Maryland, especially on the Eastern Shore, had expanded grain production in response to high wartime prices and easy credit. When European agriculture recovered and American exports collapsed, prices for wheat and corn fell sharply, credit tightened, and banks demanded repayment in hard currency that many rural households did not possess. Middling farmers were hit hardest, and in Talbot County, these pressures disproportionately affected young households like Nicholas's family, which would have operated near the margins during this period. For their son Thomas, childhood unfolded in a world shaped by economic caution rather than expansion, where early responsibility, reliance on kin, and limited opportunity were the norm.

**Thomas Matthews Sr.**- Thomas, the eldest son of Nicholas and Patty Matthews, was born in 1815 in Talbot County. The author's grandmother, Anna Matthews Blann, kept detailed genealogy notes for the family and told the author in the late 1960s that her great grandparents were Nicholas and Martha Matthews and her grandparents were Thomas Matthews and Hannah Matilda Troy, and that Thomas had at least one brother, Samuel J. Matthews. She also had the old Troy family bible, with its list of Troy births and deaths, written down by Matilda's brother Henry Troy, which is still preserved by our family. Despite the lack of a will by Nicholas or Patty naming Thomas, records tend to corroborate Anna's given lineage, such as the 1850 census which shows 20 year old Samuel Matthews living with Thomas and Matilda Matthews and their children.

Thomas's childhood would have been marked by early responsibility. Losing his father around age fourteen, he likely contributed labor well before adulthood. He was probably around 20 when his mother, Patty, passed away in her late thirties and his brother, Samuel, was probably seven or eight years old. By the time Thomas reached adulthood in the late 1830s, Talbot County was entering a period of gradual economic stagnation. While Baltimore and western Maryland industrialized, the Eastern Shore remained agricultural and increasingly marginal.

On Nov. 29, 1837, Thomas Matthews married Hannah Matilda Troy (1819-1880), with whom he had

three sons: Josiah (1841-after 1910)), Thomas H. (1845-1880) and Solomon (1849-1934). Matilda was the daughter of Solomon Troy (1789-after 1854) and Margaret Dulin (1783-1834). Margaret's parents were John Dulin (1765-before 1810) and Hannah Porter (about 1765-after 1810), both from families that had resided in Talbot County for several generations, the earliest known being Thomas Eubank Sr. (1650-1736) who immigrated to Maryland from Lancaster, England in 1675.

Hannah Matilda's father, Solomon Troy, was the son of Irish emigrants, Owen and Nancy Troy, who came to Talbot County sometime in the 1780s. The Troy family Bible names Solomon's parents and gives Solomon's date of birth as May 3, 1789 and the 1850 census confirms his Maryland birth.

According to Anna Mathews Blann's notes: "Solomon Troy and two sisters came to this country from County Cork, Ireland. One sister married a Willis of Oxford, the other a Stuart. Newspapers gave the statement that Miss Mollie Stuart held the record for longest service as Post Mistress in this country." Records confirm that Solomon had a sister named Mary Troy, who was born in 1774, likely in Ireland, who married James Stewart Sr. on Dec. 25 1802 in Talbot County. Orphan's court records from 1805 further tell us, that the court binds Solomon Troy, orphan son of Owen Troy and a minor until he is 16, to apprentice with his brother-in-law, James Stewart, who is responsible for teaching Solomon to read, write, and cipher, and instructing him in the trade of cordwainer (shoemaker) and bootmaker. The implication is that Solomon's father, Owen Troy, has died recently in Maryland, which in turn suggests that Solomon's parents immigrated from Ireland, along with one or two of his sisters, before Solomon's birth. The absence of other records about Owen suggests that he died poor or without property. His wife, Nancy Troy, died in Talbot County in 1814 and was buried at public expense

By 1814, Solomon Troy was 25 years old, married with three children, working as a shoemaker, who also apprenticed other shoemakers. His marriage to Margaret Dulin on Oct. 9, 1810, produced nine children, and after Margaret's death in 1836, Solomon remarried twice more. A short-lived marriage with Kisshan Ann (Ann Keziah) Pratt, produced another daughter, Ann Troy, in 1838, and in 1840 he married Mary Hennessey (1801-1850), a marriage that lasted a decade with no further children. Solomon later went into law enforcement and legal service in Talbot County as a constable during the 1830s and a collector of school tax and estate-related tax in the 1840s. He appears as a farmer with 200 acres in the 1850 census and is still serving as Collector for School Tax in 1854, the last record of him prior to his death. In the years before photography, a profile of Solomon Troy was made by an artist at a Methodist camp meeting which survives pasted into the old Troy family Bible. His grandson, Solomon Nicholas Matthews, was likely named after both of his grandfathers.



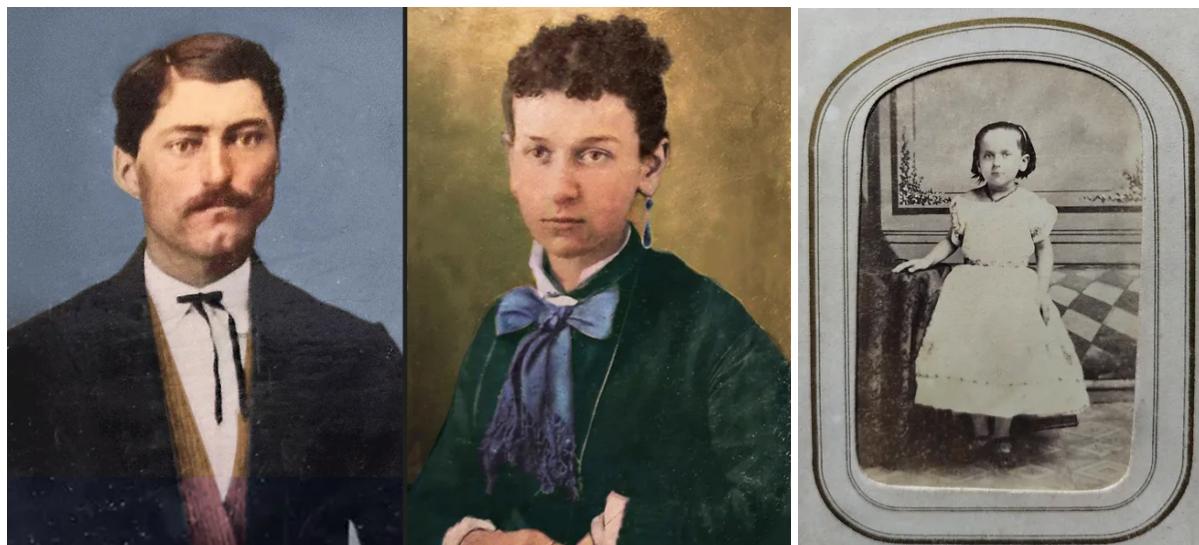
Solomon Troy

The 1850 Talbot County census shows Thomas Matthews as a 35 year old farmer living with 33 year old Matilda, with their three young children Josiah, Thomas, and 1 year-old, Solomon, in the district of Trappe, Maryland. Also living with them is Thomas' 20 year old brother Samuel. During the Civil War Samuel enlisted as a private in the Union Army on Feb. 29, 1864. Though a long-time bachelor, Samuel

appears to have married in the 1870s a few years before his death. Thomas and Matilda's oldest son, Josiah, also fought in the war, as recorded in his July 1863 draft registration which lists him as a single, 23 year old painter. At the time, Solomon was only 14 and too young to fight.

Thomas and Matilda last appear together in the 1880 census in Trappe at age 65 and 64 respectively. The census also indicates that Thomas and Matilda might be able to read but were unable to write. Thomas Matthews died in 1884 and left an April 7, 1884, will, which mentions no wife, implying that Matilda is deceased. Thomas names his heirs as: Solomon N. Matthews, executor, grandson, Henry, son of Thomas H. Matthews, deceased, and Josiah Matthews. Thomas split his land holdings between Solomon and Josiah, which probably amounted to around 30 acres.

**Solomon Nicholas Matthews**- Nicholas, the youngest son of Thomas and Matilda Matthews, was born on April 18, 1849 in Trappe, in Talbot County, Maryland. His early childhood unfolded in the final decade of the antebellum Eastern Shore, when small farmers like his father, Thomas Matthews, lived close to subsistence, dependent on local markets and seasonal labor rather than plantation wealth. He grew up on his parents' farm in the rural hinterland of Trappe and lived through the Civil War during his teenage years, a conflict in which his older brother and uncle took an active part. His formative years were likely marked by long hours of work, limited schooling, and close reliance on kin networks. In the 1870 census Solomon is living with his parents in district 3 of Talbot County and listed as a 21 year old farm laborer. By the 1880 census he has transitioned to making his living as a carpenter. Around 1879, at the age of thirty, he married nineteen year old Anna Dorothea "Annie" Mënck, the daughter of German immigrant, Johann Mënck (1804-1882), and Magdalene Craver (1830-after 1883), whose parents hailed from Rensselaer County, New York, before moving south to the area near Fort Monroe, Virginia, in the mid 1830s.



Solomon Matthews and Annie Mënck

Annie Mënck ca. 1867

Just before the start of the Civil War, Annie's parents and several other Craver relatives moved to Baltimore, where Annie was born. In 1863, Annie's parents moved to Trappe, on the eastern shore of Maryland, which was more removed from the conflict. Annie's father, Johann Mënck, was a skilled turner (a type of furniture carpenter) who emigrated from the Hamburg area of Germany around 1840 and later transitioned into retail sales as a general store proprietor in the Hambleton area on the outskirts of Trappe.

The Civil War and its aftermath profoundly reshaped the world Solomon inherited. Maryland remained in the Union, but emancipation dismantled the labor system on which much of Talbot County's agriculture had depended. Several of Annie Craver's uncles in Virginia joined the Confederate Army, one of them serving in Stonewall Jackson's brigade. According to family lore, during the war years, young Annie and her mother, Magdalene, along with her aunt, used to travel from Maryland to visit the Craver family in Virginia, and the adult women would smuggle contraband through the union checkpoints beneath their hoop skirts.

In the decades following the war, farming families like the Matthews family faced declining crop prices, rising debt, and shrinking opportunities on the land. Many younger men responded by moving toward towns and villages, where wage labor and small commerce offered more stability than farming alone. Solomon's later life reflects this shift clearly. By the 1880s and 1890s, he was no longer identified primarily as a farmer but as a resident of Trappe, part of a growing class of town-based working men whose livelihoods were tied to trade, services, and retail rather than the soil.

Annie married Solomon Matthews fifteen years after the Civil War, during reconstruction, and over the next two decades Annie gave birth to nine children: Norman (1880-1953), Olin (1882-1953), Magdalene "Maggie" (1883-1970), Maude (1885-1971), Helen and Seth (these two died young), Anna (1892-1973), Beryl (1898-1990), and Chilton Troy Matthews (1903-1970). Chilton moved to Philadelphia and became a policeman, and Anna lived for three decades in upstate New York, while the most of the other Matthews children remained in Maryland as adults. Norman, like his father, was a carpenter. Annie Ménck Matthews was skilled in knitting, weaving baskets and multi-colored rag-rugs, however she went blind toward the end of her life (probably sometime after 1898 when she bore her last child). Like most families of the time, they had no indoor plumbing, so they ran an overhead clothes line from the back of the house to the outhouse so Annie could easily find her way around. Pictures taken in her seventies show her with closed eyes and a serene expression. Solomon, in his seventies, with short white hair, a dapper suit with bow tie, and sporting a goatee, has a "Colonel Sanders" air about him.

In the 1880 census Solomon is listed as a carpenter, along with his wife and six month old son, Norman. Near them was the home of Johann and Magdalene Ménck, Annie's aging parents. One house that Solomon built was at 29449 Maple Avenue, in Trappe. Built in 1900, it is a 2,154 square foot, two story, four bedroom, wood frame house with a wide front porch, and became the home of his younger daughter, Beryl, and her husband, Harry Griffith, who fought in World War I. Diagonally across the street at 29444 Maple Avenue stands another two story wood house of 1,820 square feet, built also in 1900, this one having an "L" shaped layout. The house had a chicken coop as well as a workshop on the rear side of the house. Maude and her husband Norman Holmes, lived there along with Solomon and Annie Matthews in the 1930s, and this house I believe was also built by Solomon. Maude and her sister, Maggie Thume, were both nurses, and Maude's daughter, Ruth, was a schoolteacher in Baltimore.

The 1910 census shows that Solomon and Annie owned a farmhouse where they lived on Barber Road, a rural road of farmland just on the other side of modern Route 50, from Maple Avenue, a house they may have lived in since at least the 1890s. By 1910, Solomon was established in town as a salesman in a general store. Small towns like Trappe had general stores, blacksmith shops, saloons, boarding houses and interacted with steamboat traffic on nearby rivers. General stores on the Eastern Shore were hubs of information, credit, and community exchange, and Solomon's work in retail placed him at the center of this local economy. That Solomon could read and write, unlike his parents, marked a generational advance and speaks to the slow but real expansion of education in post-Civil War Maryland. Most of their children attended some schooling and all were literate, but among them, only Anna finished High School

and took summer college courses, obtaining certification to teach school.



Annie Mönck Matthews



Solomon Matthews



Anna Matthews

On Aug. 1, 1911, the Baltimore Sun newspaper announced Solomon's appointment as election clerk "for the coming primary and general election to be held in Talbot County." This appointment to a position requiring literacy, trustworthiness, and political reliability shows Solomon's standing in the community and is further evidence of his integration into the civic life of the town. Under the appointment system then in use, clerks were paired by party, and the order of names suggests that Matthews likely served as the Democratic clerk for his precinct. Trappe tended to be overwhelmingly Democratic in 1911, although President Taft was a republican.

The 1930 census shows Solomon and Annie living with Norman and Maude Holmes on Church Street, which probably was an earlier name for what is now (East) Maple Avenue, which has a prominent Methodist Church near the house they all lived in at that time. (The 1940 census lists Maude as a widow on Maple Street.)

Annie Mönck Matthews died in late 1930 and was survived for four years by Solomon, who died on April 18, 1934. The Star-Democrat newspaper carried his obituary, which in part reads: "Solomon N. Matthews died at 8 P.M. on his birthday, April 18, aged 85 years, at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Maude Holmes." The account names his children, and states that he has eleven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren and concludes: "He will be remembered as a man of true sterling character by his friends, and a good, kind, father to his children." Solomon N. Matthews and Anna M. Matthews were buried beside each other with a large double headstone in Easton's Spring Hill Cemetery.

**Anna Adelia Matthews (Blann)** – The fifth of seven children of Solomon and Annie Matthews, Anna was born on June 29, 1892 in Trappe. Anna completed eight years of grade school and graduated from Trappe High School in 1908 at age 16. A series of sketches and water colors that she painted in the eighth grade have been preserved by her family. Anna also learned to play the piano during her youth. She loved learning and reading books and decided on a vocation as a local school teacher. To this end, she took college level summer courses in Charlottesville, Virginia, near Monticello, and received her certification to teach. From age 16 to age 25 she taught in one room schoolhouses in Royal Oaks and Bruceville, small towns near Trappe. Albert Thume, the son of Anna's sister, Maggie, reported being one of her students during the 1910s.

Although her parents were not regular church goers, Anna began to attend church at what is now called the Wesleyan Emmanuel Chapel on U.S. Highway 50. During Anna's youth, the church's denomination was called Pilgrim Holiness, a movement that had grown out of an 1899 "holiness" tent revival in the area and resulted in the construction of this church in 1902. The building was damaged by fire in 1945, rebuilt, and subsequently expanded as a modern brick structure.

The religious teaching of Charles Wesley (1707-1788) had been introduced to the area in the late 1700s by a dynamic preacher named Francis Asbury, who transformed religious life on the Eastern Shore, and soon became the leader of American Methodism. The denomination appealed to the heart more than the intellect and presented a faith that was both practical and democratic and appealed to the less affluent members of society more than the lofty intellectualism of the Anglican/Episcopal Church. The Wesleyan church also stressed "sanctification", as a second holiness level of grace and commitment beyond the initial step of "being saved". The Methodist church was invested in helping the community build houses, schools, hospitals, and other social projects, and also emphasized women's participation in the church and within society. Methodism also rejected gambling, drunkenness, horse-racing, and frivolous reveling, stressing conversion experience over formal religious instruction. Camp meetings and tent revivals were also an important part of community life.

Anna was drawn to the Pilgrim Holiness movement and it was at her church that she met her future husband, Melvin Raymond Blann Sr., who was in the process of becoming a minister in the Pilgrim Holiness Church, encouraged by his older brother, Rev. Elwood Blann, who had already become a minister in the Church. Melvin proposed to 23 year old Anna in 1916, bringing her to a bridge to ask for her hand. Anna didn't answer him immediately but made him wait until they had crossed the bridge to give her consent. They married on Anna's 24<sup>th</sup> birthday on June 29, 1916 in Trappe. The following year, they re-located to Broom's Island in Calvert County, Maryland, where their first of four children, Melvin Raymond Blann II, was born on April 9, 1917. (There was also a brief early pastorate in Tilghman, Maryland.)

Melvin's parents were Robert Arthur Blann (1840-1916) and Annie Robinson (1851-1939) of nearby Caroline County, Maryland. Arthur's father, Thomas Bland, had died in debt when Arthur was about seven or eight years old, and young Arthur had been farmed out to work other people's farms. As an adult after the Civil War, he found employment as a steamboat captain on the Choptank River and was known at the time for his hard drinking, following his difficult early years. At age 31, he married Annie Robinson, a devoutly religious woman, who had a positive influence on Arthur and ensured his sobriety. Together they had nine children, including two sons who became ministers in the Pilgrim Holiness Church and a daughter, Effie Grey, who, with her husband, became a long term Christian missionary to India. A 1908 article in the Denton Journal provides a list of "tent-holders" who will attend a Holiness camp meeting near Denton. Included on the list is their father, "Arthur Bland of Trappe." In the years just

prior to his father's death in 1916, Melvin attended God's Bible College in Cincinnati, Ohio, receiving his ordination.



Arthur and Annie Robinson Blann



Rev.Melvin Blann and Anna Matthews wedding portrait

It was into this family that schoolteacher, Anna Matthews, married and became a pastor's wife, typing and editing Melvin's sermons, playing the piano for church services, teaching Sunday School, raising four children, and supporting her husband in his ministry. Melvin was skilled as a carpenter, as was Anna's father, who may have imparted some of his skills to his son-in-law, skills which Melvin used to build several churches. The first few years of Melvin's ministry coincided with World War I (1917-18), which brought inflation and shortages to the American population.

After Broom's Island, the family moved to Mineral, Louisa County, Virginia, where their second son, Troy Robinson Blann Sr. (the author's father) was born on Nov.15, 1919, followed by their first daughter, Magdalen Matthews Blann, who was born on April 9, 1921. From Mineral they next moved to Finch Hollow in Broom County, New York, where their last child, Linda Lee Blann, was born on June 14, 1925. There was also a brief stay in Amsterdam, New York, in the Mohawk Valley region of Montgomery County, New York, during the early years. Around 1928, the family moved on to Port Jervis in Orange County, New York, and lived there during the stock market crash and bank failures that brought on the Great Depression in 1929. They remained in Port Jervis until at least 1936, before moving on to Wells, New York.

The family rarely stayed more than four or five years before moving on. Pilgrim Holiness pastors lived an itinerant lifestyle within a ministry system that valued movement, sacrifice, and renewal over permanence and material stability. Pastors were rarely expected to remain long in one place; instead, they were rotated every few years as part of a revival-centered vision of church life. District superintendents identified communities where Holiness preaching was needed—often towns without a congregation or

areas newly stirred by revival meetings—and assigned pastors to go “open the work.” Once a group of converts formed, meetings might begin in homes or schoolhouses, followed by the gradual establishment of a permanent church. Pastors frequently led congregations in raising simple church buildings through donated land, volunteer labor, and modest funds, often working alongside their parishioners with their own hands, as Melvin did. When a congregation stabilized, the pastor was commonly reassigned to repeat the process elsewhere. Salaries were extremely low and were supplemented by gifts of food, fuel, clothing, and housing donated by the congregation rather than cash. Melvin brought in ten dollars a week during the Depression years, while Anna sewed, raised gardens, cooked and cared for the children. His salary was equivalent to a \$10,000 annual salary in the 2020s. This poverty reinforced the movement’s spiritual ideals of simplicity, temperance, mutual aid, and reliance on God rather than material security. Several large group pictures survive of Melvin and his brother, Elwood, among nearly one hundred pastors and some of their wives, at Pilgrim Holiness regional conferences, one in Gloversville, New York, and another at Lake Placid. The photographs give a sense of the vibrant camaraderie these preachers enjoyed in their sense of mission and extended spiritual community.

Once he was old enough to ride a bicycle, Troy began to deliver newspapers in Port Jervis to earn extra money, often riding for miles in the snow cover roads in freezing temperatures to deliver the papers. He and his brother Melvin, slept together in a bed that was quite cold, and at bedtime Anna would heat up an iron bed warmer in the wood stove and attempt to warm up the beds, before the children rushed from warming themselves by the wood stove to the bed. Melvin and Troy both played musical instruments in their high school band, Melvin playing trumpet and Troy playing baritone horn and trombone.

Melvin Jr., who was gifted with “perfect pitch,” attended four years of college, and later earned his living as a piano tuner and church organist in West Winfield, New York. He married Ellen Merchant in December 1941 a few weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor. When America committed military forces in World War II, he joined the Army and served a tour of combat duty in the Philippines. In later life, Mel became a member of the Freemasons, but never told his parents, as they would not have approved.

Troy graduated from Port Jervis High School in 1936, just before the family moved to Oneonta, New York. After financing Mel’s education, the family lacked funds to send their second son to four years of college, but as an alternative, he attended two years of Business College in Gloversville, New York, where he became a speed typist, producing over 100 words a minute on the manual typewriters of the time. Although he had flat feet and could have received a medical deferment, Troy joined the Army in 1942, met his future wife, Sue Boone, in Nashville, Tennessee, when he was stationed in nearby Fort Campbell, Kentucky. They married on May 3, 1944. Troy did not engage in combat like Mel, yet soon reached the rank of Master-Sergeant E-8. He spent twenty years in the military, continuing the itinerate pattern of his youth with various European tours of duty and stationed in American states as varied as Arizona, New Jersey and Georgia.

Around 1937, the Blanks moved to Wells, Hamilton County, New York, located in the Southern Adirondacks, where Melvin and Anna’s third child, Magdalen, graduated from high school. Afterwards, she moved to Maryland and attended McQueen Gibbs Willis School of Nursing in Easton, then received a bachelor’s degree in nursing at the University of Maryland, and attended Allentown Bible Institute in Pennsylvania, becoming an ordained minister of the Wesleyan Church of the Chesapeake District. In the meantime, her parents moved on to Oneonta, in Otsego County, New York, where they lived on Valleyville Street in a large rented house on the top floor above the church worship space on the ground floor. The 1940 census shows 48 year old Melvin, 46 year old Anna, 23 year old Melvin Jr. and 15 year old Linda, their youngest child.

After a brief military service in World War II. Maggie served on the general duty staff of the Samaritan Hospital and Memorial Hospital in Easton until 1946, when she became a missionary nurse to Zambia, Swaziland (now Eswatini), Pemba, Northern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Pondoland, South Africa. Melvin Sr.'s sister, Effie, and her husband, Arthur Lee Grey, were also missionaries abroad, serving in India for 30 years under the Methodist Board of Foreign Missions. In the late 1950's Maggie returned to Maryland and became nursing supervisor and assistant director of nursing at the Eastern Shore Hospital Center, marrying Dorchester County widower, Carl Mills, in 1963, a Tidewater road crew foreman and farmer with several teenage children.

Melvin and Anna's fourth child, Linda, graduated from High School in Wells, New York, and also served briefly in World War II. After working as a house mother in a children's home in Binghamton, New York, during the 1950s, she received her nursing degree and worked as a nurse in Dorchester County, Maryland, during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1963 she married widower, Millard Insley, a mild-mannered civil engineer, a loving marriage which produced no children.

World War II marked a dramatic shift. With all four children serving in the military, the family experienced the war not only as national crisis but as intimate personal risk, particularly for Mel Jr. in the foxholes of Philippines. Pictures of Mel just after the war show him with a very dark tan and a war-weary look. At home, Anna and Melvin would naturally have lived with anxiety for their children. At the same time, the war brought economic revival. Employment expanded, wages rose, and communities in the Northeast became more stable. Churches benefited from renewed attendance and giving, and pastors were often drawn into civic roles such as morale building, prayer services, and support for servicemen's families. The children's military service also broadened their horizons, exposing them to education, travel, and experiences far beyond small-town church life.



Melvin's Church in Wells, NY



Maggie, Anna, Melvin, Sue and Troy Blann



Linda, Maggie, Troy and Mel Blann ca.1945

By 1944, Melvin and Anna had moved to Troy, New York, on the eastern bank of the Hudson River, located in Rensselaer County, just northeast of Albany, where they lived at 606 7<sup>th</sup> Ave and pastored a church in the Lansingburgh neighborhood of Troy at 6<sup>th</sup> Ave. & 117<sup>th</sup> Street. Their son, Troy, now stationed in Washington D.C., brought his young bride, Sue, to meet his parents there. As Troy's furlough leave was short, he returned to Washington alone and Melvin accompanied Sue back to D.C. a few days later by train. From 1949 to 1952, Troy and his family were stationed in London, then Naples, Italy, returning to the United States just before the birth of their second son, Gregory (the author of this history).

Around 1948, Melvin and Anna moved on to what would be his last pastorate in Monticello, in Sullivan County, New York. By this time, Melvin's salary was more reliable, and the family enjoyed

greater material security than in previous years. The postwar period brought a sense of accomplishment and closure, as their children returned from service, and congregations stabilized. It is said that some of his friends called him “Dick”, although it is not clear how this nickname came about. When Melvin retired from the ministry during the fall of 1952, a large farewell party was given by the congregation for Melvin and Anna before they finally returned to Trappe, Maryland. There, they bought a cottage on the outskirts of Trappe not far from the White Marsh Elementary School. For Anna, this homecoming likely represented a transition from years of sacrifice and service to one of family reconnection with her three sisters and two of her brothers and their families in Trappe, where she and Melvin had grown up and married.

In October of 1952, the Blanns saw off their daughter, Maggie, who traveled from New York City to Southampton, England and from there to southern Africa where, she would serve as a nurse-missionary until her return to the United States in 1958. When she returned, she brought a leopard skin from an animal that had been shot while charging toward her, which Anna mounted on a wall in their living room. By 1952-53, their son, Mel, had settled in West Winfield, New York, with a family of five children and Linda was working in an orphanage in Binghamton, New York. In early February, 1953, Troy, along with Sue and their two young sons, visited his retired parents in Trappe, just before they moved to Yuma Arizona, where Troy was next being stationed.



Anna playing the piano



Melvin with grandchildren



Blann cottage in Trappe, MD.

Melvin and Anna both had siblings in Talbot County, and spent time visiting with them, and in May 1953, they traveled to West Winfield, New York to visit their son, Mel, and his family. That same week, Anna’s oldest brother, Norman, died in Easton. Two months later, Rev. Melvin Raymond Blann died suddenly from heart disease on July 7, 1953, survived by four of his siblings and seven grandchildren. His funeral was held at the Pilgrim Holiness Church in Trappe on Friday, July 10, 1953, with the Rev. G. L. Helsby officiating. Three of Melvin and Anna’s children were able to attend the funeral, but Maggie was unable to return from Africa on short notice. Ten days later another of Anna’s brothers, Olin Matthews, died in nearby Choptank, Maryland. After the funeral, Anna accompanied her son, Mel, back to West Winfield to stay for a few weeks with Mel, his wife, Ellen, and Anna’s five young grandchildren, before returning to Trappe.

After this year of loss, Anna continued to live in their retirement cottage amidst the surrounding tobacco fields on the outskirts of Trappe, attending church and spending time with her three sisters who

lived nearby. To earn extra money, she began to take in sewing and alteration work. A few years later, her daughter, Linda, moved in with her for a time, later earning her nursing degree and working as a nurse in Dorchester County, Maryland, during the 1960s and 1970s. While Mel remained settled in West Winfield, New York, Troy and family were stationed in France, near Fontainebleau and Paris, from 1956 to 1959, and Maggie returned from Africa in 1958. After 1959, all four of Anna's children remained in the United States and were able to visit her more regularly, Maggie and Linda marrying and settling in Dorchester and Talbot Counties in the early 1960s. In 1962, M/Sgt. Troy Blann retired from the army with 20 year's service and settled with his family in Sue's hometown of Nashville, Tennessee. After that, Anna spent several winters in Nashville living with Troy's family, as well as extended stays in the summer in West Winfield, New York with Mel's family. Throughout the 1960s, Anna's house in Trappe became an annual summer vacation destination for both her son's families, with Maggie and Linda settled in the area. Anna loved to read and encouraged this in her grandchildren, often giving books as Christmas presents. When young, her grandchildren were always eager to gather around to hear her dramatic story-telling session of tales from Uncle Remus and Br'er Rabbit.



Anna with great-grandchildren



Anna with her children and grandchildren ca. 1962



Anna Matthews Blann ca. 1970

Around 1971 Anna's memory began to fail and Maggie invited her to live with them in Church Creek and sold the cottage in Trappe. For a little over a year, she lived with them, with a quiet, forgetful presence, often coming downstairs dressed for a new day in the middle of the night, and sometimes curious about the identity of the nice lady in the mirror. As a psychiatric charge nurse, Maggie was well suited as her caretaker. Anna died peacefully on April 14, 1973 and was buried next to Melvin in Easton's Spring Hill Cemetery. All of her children and grandchildren were able to attend the funeral. Over the next decade, 14 great-grandchildren of Melvin and Anna would be born. With Anna's passing we come to the end of her Matthews line which began in 1748 with Thomas Matthews. Her three brothers' children continue the line and the Matthews surname down to the present.

