

Michael Shofner
(1721-1810)

Michael Shofner does not appear among the passenger lists of German immigrants compiled by Strasburger and Hinke, Rupp, and others, though several other men of similar surnames do.¹ We do know, however, that one person named Michael Schaffner had immigrated to Philadelphia by 1758.² We also know that at least two persons of that name were living in Pennsylvania circa 1760.

Our Michael Shofner probably immigrated into North Carolina about 1760. His first four children are thought to have been born in Germany through about 1758, but his last two children were probably born in North Carolina in 1761 and 1768. Note that his father-in-law, George Fogleman, evidently settled in Orange County about the same time, being one of several Orange County men naturalized in a Rowan County court in 1763.³

Most of the records of Orange County prior to 1779 were destroyed during the Revolution, although a variety of court records survived. Neither Michael Shofner nor his father-in-law appear on the 1755 tax list of Orange County, but both appear on the next available list twenty-four years later in 1779. Michael Shofner, and his sons Frederick, Martin, Michael Jr., and George, all appear on that 1779 tax list.

Due to the loss of early deeds, I found no record of his buying land before 1780. He did, however, receive two North Carolina state land grants in 1780.⁴ By then, if not long before, he was living along Stinking Quarter Creek in the part of Orange County which is now Alamance County.

The graveyard of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, established in 1777, has stones for him and some of his children. The old gravestones are mostly indecipherable, but descendants have replaced many of them with more modern stones. One of these modern gravestones reads "Michael Shoffner 1721 – June 25, 1810." The date of death on this stone is peculiar, as he was quite clearly still alive a few months later when he wrote his will. Some researchers have taken the "June 25" to be his birth record, rather than his death record. His wife's modern inscription reads "Margaretha Fogleman, wife of Michael Shoffner, Aug 3, 1724 – Aug. 17, 1796."

The 1790 census of Orange County is missing, but Michael Shofner does appear on the tax list for 1790. In 1800, all of his sons are in the censuses of either Orange County or adjacent Guilford County, but there is no sign of Michael Shofner himself.

His will, dated 27 September 1810 and probated the following month, left his house and plantation to his youngest son Peter with the provision that Peter pay \$5 to each of his four brothers and to his sister Magdalena at the rate of one \$5 payment annually to be paid in order of

¹ At least eight others of the name appear between 1732 and 1768, all as "Schaffner" or Schaeffner". Some

² Genealogical Data Relating to the German Settlers of Pennsylvania and Adjacent Territory, Edward W. Hocker (Genealogical Publishing Co., 1981), p71.

³ Salisbury [Rowan County] Superior Court Minutes, p597, naturalizations recorded 2 March 1763.

⁴ NC Grants #1562 and 1584. The first was on Stinking Creek, the second on the Haw River.

seniority. He left \$20 to his son Michael, and directed that his personal property be sold and the proceeds divided equally among “my five sons and daughter Magdalane.” He appointed “my well beloved son in law Jacob Antony and Mallica Fogleman” as executors.⁵

The six children are readily identified:

1. **Michael Shofner** (26 Jan 1752 – 24 Jun 1820) He remained in North Carolina, evidently marrying Philibina Dirr, daughter of Peter Dirr, about 1775. His modern-era gravestone at St. Paul’s reads “Michael Shoffner, born in Germany Jan. 26, 1752, died 24 of June 1820.” His wife’s stone, in German, gives her birth and death dates (1758-1795) and her father’s name.
2. **George Shofner** (c1754? – 24 June 1820) He was in the Orange County 1790 tax list, but was in Guilford County by 1800.⁶ He appears to have owned land on Stinking Creek just over the Orange County line in 1793. He appears in the 1820 Guilford County census.
3. **Martin Shofner** (3 December 1758 – 30 September 1838) He married Catherine Cooke by bond dated 7 July 1780 in Duplin County. They moved to Bedford County, Tennessee about 1806 where he founded the Shofner Lutheran Church. A monument placed there by descendants gives his birth and death dates as above. His will and estate records in Bedford County identify nine children whose descendants are covered in some detail in Ms. DeMoss’ book: **Margaret Shofner** (1781-1852), **Dorothea Turley Shofner** (1783-1881), **Christopher Shofner** (1788-1826), **John Shofner** (1787-1857), **Frederick Shofner** (1789-1846), **Eve Shofner**, **Polly Shofner**, **Sally Shofner** (1796-1869), **Elizabeth Shofner**, and **Austin Shofner** (1801-). Much of Mrs. DeMoss’s book is devoted to Martin Shofner and his descendants.
4. **Frederick Shofner** (c1761 – 11 April 1846) His gravestone at St. Paul’s gives his death date as 11 April 1846, aged 85 years. He married Christina Cooke, perhaps a sister of his brother’s wife. The first wife’s gravestone at St. Paul’s gives her death date as 7 November 1825, after which he married a widow named Susan Troxler Pike. The 1790 census for Orange County is lost, but Frederick appears in the censuses beginning in 1800.⁷ His will, dated 23 October 1845, leaves his home plantation to his wife Susan until “my son Aneas Shoffner shall arrive to the age of 21...provided she remains my widow.”⁸ At that time, the plantation was to be divided between “my two youngest sons Aneas & Tamen Shoffner.” Other property was left to Margaret Christina Clapp (and her children), Eve Garrett (and her children), the heirs of his deceased daughter Sally, Aneas, and Tamen.
5. **Peter Shofner** He may have been the only child born in America. He is in the 1800 and 1810 censuses of Orange County.⁹

⁵ Orange County Will Book 2, p342.

⁶ 1800 Guilford County p628: 12001-20110-00

⁷ 1800, p533: 11010-31110-00.

⁸ Orange County Will Book F, p279.

⁹ 1800, p534: 10010-30100-00.

6. **Magdalena Shofner** She was the wife of Jacob Anthony – see separate page for Jacob Anthony.