

**Isaac Shelby Baker
of Clark and Daviess Counties, Kentucky**

The origins of Isaac S. Baker of antebellum Daviess County, Kentucky proved elusive to me for a number of years. The name of Baker is an extremely common one, and the era was one when people were moving around a lot in areas without established record systems.

In the end, the trail back for a century or so is reasonably clear. Often, it crosses people and events from the history books of early America. There are two state Governors, though neither in this direct descent. There are battles between early Kentucky settlers and scalping "Indians." There are gunsmiths who supply the early colonial governments with lead for bullets.

A few words on methodology

This genealogy includes only information documented in primary public (or publishable) sources. That excludes many unsourced trees in various places on the web.

Colonial vital records weren't kept systematically, and many have since been lost, so direct proof is often unattainable. Circumstantial evidence may sometimes, however, offer a convincing case. It become persuasive when events are *sequential*: for instance, in the mid-1750s, Joshua Baker and Elizabeth Baker drop out of sight in Pennsylvania, and immediately afterward Joshua and Elizabeth Baker begin to appear in Virginia.

Patterns of given names can be very useful: the family here for generations named their children Joshua, John and Isaac. There were William and Jacob and Moses Bakers close around, but these have turned out to be a different family.

Finally, as the eminent genealogist Elizabeth Shown Mills has stressed,¹ migrations were of *groups* of families, who stayed together and intermarried for generations. The name Baker is a very common, unremarkable one by itself. But when it recurs along with Sudduth or Shelby, as it does here, it becomes worthy of attention.

Isaac Shelby Baker and Patsy M. Roberts

Isaac Shelby Baker

Isaac Shelby Baker was born, by his son's report² in Fayette County, Kentucky. Isaac's father was John Baker, his mother Polly *née* Combs. The census reports of 1850 and 1860^{3,4} would put his birth in 1803 or 1804, but fuller evidence suggests to me that this is a bit too late; my guess would be 1800 or just before. Such discrepancies of a few years in early records are not uncommon; one's true age wasn't a matter of any practical importance. And although his parents were in Fayette in the early 1790s,^{5,6} I suspect that his birth actually occurred in abutting Clark County, to which they had moved.

The given name of Isaac was a common one among the Baker family, including an uncle. Shelby was the surname of a family allied to the Bakers — Evan Shelby was a close friend of that uncle Isaac^{7,8} — including early leaders in the settlement of Kentucky and a governor of that state.^{8,9}

Isaac's father, John Baker, died in 1803,¹⁰ when Isaac and his siblings were very young. Within the next year, his mother Polly remarried a friend of the family, Peter Evans,¹¹ who became the children's stepfather and legal guardian.¹² The legal accounts of the guardianship¹³ suggest that it was a conscientious one, including education and books for the children, sometimes costing more than the amount left in trust for their care. The last guardianship report for Isaac S. Baker was in 1818, after which he evidently had become of age.¹⁴

By 1820, Isaac S. Baker appears in Clark County tax lists as an adult, shown as owner of 100 acres of land in Washington County, previously owned by John Baker, his father.^{15,16} The land is described as along Cartwright's Creek and Pottinger's Creek. This location is notable in the present context because many residents from this area moved to Daviess County in the 1820s. Indeed, the contemporary census and tax records of Washington and abutting Nelson counties include potentially relevant listings, including John Baker and Isaac Baker, but I have found no way to be sure of what belongs in this lineage and what doesn't.

In 1823, Isaac Baker first appeared in the tax lists of Daviess,¹⁵ although he did not own land or livestock and so was not subject to any tax. In 1824, he married Patsy M. Roberts.^{17,18} The ceremony was performed by John Pinkston, a Methodist Episcopal minister. It is reported that a number of Roberts were early members of the Yelvington M.E. Church.¹⁹

The 1830 Daviess census²⁰ shows the couple, with two young girls, next to Benjamin Roberts, who I am guessing is the brother of Isaac's wife. In 1840, the couple with children were also next to Benjamin Roberts.²¹ In 1850, Isaac Baker is listed, occupation farmer, with no other household members.⁴ He is next door to Francis Roberts and Felix H. Roberts, this last name remarkable because one of Isaac's and Patsy's sons was named Henry Felix Baker. On the other side of Isaac was Francis Suddeth, presumably related to William Sudduth, one of the earliest settlers of Kentucky, along with John, Joshua and an earlier Isaac Baker.²² The 1860 census shows the couple with one son still at home, H. F. Baker. Benjamin Roberts is two lines away.³

Over time, Isaac Baker bought various parcels of land. The first I have found listed was in 1836, a modest 30 acres on the Pup Creek watershed.²³

Isaac Baker died sometime between 1871, when he signed a land deed,¹⁸ and 1873, when his estate was probated.²⁴ Felix H. Roberts and Henry Felix Baker were the administrators.

Isaac and his wife Patsy had at least five children, as far as I can identify, some of whom may have died young: (i) my ancestor Elizabeth N. (*b.* about 1827); (ii) an second daughter, unidentified (*b.* 1830-35);²¹ (iii) a third daughter, unidentified²¹ (*b.* 1830-35); a fourth daughter,²¹ unidentified (*b.* 1835-40); and a son, Henry Felix (*b.* January 19, 1841, *d.* February 4, 1913).^{24, 25}

Patsy M. Roberts

Patsy Roberts was reported born about 1803 in Henry County, Kentucky.² She was still alive in 1871, when she signed a land deed.¹⁸

It seems highly probable to me that Patsy came from a well-documented family of Roberts who came from Virginia, were early settlers and land traders in Kentucky, and moved through Henry County into Daviess.

Beyond that, I have not managed to sort things out from the few surviving records to my own satisfaction. My first guess would be that Patsy and immediate neighbor Benjamin Roberts were children of James Roberts²⁶ (*b.* 1766, Culpeper, Virginia, *d.* 1822 Daviess^{27, 28}) and Betsey Roberts, who may have been the widow of a brother or cousin of James. James and Betsey married in Culpeper in 1792.²⁹ James may have been the son of Benjamin Roberts (*b.* about 1741 in Virginia, *d.* about 1815 in Henry County, Kentucky) and Ann Duncan,³⁰ whose father William died in the 1780s in Culpeper.³¹ The Bakers in Davies were interspersed among Roberts and Duncan

neighbors.² A Kitty Roberts (family unknown) married William R. Duncan in Daviess in 1818,³² and Henry F. Baker, Patsy's son, married Emerine O. Duncan there in 1864.² — I do believe that Patsy Roberts's roots very likely go back to Culpeper, Virginia, but the trail to Daviess, Kentucky is not firm.

John Baker and Polly (Mary) Combs

John Baker

John Baker was born perhaps in the late 1750s in Frederick County, Virginia. His family first appears in records there in 1757.³³ He was cited as a minor in his father's 1765 will.³⁴ I find no notes of his presence in Frederick in tax lists and land records, as would be usual for a property-owning adult. I have found no signs that John followed the gun-making trade of his father. I suspect that John and his younger brother Isaac followed close in the footsteps of their older brother Joshua.

In 1782 John acquired a warrant for 400 acres of land.¹⁶ Such warrants were abstract promises from a new, cash-strapped, land-rich government of property that would not actually be identified and assigned for many years. Indeed, it was not until 1800, three years before John Baker's death, that land was surveyed and conveyed to him. As noted above, its location along Pottinger's Creek is notable for this story because many residents of that area migrated to Daviess County in the 1820s.

John and his brother Isaac appear together in the 1789 tax lists of Fayette County,⁵ Kentucky, adjoining Clark County.

The three Baker brothers were very involved with the early settlement of Kentucky, including the violence it involved with the natives, called "Indians" and "savages." They built a fort known as Baker's Station.³⁵ An interview with an early settler speaks of events in 1789:

The Indians continued to be very troublesome on the frontiers. In November or December I removed back to Hoods Station. By this time Enoch Smith had settled near Mount Sterling. The Ironworks on Slate [Bath County] were began. [Ralph] Morgans Station on Slate, & [John] Baker's Station where Judge French now lives, were settled which drew the attention of the Indians from our neighborhood.²²

Another later account has more detail, including mention of John Baker's brother Isaac:

By this time, the station had been settled where Judge French now lives (beyond Somerset) west of Mt. Sterling by one John Baker in the spring 1790. The evening of the

29th of June, four Indians had been to this station (so that Hood's was no longer the nearest neighbor) and killed one Dickinson and wounded Isaac Baker (or killed) ... and wounded David J. (a young man living with his brother). It was late in the evening and they were starting out so late only because they were going to watch a lick to try to kill a deer. Baker got in, said he counted four Indians. Dickinson was scalped but not killed and could be heard groaning from the outside but was never brought in until morning by which time he was dead. He had been severely wounded, however, so could not have lived had he been brought in and attempting to bring him in there, they would have been exposed. There were several visitors that night . . . [at] Baker's Station. Betsy Keeton, one of these, crept under the bed.³⁶

John Baker married Polly Combs in Clark County in 1797.³⁷

He died in Clark in 1803.¹⁰

With Polly, he had four children in the six years of their marriage: (i) Isaac Shelby, whose given names are discussed above; (ii) Cuthbert Bullitt, Cuthbert being the name of Polly's father and Bullitt her maternal grandmother's surname; (iii) Cythe, the given name of Polly's maternal grandmother; and (iv) Nancy, perhaps after Polly's sister.

Polly (Mary) Combs

Polly was born about 1775, probably in Stafford County, Virginia.^{4, 38} Her father was Cuthbert Combs, her mother Sally Evans. Within about a year after the death of her husband John Baker, Polly remarried to Peter Evans,¹¹ who became the guardian of the former couple's four children, It is unclear whether Peter Evans was related to Sally Evans. I suspect so, but that is outside of the lineage of current focus. Polly Evans, as she became, was still alive in 1850, living in Clark County.⁴

There is excellent research available online³⁸ about Polly Combs's ancestry, which I will not recapitulate here.

Joshua Baker and Elizabeth —

Joshua Baker

Joshua Baker must have been born sometime before the mid 1730s, because he was of age and married at the time of his father's death around 1754.³⁹ He was probably not born much earlier than that, because at least some of the father's other children were still minors then.

Joshua had married his wife Elizabeth by that time.

Joshua and his brother Isaac continued their father's gunsmith trade.^{34, 40} They both moved away from Lancaster, Pennsylvania soon after their father's death. In 1755 and 1756, the couple sold land in Lampeter township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.^{39, 40} In 1757, Joshua leased land in Winchester township, Frederick County, Virginia⁴¹. Over the next several years, he amassed considerable further property in that area.

Joshua died about 1765.³⁴

Joshua and Elizabeth Baker had six known children who survived to adulthood: (i) Joshua; (ii) John; (iii) Isaac; (iv) Eleanor; (v) Ann; and (vi) Elizabeth.³⁴

Elizabeth —

There are a few unsourced reports that Elizabeth's maiden name was Campbell, with nothing that I can find about her family background. I have not been able to verify the undocumented reports of the surname, though the immediate presence of a number of Campbells in this chapter of the Baker story makes the hypothesis at least plausible. Joshua's niece Eleanor married Duncan Campbell.⁴² Thomas Campbell was a witness to Joshua Baker's own will.³⁴ John Campbell was a witness to the will of Joshua's brother Isaac.⁸

The three sons: Joshua, Isaac and John

It is notable that the names of Joshua's three sons are the same as those of the children's grandfather, also named Joshua. This recurrent use of the same given names over a number of generations has been the source of much confusion to me during my research, especially when sons died young.

Joshua consistently appears among the three brothers in the role of alpha male. In his father's will,³⁴ he seems to have some precedence, receiving the house and lot in Winchester, with reservation the right for Joshua's widow to use it during her widowhood; the other brothers' legacies are more residual. Like his brothers, Joshua was an early settler of Kentucky. He rose to be a militia colonel.⁴³ He settled in Mason County. He married Susan Lewis. Their son Joshua G. Baker, later Governor of Louisiana, was born in Mason in 1799. By 1803, the family had moved away to West Florida, not then a part of the United States.⁴⁴ They settled in St. Mary Parish, Louisiana.

His son's life is described in Wikipedia⁴⁵ and other common references, sometimes with brief reference to early family days.

Isaac died as a young adult around the end of 1792. He did not marry. His will mentions his brothers Joshua and John.⁴⁶

John Baker has been discussed immediately above.

Joshua Baker and Rebecca Wilson

Joshua Baker

Lancaster County, Pennsylvania was formed out of Chester County in 1729. There are some records surviving from that time, including lists of residents⁴⁷. The first visible presence of Joshua Baker is in 1742, when a road order speaks of "Joshua Baker's plantation."⁴⁸ The following year, an indenture records a grant to Joshua Baker of land on King Street in the Town of Lancaster, conditioned upon his building a house within two years.⁴⁹

He was a gunsmith.⁵⁰

He died in 1754. His will names his wife Rebecca, sons Joshua and Isaac, and daughters Ann and Eleanor.⁵⁰ Besides these children, the couple evidently had a son named John, who predeceased his father.

Rebecca Wilson

There is little information available about Rebecca Wilson. Her father was John Wilson, a merchant, her mother Rebecca.^{51, 52} Both parents were alive in 1752. The mother came from Ireland and died about that time in Lancaster.

The three sons: Joshua, Isaac and John

Joshua's life is described immediately above.

Two years after his father's death, Isaac was established in Frederick County, Maryland, continuing in the family gunsmith trade. In 1756, he received muskets, gunpowder, and bar lead for bullets for use of the Baltimore militia.⁵³ In 1758, Joshua Baker of Winchester in Frederick County, Virginia, gunsmith, conveyed for 5 shillings to Isaac Baker of Frederick County, Maryland, also gunsmith, 391 acres of land.⁴⁰ Other,

similar transactions between the brothers are recorded. Isaac Baker moved to Washington County, Virginia around 1790 and died there. His life and family are already very well described online, with excellent documentation, so I will not reiterate that history here.⁷

John Baker was evidently a son of Joshua Baker, though John died by 1750, before his father Joshua, and so was not included in the latter's will. John's probate inventory⁵⁴ includes smith tools and bar iron, providing some evidence that he may have been a gunsmith, like his father. In 1744 John Baker and his wife Jane *née* Daugherty acknowledged receipt of part of the legacy of Edward Daugherty, Jane's father, from Mary Daugherty, her mother.⁵⁵ The identity of John's wife is later confirmed in the will of Mary Daugherty.⁴² In 1751, Martin Meylin, a local gunsmith, Peter Worrell, and Edward Daugherty were appointed guardians of the couple's two children, Elinor and John.^{54, 56} In 1756, Joshua and Elizabeth Baker sold land which was noted to abut that of John Baker.³⁹

Questions and further work

I wish I could establish a clear pedigree for Patsy Roberts. Isaac Baker's wife. I am not sure that this is possible on the basis of surviving paper records. There are a number of Benjamin Roberts and James Roberts in early Henry County, the key names and area for research. Teasing these apart from tax lists and infrequent wills seems unrealistic. It might be possible if DNA data sets grew much larger than they are now.

Beyond that, there are various loose ends, as there always are. Somehow, I feel curious about the earliest Joshua Baker's origins. There is much speculation on the topic, with conflicting views as to even what country he came from. There are a few possible clues, but they seem to be swimming in a sea of red herrings.

If it were easy, it wouldn't be fun.

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 48. Eshleman, H.F. History of Lancaster County's Highway System. https://collections.lancasterhistory.org/en/viewer?file=%2fmedia%2fflibrary%2fdocs%2fvol26no3pp37_80_2246734.pdf, viewed October 31, 2022.
 49. Indenture to Joshua Baker. Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Book G, Page 125. July 15, 1745. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CS7S-NHZ2?cat=224489>, viewed October 24, 2022.
 50. Will of Joshua Baker. Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Will date My 7, 1753; probated July 3, 1754. Book B, Page 57, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-899B-VZD9?i=165&wc=9PM8-4WY%3A268493801%2C268514701&cc=1999196>, viewed October 27, 2022.
 51. Will of Rebecca Wilson. Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Will dated December 19, 1749; probated January 3, 175e. Book B, Page 56, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-899B-VZD9?i=165&wc=9PM8-4WY%3A268493801%2C268514701&cc=1999196>, viewed October 27, 2022. The will names the testator's daughter Rebecca as wife of Joshua Baker.

52. Deed from Samuel Boude et ux. to John Wilson. Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Book D, Page 20. May 4, 1752. <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSHW-43Y8-D?cat=224489>, viewed October 31, 2022.
53. Archives of Maryland Online, Proceedings and Acts of the General Assembly, 1755-1756. 52. <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000052/html/am52--336.html>, viewed October 31,, 2022.
54. Probate records of John Baker. Lancaster County Archives, 1750. Instrument number Inv 1750 F001 B. Digital copies in possession of Paul Nordberg of grant of administration, inventory, accounting, and other miscellaneous probate records. No will is included or known.
55. Acknowledgment. Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, November 3, 1744. Book F, Page 117, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSHW-431C-3?cat=224489>, viewed October 30, 2022.
56. Guardianship appointment. Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, 1751. Book Miscellaneous books 1742-1767, Page 18, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9B2-2956-K?cat=244145>, viewed October 29, 2022.