

From Leasure To Leshar

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If we are to trace our ancestry back to whatever European country from which we originated, it is imperative that we know the actual surname of those who immigrated to the U.S. Usually the surname stays sufficiently close to the original as to be obvious, as we learned in two other branches of our family: **Benninghoff** which was **Benninghofen** in Germany, and **Duffie** which was **Duffy** in Ireland and with all but one branch of the **Patrick & Mary McNally Duffy** family in Canada.

But Leshar had us puzzled. Years ago someone suggested it was derived from the German surname Loeshar. However, searching the census reports for Pennsylvania in the mid-1800s turned up nothing even close to Loeshar.

It was a mystery.

Ken & Becky Leshar Grudei had been doing some research and, as with my research, could get no further into the past than Nathan Leshar, ca 1860-70.

Right: Daniel John Leshar, son of Nathan & Rebecca May Catharine Trien Leshar, with his grandchildren Shirley & Betty Leshar, and Ralph and Paul Deevers. ca 1924.

Nathan & Rebecca May Catharine Trien Leshar simply appeared out of nowhere in Otter Creek Township, Mercer County, Pennsylvania, in the 1860 census.

The answer was in the 1850 Salem Township, Mercer County, Pennsylvania census:

29	1532	1548	LEASURE, Nathan	28	M	Waggon (sic) Maker	Pa.
30	1532	1548	LEASURE, Catharine	24	F		Pa.
31	1532	1548	LEASURE, Matilda	1	F		Pa.
32	1533	1549	TRIEN, Peter	43	M	Farmer	Pa.
33	1533	1549	TRIEN, Catharine	47	F		Pa.
34	1533	1549	TRIEN, David	18	M	Farmer	Pa.
35	1533	1549	TRIEN, Flory	17	F		Pa.
36	1533	1549	TRIEN, Daniel	15	M	Farmer	Pa.
37	1533	1549	TRIEN, Nathan	12	M		Pa.
38	1533	1549	TRIEN, Eliza	8	F		Pa.

Nathan & Catharine Leasure were living next to Catharine's parents, Peter & Catharine Trien. Research indicated that Salem Township was a precursor to Otter Creek Township where we first located them in 1860.

So why did it change to Leshar?



I e-mailed Richard Winder, the man who transcribed the Salem Township, Mercer County census for the internet. As a formality I like to request permission before I use someone else's work. He replied with permission and added the final hint as to how our name changed:

When I went to high school (Laurel in Lawrence Co., Pa., mid seventies) there was a student named Doug Leasure, I think in one of the grades ahead of me. I believe he pronounced it more like 'leh(s/z)her' rather than 'leezhur', so I think that you are probably right that the spelling could change depending on the enumerator, literacy, etc.

Happy hunting!

*Sincerely,
Richard S. Winder*

I had suggested an erroneous spelling by the census taker, a not uncommon occurrence if the enumerator assumes he/she heard the name correctly. However, generally a misspelled name on the census does not carry the weight of changing the spelling of the family forever.

I also anticipate that few people pronounced the name properly. Most would probably say "Leezhur". Consider the option that Nathan simply decided to spell his name in such a way that, for all generations to come, none of his descendants would have to correct the pronunciation of their name. It may have been something as simple as spelling his name "Leshur" on the 1860 census, and insuring that all his children did so in all of their activities. By the next generation, the name would be set-in-stone.

By the time our generation came along, nobody could even remember what their surname used to be.

As of this writing, Nathan Leasure appears out of nowhere in the 1850 census. He then disappears only to emerge as Nathan Leshur in the 1860 census. We have been unable to determine anything about his parents. However, on that same 1850 census we find the following:

LEASURE, Samuel, 52
LEASURE, Mary, 52
LEASURE, Ester, 22
LEASURE, Samuel, 16

These are the only other Leasure listings in Salem Township, Mercer County, Pennsylvania, at the time, and I believe that Samuel & Mary are Nathan's parents. I mentioned my thoughts to Patty Smith, a Leasure Family researcher and genealogist of 40 years. She agrees.

Until proven otherwise, I am going on the assumption that Samuel & Mary Leasure are the parents of Nathan Leasure/Leshur.