

## **7 generations of the Blann family with historical context**

**by Gregory Blann**

**This is the story of seven generations of Blanns descended from Joseph Bland Sr. of Dorchester County, Maryland, told with historical context. The author's website contains the genealogical source data and analysis upon which this account draws at:**  
**<https://blannng.wixsite.com/blannwattsgenealogy/blann-family-page>.**

**Joseph Bland Sr.** was the Blann family's patriarch and the earliest confirmed ancestor of his line. His story unfolds against the backdrop of the 18th century, a time marked by profound historical events and local conditions in Dorchester County, Maryland. Joseph Bland Sr. was born around 1690 in Kent County, Delaware in an area close to the border of Maryland.

There is strong circumstantial evidence to suggest that Joseph may have been the son of John Bland, a prosperous planter, merchant and ship owner of Kent Co., Delaware who was born around 1670 and died without a will around 1739. John owned land in both Delaware and Maryland and likely emigrated from England—possibly Yorkshire or London, where the Bland surname was well established. In 1711, John Bland asserted legal rights to a 500-acre tract called "Man Mum" on the north side of Sheppard's Detary Fork in Dorchester County, Maryland. This early legal action suggests that Bland had already become a man of property and influence in the Eastern Shore region. John Bland's participation in the formal proclamation of King George I in Annapolis in 1714 confirms his recognized status among the colonial elite.

By the 1720s, John Bland had relocated or expanded his operations into Kent County, Delaware, where he was referred to as a merchant. He appears in numerous transactions: as a landholder, trustee, and ship owner. Of particular interest is John Bland's procurement of a sloop in 1723 called *The Three Brothers*, acquired through a sheriff's sale in Kent County, Delaware. Such vessels were integral to colonial trade, ferrying goods like tobacco, grain, and other commodities between colonies and across the Atlantic. Given its acquisition by a merchant like John Bland, it's plausible that the *Three Brothers* was utilized for regional trade, navigating the interconnected waterways of the Mid-Atlantic.

The name of John's first wife, the likely mother of Joseph, is unknown. It can be surmised that she died before 1730 when John, at about 60 years of age, married Ann Robisson (Robinson). Later records show another John Bland in Maryland in the 1760s who could be a son of John Bland Sr. and a brother of Joseph. On the Eastern shore of Maryland and Delaware in the early 18th-century the Bland surname was rare. Other than John Bland of Kent County, Delaware and Thomas Bland of Anne Arundel County, Maryland (ca.1650-ca.1700), there are very few Blands in the early Colonial record. This makes John Bland, who was about 20 years older than Joseph, a strong candidate for being the father of Joseph. The birth of Joseph Bland took place during the time of the Protestant Revolution, also known as Coode's Rebellion, which took place in the summer of 1689 in Maryland, then an English province. The Puritans, who had gradually become the majority in the colony of Maryland, revolted against the proprietary government led by Catholic Governor Charles Calvert, 3rd Baron Baltimore. The Calvert family had founded Maryland partly as a refuge for English Catholics and Maryland had long practiced a form of religious tolerance among various Christians, passing the Maryland Toleration Act in 1649, which the Church of England opposed. Calvert acted in various ways to restrain the influence of the Protestant majority, in 1670 restricting suffrage only to men who owned 50 acres or more or held property valued at more than 40 pounds. But after the Catholic monarch, King James II of England, was deposed by the

Anglican King William III and Queen Mary II in 1688, the Protestants took over Maryland and prohibited Catholicism entirely. Full religious toleration would not be restored in Maryland until the American Revolution. Besides Europeans, there were tribes of indigenous people living on the Eastern shore of Maryland during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, mainly the Nanticoke and the Iroquoian speaking Susquehannock.

Around 1717 Joseph Bland married a wife whose name has been lost. In 1718, she gave birth to a son named Joseph Bland Jr. after his father. The first mention of Joseph Bland in Maryland records occurs in 1732 when he purchased 50 acres of land called “Good Hope” in Dorchester County around the area of Preston. The land record describes Joseph as a planter. Most Maryland planters raised and exported tobacco, were affluent and often plantation owners, while Delaware planters primarily planted grain crops. Joseph apparently shared the “Good Hope” property with his son, Joseph Bland Jr. and his wife, Sarah, for in 1764 the three of them together sold the land to a tanner named Richard Jones. Joseph Bland Sr. died a few years after the land sale, having lived into his late seventies.

Another Bland of the time who was likely a distant cousin of Joseph Bland was Richard Bland, who lived in Virginia from 1710 to 1776 and became one of the founding fathers of the United States. A cousin of Thomas Jefferson, Bland served in the House of Burgesses and the First Continental Congress. He also owned a tavern in Williamsburg, Virginia which still stands today. George Washington stayed in the inn which was part of the Bland tavern. Richard Bland was named to Virginia's House of Delegates when it was formed in October 1776, but he died within a month of the appointment.



Colonial Maryland and Virginia

**Joseph Bland Jr.** Joseph, the son of the elder Joseph Bland, was born in 1718 and raised in Dorchester County, Maryland. Records of the time show that he was both a planter and a carpenter. At age 28 Joseph married Sarah Andrew in Dorchester County, Maryland. In March 1746, Sarah's father, George Andrew, gave the newly married couple 100 acres of land which bordered the Choptank River and formed part of his “Grantham” land holdings. The name “choptank” was an Indian word which early on became the name of the river which flows through Dorchester County. Sarah Andrew Bland was born around 1724 in Somerset County, Maryland to planter George Andrew and his wife, Eleanor “Ellen” Adams. Sarah was the only daughter among George and Ellen's four sons. George Andrew, of English ancestry, was born on December 18, 1684 in Somerset County, Maryland, and married 19 year old Ellen Adams in 1709. Sarah's father, George Andrew, died in 1755, predeceased by his wife in 1745.

Many of these planters used slave labor, indentured servants being another alternative source of labor. Records show that one of Sarah's brothers, George Andrew Jr., sold a "negro man named Nase" to Joseph Bland Jr. on Dec. 17, 1768 in Dorchester County, Maryland. The 1800 census for Joseph Bland Jr.'s son, George Bland, shows three enslaved workers, but by 1810, George no longer owned any. As early as 1684, George Fox had established Quaker congregations in the area who opposed slavery and practiced

silent contemplation of the “inner light.” The Third Haven Meeting House of 1684 in Easton is the oldest Quaker, or Friends, meeting house still in use in the area. Two families that would intermarry with the Bland line were Quakers: the Stevens, and the Gootee families. Also joining the Maryland Quakers in their opposition to slavery and commitment to non-violence were the Nicholites, a “New Quaker” offshoot founded in the early 1760s by Joseph Nichols.



Friends' Meeting House in Easton, Maryland, 1684

In 1773 Caroline County was formed out of Dorchester County and Queen Anne's County. The county was named for Lady Caroline Eden, a sister of Frederick Calvert, 6<sup>th</sup> Lord Baltimore and the wife of Sir Robert Eden, then the Governor of Maryland. The County Seat of Caroline County was called Edenton after the Edens, but later the initial E was dropped and the town became known as Denton. After the boundary change, Joseph and Sarah Bland resided in Caroline County until their deaths, Sarah dying in 1799 and Joseph dying in May 1800. Joseph Bland wrote his will on November 5, 1799 in Kent County, Delaware—just over the border from Caroline County—and the will was probated in Caroline County on May 27, 1800. In the will, Joseph mentions his late wife, Sarah, his son, George, his granddaughter, Arianne (George's daughter), his daughter, Elizabeth, and his son-in-law, George Andrew (Jr.). George Andrew was Sarah Andrew's brother, who married Joseph Bland's daughter, Selah, around 1778. Not mentioned in the will was their oldest son, Joseph Bland III, who had died a few years earlier. Before his passing, Joseph Bland II made several land transactions in which he asked planter Isaac Collins to sign as a witness. Isaac was the father of Peter Collins, the short-lived first husband of Clair Ireland Collins, who was the second wife of George Bland, the youngest son of Joseph Bland II.

**George Bland.** Joseph's son, George, was born around 1760 in Dorchester County, in an area that would later become Caroline County, Maryland. When he came of age, George became a militiaman in the Revolutionary war in Charles City County, Virginia, serving as a private in Captain Thomas Hamilton's Company in the Virginia State Regiment from September 1777 to March 1778. George likely traveled by boat from Denton, Maryland down the Choptank River to the Chesapeake Bay then up the James River, passing Jamestown, to Charles City County, Virginia to join the militia. Soldiers often enlisted in neighboring states which paid better or offered land for their services.

After the war's end in November 1783, Annapolis, Maryland became the nation's capital until August 1784. The treaty of Paris was signed there and George Washington resigned his commission in the State House in Annapolis. After Annapolis, the American capital moved three times before finally moving permanently to Washington D.C. in May 1800.

In August 31, 1797 George Bland married Elizabeth "Betsy" Caulk, the daughter of Henry and



Frances "Frankie" Caulk, in Caroline County, Maryland. After bearing two daughters, Sally and Arianne, Betsy passed away in 1808. In early 1809, Deborah Caulk, the surviving sister of Betsy Caulk Bland, signed a document in court, witnessed by Joseph Bland, which leased to George Bland all of the land which their late mother, Frances Caulk, had bequeathed her two daughters. The agreement further stipulated that George would agree to build Deborah a comfortable log house on the land, for which she would provide wood and materials, and he would pay Deborah a small portion of the profits made on the land, including some corn and wheat—property on which George could continue to live for life. That George would be asked to build a house for Deborah suggests that he was probably a skilled carpenter, like his father, Joseph. The required share of corn and wheat gives us an idea of the crops he raised.

On December 8, 1809, George Bland married the widowed Clair Collins in Talbot County, Maryland. The minister for the marriage was Rev. Willoughby. Clair was likely from a family whose surname was Ireland, with two older brothers, John and Charles Ireland, living in Caroline County. Clair had previously married Peter Collins in 1802, the son of Bland family friend, Isaac Collins. Together they had three sons before Peter's untimely death in 1808. Clair and her brother, Charles, were made executors for Peter's estate and were called up together as witnesses at the probate of Peter's will. Clair would subsequently turn over all executor duties to Charles Ireland. In 1811 Charles E. Ireland would become the guardian of two of Peter & Clair Collins' minor orphans, Peter Jr. and Lishey, raising them until his own death in 1818. Numerous robust DNA matches between The Ireland and Bland family, strongly support Clair's connection to the Ireland family.

Clair was in her early thirties when she married George Bland in 1809. She was born about 1776 in Dorchester County, the year of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Clair's parents were almost certainly Jonathan Ireland Jr. and his wife, Rachel, of Dorchester County, the parents of John, Charles and another daughter named Mary Ann Ireland. Jonathan traveled to nearby Delaware to join the Revolutionary war around the time of Clair's birth. He served with Gen. George Washington at Valley Forge and was among the troops who crossed the Delaware with Washington. After several engagements against the British in the southern theatre, Jonathan was killed in action during the first Battle of Camden, South Carolina on August 16, 1780. For many years his family never knew what became of him, but more recently his fate was discovered by genealogist, Robert Ireland. Young Clair and her family may have been taken in by Jonathan's parents until their death or lived with other family members until they reached maturity.



Revolutionary War battle



George Washington and troops at Valley Forge



After the Revolutionary war, numerous planters freed their enslaved workers as the economy changed and Baltimore grew to become one of the largest cities on the eastern seaboard, with the highest number of free people of color in the US. It was the third largest point of entry for European immigrants on the Eastern Seaboard during the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1830, the Baltimore and Ohio (B&O) Railroad became the first chartered railroad in the US and by 1852 connected the Eastern Shore to the Ohio River. In relation to the Eastern Shore of Maryland, Baltimore was the “big city” only hours away by boat, where people traveled for important occasions, cultural events and vacations.

A year after George and Clair Bland married, Thomas Bland, the first of the couple’s two children, was born in 1810 in the town of Denton, the County Seat of Caroline County. Thomas’ brother, Robert J. Bland, was born in 1817. At age 44, Robert would join the Union Navy in 1861 during the Civil War, and be assigned to the ship *Allegany* in Washington D.C. He was later transferred to the Army, where he became a Captain. During times of peace he lived with his wife Amelia (“Millie”) and family, and made his living as a carpenter, a family trade for several generations. George and Clair Bland continued to live in Caroline County until their passing in the mid-1820s.

**Thomas Bland.** Thomas, the eldest son of George and Clair Bland, was born in 1810 in Denton. Around 1835, he married Elizabeth Stevens, who was also of Caroline County. Elizabeth was about the same age as Thomas, born in 1810, and DNA suggests that she may have been the daughter of William Stevens and Violetta “Letta” Gootee of Caroline County. Letta Gootee’s grandfather was named Phunback Pritchett, the son of a medical doctor from Wales, Dr. John Pritchett, and his wife, Margery Price, whose grandfather, John Price I, came to the Jamestown colony from Wales and lived for a time among some of the famous early settlers such as Captain John Smith, John Rolfe and Pocahontas. Dr. John Pritchett was born in 1641 and immigrated in 1670 to Dorchester County, Maryland as “a Gentleman Adventurer.” The Colonists of Maryland were divided into six classes. The first class, termed “Gentleman Adventurers,” were persons who transported themselves, at their own expense, often bringing with them indentured servants. For each person transported, the person transporting them received 50 acres of land. Dr. John Pritchett, a Quaker, made his home at a beautiful plantation on “Apes Hill” in Dorchester County and owned several large tracts of land there. As a doctor (or “chemist”) Dr. Pritchett had a reputation for being kind to the Indians. A contemporary account says he “administered to their needs, as well as the white man, and the Indians respected him and his family. To honor one of these old Indian Chiefs, it is said he named one of his sons Phunback.” Phunback Pritchett, the author’s five times great-grandfather, died in Dorchester County in 1769.

Thomas and Elizabeth had a son and two daughters, Robert Arthur (1840-1916), Mary Jane (1836-1880) and Elizabeth Ann “Lizzie” (1846-1912). Around 1849, a little more than a decade after he wed Elizabeth, Thomas Bland died at the age of 39. Little documentary evidence survives to illuminate Thomas’ life, a circumstance typical of men of modest means in early nineteenth-century Caroline County. Appearing only in census records and leaving no deeds, probate files, or tax assessments, Thomas was almost certainly part of the large class of rural laborers and small farmers who worked rented land or hired out their labor in an agrarian economy already under strain. The plight of impoverished families was intensified by the Panic of 1837 and the prolonged economic depression that followed, leaving families without land or credit especially vulnerable. High mortality was common among men in their 30s and 40s, due to accidents, infections, and chronic conditions that were survivable later in the century.

When Thomas died around 1849, at only thirty-nine years of age, his family faced immediate crisis in

a society that offered no life insurance, survivor benefits, or meaningful public relief. Elizabeth Stevens Bland, lacking property or legal protections, was forced to rely on extended kin networks and survival strategies common to the period, including placing her children with relatives and binding out her young son, Arthur, to other households. Under Maryland law, Elizabeth Stevens Bland had few protections unless land existed from which dower could be claimed, and there is no evidence that such property existed. Widows in her position commonly relied on extended kin networks, exchanged domestic labor for shelter, or delayed remarriage until a viable arrangement could be made.

**Robert Arthur Bland.** Arthur Bland (Blann), the only son of Thomas and Elizabeth Bland, was born in Caroline County, Maryland on March 5, 1840. Arthur was the middle child of Thomas and Elizabeth's three children, Mary Jane being the oldest at around age thirteen or fourteen when her father died around 1849. Arthur was eight or nine years old and his youngest sister, Lizzie, was three or four. After Thomas' death, Elizabeth sent her oldest daughter, Mary Jane, to live with her relatives, William and Susan Willis Turner. William Turner was the son of Elizabeth's cousin, Sally Gootee and her husband, Garretson Turner. Elizabeth Bland and her youngest daughter, Lizzie, moved into the household of the brother of Susan Willis Turner, John Rumbold Willis, a relative who was eleven years younger than Elizabeth. John R. Willis' first wife, Celia, died in early 1849, leaving behind a young son named Thomas Willis. John quickly remarried a second young wife, Mary Todd, who died within less than a year, perhaps from childbirth complications. John was again a widower by 1850, and Elizabeth may have initially functioned as domestic help and cook for John's household, since she appears in his household in the 1850 census as an unmarried widow with her daughter, Lizzie.

Elizabeth's son, Arthur, not yet ten years old when his father died, was farmed out to non-relatives as an indentured servant or "bound-out boy" in order to help pay off family debts and learn a trade. The 1850 census shows an eleven year old boy named Arthur, living next door to John Willis and Elizabeth Bland, with the family of William Neighbors, who is probably Arthur Bland. Years later, Arthur's son, Nelson Blann, recounted how his father was bound out with several families and ran away from one family that kept him, because he was forced to eat leftovers and to live and sleep in the barn with the animals. The binding out of Arthur and the placement of his teenage sister with relatives were well-established strategies for managing debt and survival among poor families in the antebellum period. Binding out transferred the cost of a child's upbringing to another household while providing the child with labor training, though conditions ranged widely and could be severe.

On April 4, 1853, John R. Willis and Elizabeth Stevens Bland were married. After the marriage, Arthur was reunited with his mother and younger sister in the Willis household, living there until age 21. Toward the end of 1853, Elizabeth gave birth to another daughter, Molly Todd Willis. Arthur's older sister, Mary Jane, married William McCracken a few years later and Elizabeth had a final child in 1864 named Roxanne or "Roxie". Although Elizabeth would have been 53 or 54 when this birth occurred, DNA evidence strongly suggests that she was Roxie's mother. The 1860 census shows Arthur Bland, age 21, living in Denton, Caroline County, Maryland with his mother, step-father, sister Lizzie, and step-sister Mollie. By 1870 Arthur is in Talbot County boarding with a farmer named Nathaniel Clifton. Elizabeth died in 1878 and, after her passing, John Willis remarried for a fourth and final time to a wife named Ellen. John died in 1895 in Tuckahoe Neck, Caroline County.

Steamboats were introduced to the Eastern Shore of Maryland a few decades before the Civil War. Denton, as Caroline County's County Seat, flourished as a warehouse town and storage depot for ships coming up the Choptank River from Cambridge. Denton's fresh produce, butter and eggs were much

prized by steamboat business clients who in turn shipped them to a receptive market in Baltimore. As early as the 1860s, the Individual Enterprise Line was serving Denton with its side-wheeler, *Highland Light*. The company became the Maryland Steamboat Company in 1868 and replaced the *Highland Light* with the new *Enoch Pratt* for the Choptank run in 1878. Between 1881 and 1885, Maryland Steamboat Company built three sister ships – *Avalon*, *Ida*, and *Joppa*, the later two operating on the Choptank.



Steamboats of the 1860 and 1870s on the Choptank River

In the mid 1860s Arthur Bland, now in his twenties, signed on with a steamboat captain named Hardcastle at Lloyd's Landing, and began running a steamboat on the Choptank River, hauling people, farm produce and plants back and forth from Baltimore to the Eastern Shore. Arthur ran the steamboat until the mid 1870s. He also developed an alcohol habit during this period. Many years ago, the author heard a family story in which a Maryland relative was said to have once encountered an old local man who had known Arthur Bland during his steamboat days. The man characterized Arthur as "the meanest man on the Chesapeake." While no other such tendentious stories have survived regarding Arthur, we can probably infer from this statement that Arthur was "mean" when he drank too much. A grandson of Arthur related that Arthur was often called "Otts" by the locals and during his days as a sailor, he boarded in Trappe, Maryland with Nathaniel Clifton.

After about a decade at sea, Captain Hardcastle put Arthur ashore on one of Hardcastle's farms at Miller's landing. According to Arthur's grandson, John Blann, the Robinson family had a farm down the river from Lloyd's Landing and because of that proximity a relationship started that ended in marriage. On Jan.3, 1871, at the age of 31, Arthur married Annie Robinson, the 20 year old daughter of Solomon M. Robinson and Sally Turner of Talbot County, Maryland. After the wedding, Arthur and Annie lived at the home of the farm manager at Lloyd's Landing, where all nine of their children were born.





Lloyd's Landing in 2000 and in 1939, before renovations

Thought to be Arthur and Annie's wedding photo 1871

Annie Robinson, born in 1851, was a deeply religious woman who attended the local Methodist Episcopal Church. Under her influence, Arthur stopped drinking alcohol and began to attend church services. Also, Talbot and surrounding counties went dry by local ordinance in 1874. Like Arthur, Annie had lost a parent at a young age when her 20 year old mother, Sally Turner Robinson, died soon after Annie's birth. Solomon, her father, quickly remarried Margaret Seymore, who became Annie's foster-mother and gave birth to one further child named William Franklin Robinson in 1853. Annie had brown eyes and dark hair and was petite in older years, while Arthur was more stocky and wore a thick beard in later years.

Up until the time of the American Revolution, the main religious denominations in Maryland were Episcopal, Quaker, Nicholite, Presbyterian, Baptist, Anglican and Roman Catholic, the latter being suppressed for nearly a century. Methodism was 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, including blacks and illiterates, in a way that Anglicanism had not. The Methodist church was invested in helping the community build houses, school, 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. One of the offshoots of Wesleyan Methodism was the Emmanuel Pilgrim Holiness Church, a sect that came into being around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and was the denomination of choice for many of the children and grand-children of Arthur and Annie Bland during its half-century of prominence. In 1968, the denomination was re-absorbed into the Wesleyan Church. Camp meetings and tent revivals were an important part of community life. 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 "Arthur Bland of Trappe."

Annie's father, Solomon Robinson, and his older brother, George, were drafted into military service in 1863 under Capt. John Frazier Jr., a Union captain from Kent County, Maryland. Although Maryland remained neutral during the Civil War, many of Maryland's young men joined the conflict, fighting on both sides of the war. Solomon Robinson, who worked as a farmer, died in July 24, 1882, surviving his second wife by one year. Annie's birth mother, Sarah "Sally" Turner, connects the family line with the Turners and Gootees of Dorchester County, Maryland. Sally's father, Garretson Turner, was born in 1790. His Turner line traces back to Henry Turner I, who was born about 1660 in Queensborough, Kent, England and immigrated to Dorchester County, where he died in 1679. Sally Turner's mother was Sally Gootee (Gowty), who was born around 1790 in Caroline County. Her line goes back to Jean Gautier, who

was born in France around 1645 and immigrated to Dorchester County, Maryland where he died in 1699.

There are three versions relating how the Bland name was changed to Blann. Annie Robinson Bland has been credited with changing the spelling of the name from Bland to Blann in the 1870s, when her oldest son, George, first went to school and had to spell the family name. George claimed that he himself initiated the change. Ellis Blann, a grandson of Arthur, said his father told him he had heard that Arthur went down to the courthouse and had the name changed legally to help avoid the confusion between so many Blands in the area. While this is possibly compatible with the other versions, it is uncertain how literate Arthur was. Harold Blann stated that, as a very young boy in the early 1930s, he visited his great-grandmother Annie Robinson Blann and, while he sat in her lap scribbling what he thought was intelligible writing, she advised him: "It is very important for you to learn how to read and write properly. Your great-grandfather (Arthur) never learned how to write because he never got the chance to go to school as a child." Yet, it would not be surprising if Arthur, as a former steamship captain, was able to sign his name. The 1900 census is the first census that shows the spelling change to the name Arthur Blann, the 1890 US census being lost. As the name was occasionally spelled "Blann" even at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it must have been changed previously by other Blands as well.

Sometime before 1909, Arthur and Annie Blann moved to a house on Landing Neck Road, in Trappe. This road, on the western side of Route 50 across from the White Marsh cemetery, is now called Almshouse Road and the area is called Hambleton. The Blann's house still stands at the first crossroad, which goes into Trappe, on a street called "Old Trappe Road" as it approaches town. The crossroads on Route 50 where the ruins of the White Marsh Church stand today were sometimes called "Hole in the Wall" after a tavern and inn that once stood in the area.



Ruins of White Marsh Church in 1970



Arthur and Annie Blann ca. 1912



Blanns at their house in Hambleton

There was at one time a small community around the crossroads with a blacksmith shop, a tannery, and a few stores, all now long gone. One of them was a grocery store run by Anna Blann's maternal grandfather, Johann Mēnck. The road that ran by the Blann's house from Hambleton into Trappe, which also passes by what would later be Melvin and Anna Blann's house (the author's grandparents), was the old Route 50, prior to the construction of the nearby four lane highway which is now US 50.

An interesting bit of lore surrounds the cemetery of the old White Marsh Church. For over a century, two wall sections of the ruined church have stood a mile or two from the old Blann home at the junction of Highway 50 and Almshouse Road (more recently restored to one complete wall with an arched entrance). Sometime around 1670, near the intersection of two main roads, an Episcopal church was built at White Marsh to serve the needs of the people in surrounding towns from Oxford to the Choptank River.

The church became the seat of St. Peter's Parish in 1695 and was a thriving community church throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Between 1714 and 1745, Rev. Daniel Maynadier, a French Huguenot immigrant from England, was the rector of the White Marsh Church. At some point during his tenure, his wife, Hannah, appeared to die and was buried in the church graveyard, wearing a valuable ring. When night fell, grave robbers dug up the coffin, desiring to steal the ring. But as her fingers were too swollen to remove the ring, they determined to cut off her finger. As soon as they began, the pain brought the comatose woman back to life and she sat up with a cry, causing the robbers to flee as from a ghost. Hannah recovered enough to walk back to the nearby farm house where she and the Rector lived and bang on the door until her husband answered it in amazement. After other churches were built in the 1800s in Trappe and Easton, the White March Church gradually fell into disuse. On January 12, 1897, after an open air service, the building caught fire and burned down, the blaze accidentally started while burning trash. Today, only one brick wall with an archway entrance remains, along with the church foundations and a brick altar. The cemetery grounds are well kept and an historical marker on the brick covered floor of the church commemorates: Daniel Maynadier, Rector of St. Peter's Parish, and his wife, Hannah Martin.

Arthur Blann died in Talbot County, Maryland at age 76 on April 12, 1916, according to his tombstone at the Springhill Cemetery in Easton. His widow, Annie Robinson Blann, lived her final years with her daughter, Hattie, at the house in Hambleton, near Trappe, and died at age 88 on September 13, 1939. She is buried next to Arthur. Their nine children were: George T. Blann (1871-1952), Roland Solomon Blann (1873-1949), Sarah Wilhelmina ("Willie") Smith (1875-1947), Percy Robinson Blann (1877-1917), Effie Ellen Grey (1880-1964), Rev. Arthur Elwood Blann (1883-1969), Hattie Melvina Swann (1885-1979), Nelson Clifford Blann (1887-1975), and Melvin Raymond Blann Sr. (1891-1953), the author's grandfather.



Blann family ca. 1938. Front row from left to right: Wilhelmina Smith, Hattie Swann, their mother, Annie Robinson Blann, and Effie Gray. Back row, left to right: Elwood, Roland, George, Nelson and Melvin Blann. The photo on the right is Arthur Blann



**Rev. Melvin Raymond Blann.** Melvin, the youngest of Arthur and Annie's five sons, was born April 26, 1891 at Lloyd's landing on the Choptank River in Talbot County, Maryland, the youngest of nine children of Arthur and Annie Blann. According to his daughter, Linda Blann Insley, Melvin attended school only to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, his sister, Hattie, being his only sibling to complete high school. However, he did take several years of seminary training. His older brother, Elwood, attended "God's Bible College," an evangelical seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio, and become a Pilgrim Holiness pastor. He encouraged his brother to follow his example and Melvin did, but his training at the Bible College was interrupted when Arthur had a stroke and Melvin returned home to help out. This would have been around 1914 or 1915, just at the start of World War I. One of the last photos taken of Arthur Blann shows him sitting in a wheelchair next to his wife in the front yard of their house in Hambleton. Linda commented on the photo, observing that her grandfather was crippled with arthritis during his final years, but it was probably the stroke that put him in a wheelchair.



Arthur and Annie Blann



Rev. Melvin R. Blann



Arthur and Annie Blann with Melvin

While away from seminary attending to his parents in Trappe, Melvin met Anna Matthews, a local school teacher, and they began a courtship. Anna Matthews, the daughter of Solomon Matthews and Annie Menck, was born June 29, 1892 in Trappe, Maryland. Solomon, her father, was born in 1849 in Talbot County, Maryland and died there in 1934. Around 1879 he married Anna Dorothea Mënck, the daughter of German immigrant, Johann Mënck and his wife, Magdalene Craver. Johann's German parents are unknown and they did not immigrate to America. Around 1842, Johann boarded a ship from Hamburg, likely entering through Baltimore's port, and traveled south to Virginia where he met Catherine Craver, the daughter of Zachariah Craver (grandson of Revolutionary War veteran, Johannes Craver) and Annie Weatherwax, daughter of a third generation German immigrant named Johann Andreas Widerwax. The Cravers were Presbyterian and the Weatherwaxes were Dutch Reform, while Johann Mënck was Lutheran, but they all shared German and Dutch origins. Johann Mënck and Catherine Craver were married around 1846. They had one child who died, and may have been the cause of Catherine's death in 1848. Subsequently, Johann married Catherine's younger sister, Magdalene Craver, on June 2, 1849 at the Concordia Lutheran Evangelical Church in Washington D.C.

Around 1835, Magdalene's father, Zacharia Craver, was stationed along with his family at Fort Monroe, Virginia, a Union military fort. The 1850 census shows the Craver family in Fox Hill, Elizabeth City, Virginia, with six children, and lists 50 year old Zacharia's occupation as a blacksmith, while the

1860 census lists him as a cooper (barrel-maker). No military record has been found for Zacharia, which suggests he may have been appointed to a civilian federal post at Fort Monroe as a cooper, clerk, or technician, a common practice for literate Northerners with skills. Six of their older children left home before 1850, including Magdalene and Anna Craver who settled on the Eastern shore of Maryland, Monroe and Jefferson Craver who settled in Baltimore, while Dave and Jefferson Craver settled elsewhere in Maryland. When the Civil War began in 1861, Monroe Craver joined the Confederate Army and, per family lore, was riding with Stonewall Jackson on May 5, 1863 when the general was mortally wounded.

Zachariah's granddaughter, Anna Matthews Blann, recounts that "On the strength of their father's position, the younger girls obtained passes to visit their sisters in Maryland and always returned with smuggled medical supplies for the Southern Army. The supplies were tied around their waists, hidden by the voluminous hoop skirts of the times."

Annie Mënck, Johann and Magdalene Craver Mënck's daughter, was born just prior to the Civil War in January 1860 in Baltimore just before her parents moved to Talbot County, Maryland. In 1879, Annie married Solomon Matthews, a 30 year old carpenter from Trappe, Maryland and together they had nine children, the fifth being Anna Matthews, the author's grandmother. Photographs of Solomon and Annie from the 1880s show a fashionably dressed young couple with dark hair and brown eyes. Later photos from the 1920s show Solomon with a white goatee beard and Annie with eyes closed serenely, having lost her eyesight during the final decades of her life.



Annie Mënck and Solomon Matthews

Anna Matthews

Anna Matthews grew up in Trappe where she attended grade school and graduated from high school at age 16, the only one of her sisters who completed high school. A number of eighth grade drawings and watercolors by Anna survive which show her artistic gifts. She also played piano, a common instrument of music prior to phonograph records and radio. After high school, Anna took further summer courses in

Charlottesville Virginia, near Monticello, where she received her teaching certificate. She likely attended either the University of Virginia, which was founded by Thomas Jefferson and began to admit women to summer school in the 1890s, or the State Female Normal School, founded in 1908, which later became Mary Washington College/University.

After Anna received her teaching certification, she returned to Trappe, where she worked as an elementary school teacher for about seven years at the Royal Oaks and Bruceville schools in towns near Trappe, prior to her marriage to Melvin Blann at age 24. Her daughter, Linda, related that Melvin proposed to Anna as they went over a bridge, but she made him wait for an answer until they had crossed the bridge. Alma Hall, the granddaughter of Anna's sister, Maggie Thume, wrote to the author in 2003 that her father, Albert Thume, had been a student of Anna in a one room school in Talbot County, Maryland.

Rev. Melvin Raymond Blann and Anna Adelia Matthews were married in Trappe on Anna's twenty-fourth birthday on June 29, 1916, just two months after the passing of Melvin's father, Arthur Blann. The couple's first born child, Melvin Raymond Blann Jr., was born the following year in 1917, on Broome's Island, in Calvert County, Maryland, which was Melvin Sr's first pastorate. By 1919, Melvin had transferred to a church in Mineral, Virginia where their second child, Troy Robinson Blann Sr., the author's father, was born. A daughter, Magdalen Matthews Blann, was born in Mineral, Virginia in 1921. Around 1923, Melvin followed in the footsteps of his brother, Rev. Elwood Blann, and moved his family to upstate New York, where he continued his pastoral work, beginning in Maine, Broome County, New York, near Binghamton, where their last child, Linda Lee Blann, was born in 1925 and later lived for a time during the 1950s. Linda's middle name, Lee, may have been in honor of Robert E. Lee who Anna regarded as an inspiring general and founder of Washington and Lee University, despite his Confederate loyalties during the war.

In the following years, Melvin would oversee churches in Port Jervis, Wells, Oneonta, Troy (Lansingburg), and finally Monticello, New York. His skills extended beyond the pulpit, as he also worked as a carpenter, helping to construct some of the churches he served. It is said that some of his friends called him "Dick" although it is not clear how this nickname came about.

Melvin's daughter, Linda, related a comical scene she witnessed at a New York Pilgrim Holiness Camp meeting attended by both Melvin and his elder brother, Elwood, between whom a mild sibling rivalry existed. It wasn't unusual for one of the pastors to loudly begin singing a hymn, which the people would then join in singing, but on this occasion, both Melvin and Elwood exuberantly launched into different hymns at the same time. As Linda described it, both were too stubborn to defer to the other and kept bellowing out their different hymns at the top of their lungs until the musical cacophony finally dissolved in laughter.

Around 1928, the family moved on to Port Jervis in Orange County, New York (near the eastern Pennsylvania border), 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 in one location 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 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 there and start a church. 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.

A number of Melvin's typewritten sermons survive, prepared by Anna, the former school teacher, who would type them up, proofread and correct any errors. The sermons, which are radio addresses, are thematic homilies which amplify various Biblical passages that provide guidance for Christian living. The two following benedictory prayers from the sermons give the flavor of Melvin's pastoral style:

*Let us pray. Lord we look to thee to help us this day. May our faith ever be in thee. May we apply our hearts unto wisdom and walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called. Thou hast promised never to leave us nor forsake us. So help each one of us this day to be careful of our words and acts. May thy richest blessings rest upon each one of us. These favors we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*We come to thee today our Father, asking that thou wilt remember each of us, and help us that profess thy name, that we'll live daily the transformed life, show to others the realities of thy Salvation, and those that do not know thee in transforming Grace, help them today to make a decision to serve and love thee. May thy richest blessings rest upon us all this day. We ask these blessings in the precious name of Jesus, Amen.*

Melvin's family grew up during the Depression and had little money to spare. Melvin's pay during those years was \$10 a week, plus housing in the church's parsonage and occasional help from congregation members. Anna took in sewing alterations and their son, Troy, earned extra money with a paper route, a miles-long bicycle route which he delivered both in the summer and during New York's snowy winters.

Most of Melvin and Anna's family played musical instruments. Anna played piano for church services, Melvin Jr. played trumpet, piano and organ, Troy played Baritone horn, tuba and trombone, and Maggie played the piano. Whether Linda played the piano a little as well is not known. Melvin, 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, 24 year old Mel (Jr.) joined the Army and served a tour of combat duty in the Phillipines. Years later, Mel recounted the anxiety of enduring enemy shelling in the trenches and said he started smoking cigarettes to help offset the stench of death surrounding them. Mel and Ellen had five children—Melvin III, Judy, Diane, Christine, and Debbie—but after the children were grown, the couple divorced. Subsequently, Mel remarried a woman named Marion in Herkimer, New York, a few years before his death from heart disease in 1983. At Mel's funeral, the extended family learned that Mel was a lifelong member of the Freemasons, although this had never been revealed to his parents.



Melvin and Anna with sons, Melvin and Troy (baby)      Blann family during World War II      Troy and Sue Blann 1945  
(Middle photo: left to right standing: Troy, Anna, Melvin, Mel Jr.; Kneeling: Linda and Maggie.)

Melvin and Anna's third child, Magdalen Matilda "Maggie" Blann, graduated from high school in Wells, New York and from McQueen Gibbs Willis School of Nursing in Easton, Maryland. She 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. 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 thirty years under the Methodist Board of Foreign Missions. In 1858, Maggie returned to Maryland and became nursing supervisor and assistant director of nursing at Eastern Shore Hospital Center, marrying Dorchester County widower, Carl Mills, in 1963, a Tidewater road crew foreman and farmer who brought to the marriage three teenage children by his late first wife. Maggie retired in 1981 and died of cancer in 1998.

Linda Lee Blann, Melvin and Anna's fourth child, also served briefly in World War II, and after working as a house mother in a children's home in Binghamton, New York during the 1950s, received her nursing degree and worked as a nurse in Dorchester County, Maryland during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1963 she married a mild-mannered widower and civil engineer named Millard Insley—a loving marriage which produced no children. Linda died in Cambridge, Maryland on May 10, 2006.

While all four of the Blann children joined the army during World War II, Troy remained in the army the longest, retiring with 20 years of military service. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, Troy's family was in England and Italy, while Magdalen was in Africa, both continuing the itinerant lifestyle of their upbringing during their first half of life. In 1952, Rev. Melvin Raymond Blann retired with his wife to Maryland, where they bought a retirement cottage in Trappe, Maryland. Melvin and Anna both had a number of siblings in Trappe with whom they enjoyed visiting after so many years away from the area. In February of 1953, Troy's family, now back in the United States, traveled from New Jersey, where Troy was then stationed, to visit his parents. The following May, Melvin and Anna traveled to West Winfield, New York to visit their son, Mel and his family.



Melvin Blann with granddaughter Judy



Rev. Melvin and Anna Blann in Trappe, 1953



Anna Matthews Blann, 1970

On July 7, 1953, Melvin passed away from heart disease, survived by four of his siblings, including Elwood, who died in 1969 in Troutville, Virginia. Melvin's 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. Anna lived on in Trappe for nearly two decades, moving in with her daughter, Magdalen Mills and family, in Church Creek, Maryland during her last year, when her memory began to fail. Anna Matthews Blann passed away peacefully on April 4, 1973, survived by all four of her children, seven grandchildren, and the first of her 14 great-grandchildren.

**Troy Robinson Blann Sr.** Troy, the second son of Melvin and Anna, was born in Mineral, Virginia on Nov. 15, 1919. Troy grew up as a pastor's son in various cities in New York, graduating from Port Jervis High School in 1936. After financing Mel's education during the aftermath of the Depression, the family didn't have enough money to send Troy 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. Around 1937 and 1938, he worked for "Pop" Tibbits at a summer camp at Camp of the Woods, New York, and he worked another summer at a camp in Florida before finding work at General Electric for a few years in Schenectady, New York. Subsequently, Troy joined the U.S. Army in 1942 and attended the Army War College in Washington D.C. Although he had flat feet and could have been deferred from World War II service, Troy voluntarily enlisted and in time reached the rank of Master-Sergeant E-8. He never saw combat but worked primarily in accounting and reports and sometimes as a supervising sergeant.

Troy was initially stationed to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and it was during a furlough to Nashville that he met Sue Boone, who he would marry on May 3, 1944. Sue had grown up in Nashville and her parents were members of the Nazarene Church, which held similar beliefs to the Pilgrim Holiness Church. She was a freshman at Trevecca Nazarene College, then located off Gallatin Road in East Nashville, when she met Troy. From Nashville, they moved to Washington D.C. where their first son was still-born and buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Around 1947, Troy was assigned to the Headquarters Army Field Force in Fort Monroe, Virginia. The couple lived in Newport News when their first living son, Rob (Dr. Troy Robinson Blann Jr.), was born in nearby Hampton, Virginia on Oct. 23, 1948.

Six months later Troy was assigned to overseas duty in London, England and Melvin and Anna saw them off when they departed from New York by ship on March 7, 1949. They stayed at 39 Rutland Court in the Denmark Hill area of London through 1951, when Troy was reassigned for a year to Naples, Italy. Another son was conceived in Italy a few months before Troy was reassigned to Bayonne, New Jersey.



The family returned to the United States several months before the birth of Gregory Boone Blann (the author), who was born at the Marine Army Hospital on Staten Island, New York on Oct. 14, 1952.



Blann siblings (left to right:) Troy, Linda, Maggie and Mel



Sue, Troy, Gregory and Rob Blann in France 1959

For the next ten years the family continued to be stationed in a variety of locales. From 1953 to 1956, the family lived in Yuma, Arizona, followed by three years in France in the small village of Malesherbes, near Fontainebleau and Paris, where Troy supervised French workers at the Melun Terminal District. Troy's frequent furloughs afforded the family numerous opportunities to visit all over France, as well as Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy and Spain. Memorable trips included the 1958 World's Fair in Belgium, the prehistoric Lascaux caves, the Louvre, Notre Dame de Paris, Chateau de Versailles, Mont Saint Michel, the Riviera, Innsbruck, Salzburg and Berchtesgaden in the Bavarian Alps. In November, 1959 the family returned to the United States and spent six months in McCordsville, Indiana, before Troy's final two year stint in the Army, with his family, in Columbus, Georgia (Fort Benning; 2nd Infantry Division).

In 1962, with the Vietnam War looming, Troy retired from the Army with twenty years of service and settled with his family in Nashville, Tennessee. There he first worked for Dupont, then American Paper and Twine as their chief payroll master and accountant. He was an avid stamp collector with a huge stamp collection, much of it accumulated during his years in Europe, and in later years he served as treasurer of the local stamp club in Nashville. Troy and Sue were regular members of the First Nazarene Church in Nashville. Their two children also attended until they left home to attend college at Vanderbilt University and Peabody College in the late 1960s and early 1970s. During the 1960s, Sue worked first as a department store attendant and then trained as a licensed practical nurse, working at various nursing homes in Nashville over the next two decades. They both retired in 1998 and moved to Trevecca Towers, a retirement home on the Trevecca University campus, now located on Murfreesboro Road. Troy died on Feb. 19, 1999, at age 79, from diabetes and heart disease, receiving a 21 gun military salute at his funeral. Sue lived on until 2007, residing next door to her sister, Edith Galloway at Trevecca Towers, and gradually developing vascular dementia during the last few years of her life.





Troy and Sue Blann 1997



Troy and Sue with the next two generations 1990



Master-Sgt. Troy Blann 1961

Middle photo (left to right on Couch: Gregory, Claire, Sylvia, Tristan, Barbara, Jennifer, and Rob Blann)

Troy and Sue Blann were survived by two sons and their wives, and two granddaughters, now grown with children of their own. Troy's brother, Mel, had five children, and eleven grandchildren. The line of Arthur and Annie Blann also continues through the many descendants of Melvin's eight siblings. Our narrative ends with the close of a historical arc. Across seven generations, the Bland/Blann family moved from the colonial Eastern Shore through war, migration, poverty, revival, and global travel, adapting repeatedly to the circumstances of their times. While the family's later generations continue into the present, their stories remain their own to tell. What remains here is an account of one family's passage through more than three centuries of American history.