

**CHIEF JUSTICE JOHN MARSHALL**  
*Our Cousin or Not?*  
Reflections on Family Lore  
Kelly Marshall

**SOURCE**

*This article appeared in the June 2005 edition of Family!—an occasional newsletter for descendants of Catharina Truby Marshall Rohrer and her husbands, Frederick Rohrer, Jr., and John Marshall.*



One of the earliest bits of oral Marshall family history I recall hearing was this: Our ancestor **John Marshall** (about 1761 to 1806) was a cousin of the renowned Chief Justice John Marshall (1755-1835) of the United State Supreme Court. One thing I've learned over a quarter-century of researching and thinking about family history is this: Don't readily discount the family stories which have been important enough for one generation to tell the next. This strand of our family's story is widespread, having been relayed to me from these varied sources:

◆ The **John Marshall** (1803-1889) family of Parker City, Armstrong County, Pennsylvania. This family has told the story through descendants of his son William K. Marshall (1829-1911) and his daughter, Mary Ann Marshall Turk (1827-1915). My grandfather, Clifford W. Marshall and his cousin Laura Heffner Wilson, my third cousin Vicki Marshall Dunn, and distant cousin, Charlotte Turk Dean all told me about the Chief Justice Marshall connection; and Howard Zollinger, son of Mary Allison Turk Zollinger, heard this story from his mother.

◆ The **Samuel Marshall** (1801-1835) family of Venango County, Pennsylvania; in particular, descendant Sue McGough Veal of Texas, heard this account through the McGough descendants of Samuel and Phebe Marshall.

◆ The **Mary Ann Marshall Bailey** (1804-1895) family of Parker recounted the story through Sarah Cooper Avey, whose 1987 work *My Pennsylvania Ancestors* records many family memories; and through Jane E. Cooper, California attorney and fellow family history researcher.

◆ The **Elizabeth Rohrer Robinson** (1792-1881) family of Hovey Township, Armstrong County. Betsy Robinson was a half-sister of the Marshall children through their mother, Catharina Truby Rohrer Marshall. The Chief Justice connection was repeated to me by her descendant, the late Charles S. L. Robinson (see Volume 1, Number 1 of *Family!*).

So this account was a very strong and quite broad tradition among Marshall, Turk, Bailey and Robinson kin in the Parker area and beyond. As living memory, it came through the generations, right down to our own time.

*Jane E. Cooper* is my sometime-collaborator on early Marshall/Truby/Rohrer family research. She and I have different angles on this. Hers is that the family tradition is so powerful that there has to be something to it—and that we would do well to search the records of Justice Marshall's Virginia family to identify the connection. She postulates that our Irish-born ancestor **John Marshall** made his way across the Atlantic to his Virginia kinfolk, but that his wander-lust drove him further west: first to Greensburg, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania and then to the Ohio wilderness, where he met his untimely death.



My angle is this: Marshall appeared suddenly in Greensburg in the late 1790s and promptly married the widowed daughter of **Colonel Christopher Truby**, a leading citizen of the town. She had two Rohrer children from her previous marriage, and four Marshall children were born to this couple before they left Greensburg for Ohio in late 1805 or early 1806. The memory in the Turk family (see the box on page three) is that Marshall was Irish-born—and his son John Marshall (1803-1889) indicates in the 1870 census that his father was foreign-born. My pet theory--totally unsubstantiated--is that Marshall's sudden appearance in Greensburg has to do with hightailing it out of Ireland because of the 1798 Rising against George III. My only clue besides the timing is that among his books when he died in 1806 was one entitled *History of the Society of United Irishmen*. This was the rebel group.

Marshall died when his children were babies, they knew next to nothing about his family, and they were reared by their mother's people. *And isn't there is a predisposition in families to establish a link with a famous person?* So this Chief Justice story could have been a way of giving the Marshall children roots they had lost because of not knowing their father.

Anyway, we're up against a brick wall with "our" **John Marshall**. Where do we find him before 1798? Jane's approach is to research the Virginia Marshalls—the family of the Chief Justice. Mine is to research Ireland. Maybe records exist there for a John Marshall born about 1761, who has relatives named Andrew and Samuel—the names of his first two sons. And perhaps the truth will include both approaches.

**If you have clues, evidence, variations of this family tradition, or great ideas, please share them! One of these years, we'll uncover the truth behind this extensive family tradition.**

