

DANIEL SKINNER SR. (1733-1813)

A Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS) Biographical Study

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Synthesized and Typeset using NotebookLM, July 4, 2026

Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS) Application: This biographical study synthesizes primary land deeds, probate files, and early family journals to reconstruct the life of Daniel Skinner Sr. It directly resolves major chronological conflicts in regional histories (such as establishing his 1813 death year over secondary 1812 claims) and dismantles local Tory myths while proving the lineage of his daughter Lilly Skinner.

I. Parentage and New England Origins

Daniel Skinner Sr. was born into a colonial Connecticut family in the town of Preston, New London County, where he was born on **March 22, 1733**. He was the third of nine children born to **Joseph Skinner Sr.** and **Martha Kinne**, who had married on April 30, 1729. Daniel grew up in a large, active household alongside his siblings Benjamin, Timothy, John, Abner, Haggai, Calvin, Joseph, Martha, and Huldah.

II. The Settlement of Cushetunk and Family Tragedy (1755-1761)

In 1754, the newly chartered Connecticut-backed Delaware Company began securing land tracts from the native Delaware (Lenape) Indians to establish its first settlement in the Upper Delaware River Valley. Joseph Skinner Sr. was among the original Connecticut grantees. On **September 8, 1755**, Joseph gave his son Daniel a deed for a quarter-part of his 100-acre share at the **Ackhake Place** (meaning 'Wolf Place' in the Algonquin tongue) on the western flats of the Delaware River, for five pounds New York currency. Daniel assisted in laying out a planned town eight miles from the river, selecting a meeting house site and a preacher's lot under surveyor William Price.

The family's pioneering endeavors were soon shattered by tragedy. Around 1758 or 1759, Joseph Skinner Sr. journeyed away from home on business regarding his land titles and vanished. Roughly two years later, his skeletal remains were discovered at **Taylor's Eddy** (about a mile above the Cohecton bridge). He had been shot in the head, though his murderers were never identified. He was recognized primarily by a handwritten prayer book in his coat pocket bearing his name. Following this tragedy, Daniel's stepmother Martha returned to Canterbury, Connecticut, in 1759, while Daniel and his brothers Abner and Benjamin chose to remain in the valley to clear the wilderness, cultivate the flats, and secure their father's claims.

III. Seafaring, Land Accumulation, and Marriage

In his youth, Daniel Skinner left the valley for a time to work as a coastwise sailor. He continued to invest heavily in the region, purchasing a half-right in the Susquehanna Purchase in 1756 for four pounds, and a half-share in the Delaware Purchase on January 2, 1760, from Timothy Wents of Canterbury for four pounds, while temporarily residing in Newtown, Sussex County, New Jersey. He also worked as a peddler, selling checked flannel shirts and buckskin breeches throughout Pennsylvania and New York, becoming widely acquainted with the early inhabitants.

On **March 11, 1761**, Daniel married a young widow named **Lillie (Healy) Richardson** at Pomfret, Connecticut, officiated by Jeremiah Hinna. Lillie's first husband, a Mr. Richardson, had been killed at Braddock's Defeat during the French and Indian War, leaving her with a young daughter named Phoebe. Daniel and Lillie returned permanently to Ackhake Place in the spring of 1763 to farm and raise a family.

IV. The 'Lord High Admiral' of the Delaware (1764)

Seeing the massive, straight white pines towering along the riverbanks, Skinner envisioned a lucrative business selling them to Philadelphia shipyards to be used as ship masts. His first attempt in 1763 failed when he tried to float loose, unfastened logs down the river while guiding them from a canoe, losing the entire batch.

The following year, 1764, Skinner pioneered a revolutionary technique. He put six of his largest logs into the water, mortised the ends, and pinned them together using a sturdy white oak spindle to form a unified, steering-oared raft. Rigging steering oars fore and aft, Skinner and a Dutchman boldly piloted the craft through the river's treacherous rifts, delivering it safely to Philadelphia. This historic run birthed the Delaware rafting industry. By general acclaim, Skinner was crowned the **'Lord High Admiral of all the raftsmen on the Delaware,'** and his boisterous rafting partner, Josiah Parks, was dubbed the 'Boatswain' ('Old Boson'). Under the unwritten laws of the river, no man could legally steer a raft to market without the Admiral's personal consent, traditionally secured by presenting him with a bottle of wine.

V. The Battle of the Cushetunk Women (1767)

The immense success of Daniel Skinner's timber operations excited the jealousy of several neighbors, namely Nat Evans, Abraham Ross, and Phineas Clark, who conspired to drive Skinner out of the flats to seize his property and monopolize the rafting business. Fearing Daniel and his resolute brother Haggai, the conspirators hesitated to act. However, their wives resolved to execute the plan while the Skinner men were away on a rafting trip to Philadelphia.

Led by Mrs. Ross—a formidable woman who had previously defended the Cocheton blockhouse against native raids—the women marched on the Skinner home on a sunny morning in 1767 to evict Lillie Skinner and her children. Finding Mrs. Skinner away, they began throwing her belongings out of the house. Only 14-year-old Phoebe Richardson was home, guarding three young infants. Phoebe valiantly defended her home, putting the items back as fast as they were thrown out. When Mrs. Clark attempted to physically restrain the girl, Phoebe tripped Mrs. Clark and knocked her unconscious. Stunned by the girl's ferocity, the other women surrendered. By the time the husbands returned, the wives had made peace, sealing their reconciliation with a communal meal of dried eels and Johnny cakes.

VI. Turnpikes, Land Jobbers, and the Fleeing Whigs (1770-1777)

In 1770, Daniel Skinner attempted to secure a Pennsylvania title, getting a survey for 140 acres. His patent was bitterly opposed by land jobber James Hayes, who made false claims against Skinner's character to locate the tract for himself. Discouraged by title disputes and rising native hostilities (including an unwarranted arrest attempt following a Christmas 1771 tavern scuffle with native Captain John), Skinner moved his family to Shawangunk Kill Meadows in November 1772, purchasing 700 acres from Henry Wisner.

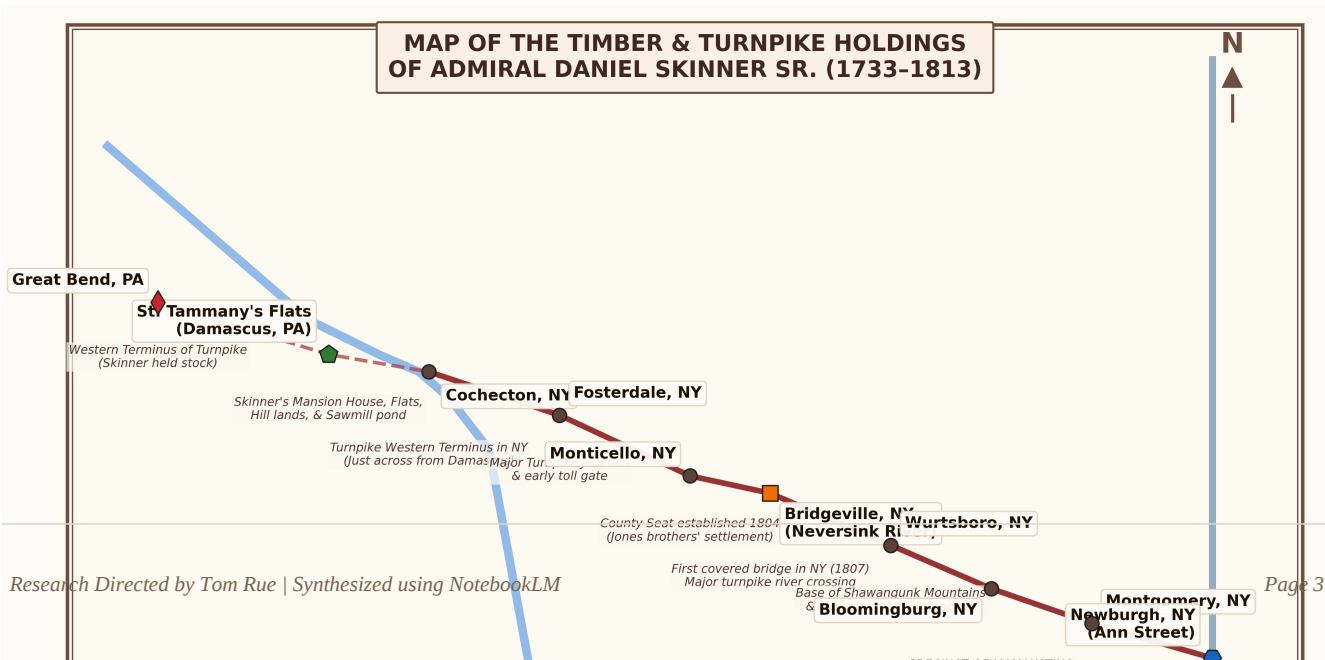
After an investigation cleared Skinner, he was granted a Pennsylvania Patent on **May 8, 1775**. He immediately returned to Cochection with his stepdaughter Phoebe and her new husband, Gershom Smith, a carpenter, to build a new house and a sawmill on Hollister Creek. He planned to bring his family back in May 1777, following the birth of his son Nathan on April 4. However, in April 1777, news arrived of the brutal slaughter of the Bryant Kane family by native raiders. Skinner, his oldest son, Gershom Smith, Phoebe, and their 2-month-old infant fled across the river, joined by Mrs. Evans, who swam the Delaware with her baby. This group of 6 fugitives wandered in cold and hunger to the safety of Orange County. In the autumn of 1777, marauders burned down Daniel's newly built house.

VII. Post-War Reconciliation and Freemasonry

Following the war, Daniel rebuilt his home on St. Tammany's Flats. While the conflict had bitterly divided the valley, a powerful symbol of post-war reconciliation occurred when his daughter **Lilly Skinner** married **John Land**, the son of Cushetunk's most prominent British Loyalist magistrate, Robert Land. John remained behind on his father's property and became a respected citizen, bridging the Whig and Tory divide.

In **1800**, Daniel Skinner was instrumental in establishing **St. Tammany's Lodge, No. 83, F.&A.M.**, under a warrant from the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. The lodge held its meetings in the secure second story of Skinner's log storehouse on the flats. His sons, Reuben (the lodge's first Master) and Nathan, were the primary drivers of the lodge. To ensure absolute security, members entered the second story using a wooden ladder which was hauled up once all the brothers had gathered.

VIII. Map of Holdings & Turnpike Routes (Plate 1)



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Plate 1: Stylized cartographic reference mapping the estate, sawmill, and turnpike holdings of Daniel Skinner Sr., connecting St. Tammany's Flats to the port of Newburgh.

IX. The Later Generations and the Skinner Houses

In 1815, Daniel's son **Nathan Skinner** built what is today the oldest surviving residence in Milanville. The house was framed in halves near Callicoon, NY, by carpenters Samuel Hedding and John Ross, and floated on timber rafts downstream to the Skinner property, where they built a common roof and a center chimney. Nathan, Wayne County's first surveyor, J.P., and militia Captain, only lived there briefly before leaving it to his son, **Colonel Calvin Skinner** (born November 15, 1799).

Calvin, who lived in the house for over 70 years, named Milanville in 1861 in honor of Napoleon's Milan Decree, reflecting his anti-British sentiment. Calvin's children established several historic houses in the Milanville Historic District, including the Volney Skinner House (c. 1840, later the 'Milanville House' hotel where Civil War Confederate POWs were quartered and dug out the basement), the Weston Skinner House (c. 1870, who ran a general store), and the Milton Skinner House (c. 1900, who established the first scow ferry and served as president of the Milanville Bridge Company in 1902).

X. Resolving the Date of Death & the 1813 Will

While secondary histories by James Eldridge Quinlan and J. S. Graham state that Daniel Skinner died in 1812, primary document analysis definitively corrects this error. Daniel's original, handwritten Last Will and Testament was signed and sealed on **February 23, 1813**, and officially probated by Register Eliphalet Kellogg on **March 1, 1813**, proving he died in late February 1813.

Tabular Summary of Bequests under the 1813 Will

Beneficiary	Relationship	1813 Will Bequest Details
Rosabella	Wife	Ann Street Newburgh dwelling and lot; all ready cash in possession.
Daniel Skinner Jr.	Son	200 acres of land; all of Daniel's wearing apparel.
William H. Skinner	Son	Note of hand for \$300 on condition he pays \$200 to sister Sarah.
Nathan Skinner	Son & Executor	100 acres of land; 50 acres back of the sawmill & pond; all books.
Lilly Land & Sarah Conklin	Daughters	All household furniture belonging to his first wife, divided equally.
Mary Wilcox	Daughter	One turnpike share in the Great Bend & Cohecton Turnpike Stock.
Daniel K. Skinner	Grandson (son of Joseph dec'd)	Mansion house, flats, and 200 acres on the hill until age 21.
Albo Skinner	Grandson	Barn and lot of land on Ann Street in Newburgh, NY.
Cortland Skinner	Grandson	Residue of the lot from which Nathan Skinner received 100 acres.

History of the Manuscript

The *Nathan Skinner Manuscript* was written by Nathan Skinner between 1840 and 1856 in microscopic handwriting. It was preserved by his family (including Bessie, Mabel, and Laurena Fisher) and copied by Doris Seymour Wahl over two years, who published it in her limited-edition book *The Skinner Kinsmen* (1952). A 1924 copy by Rev. Charles Sinnett was also preserved in the Grosvenor Library. The

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family Bible was donated by Cora Skinner to the Wayne County Historical Society.

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