



John Muir's Birthplace Fact Sheet

Number 2.03 – John Muir's Dad – Daniel Muir

Daniel Muir was a harsh disciplinarian and exceptionally strict parent, even by the standards of the early Victorian years.



John Muir's block on Dunbar High Street © ELMS

Daniel was born at Manchester in 1804. Orphaned before the year's end he and his elder sister went to relatives in Crawfordjohn parish, Lanarkshire. His youth was spent working on the land. In his late teens he experienced a religious conversion, put aside gaiety and his homemade fiddle, and set off for Glasgow. He joined the army and advanced to the rank of sergeant. By 1829 he was in Dunbar recruiting for his regiment.

There he married firstly Helen Kennedy and then after her death Anne Gilrye, who was John Muir's mother.

Daniel became a meal-dealer in Dunbar, working his way up from a simple shopkeeper. Meal was the Scots term for oats, an essential staple. 6-7 bolls (60-70 stones or 380-446 kilogrammes) was then the yearly need of an average family. It was also in demand as animal feed. In the rich farmlands of East Lothian, Daniel prospered.



Grain fields near Dunbar © ELMS

He bought property, gave to the church and actively participated in the community, becoming a town councillor. However, his religious beliefs became ever more extreme, so straining relationships with his in-laws, the

Gilryes. Daniel always sought to live life according to his religious beliefs and he forced his family to do the same. Moving from church to church, he became interested in an American-based sect.



Dunbar Parish Church © ELMS

His decision to lead his family from a secure and successful position in Dunbar to the uncertainties of the New World was prompted by the Disciples of Christ. In 1849 he uprooted his family and set off, settling in an area of Wisconsin where there were many other Disciples. His family bore the brunt of breaking in the land on their first and succeeding farms. Daniel took up preaching and gradually became more and more estranged from his family – John went 18 years without visiting his father.

After a period of ill health, Daniel rested at the Kansas City home of his youngest daughter, John's sister Joanna. As the old man declined, John was seized with a premonition and gathered up the family to meet at his bedside. John and Daniel were reconciled. Daniel died in 1885 and is buried in a Kansas City cemetery.

More Information

Further Reading

- Muir, John, *The Story of my Boyhood and Youth*, Canongate Publishing Ltd., Edinburgh, 1987 (first published Houghton Mifflin Co., 1913)
- Wolfe, LM, *Son of the Wilderness, the Life of John Muir*, UWP, 2003 (first published AA Knopf, 1946)
- Friends of John Muir's Birthplace, *John Muir's Dunbar*, DJMA, 1998

Websites

- John Muir's Birthplace www.jmbt.org.uk
- Friends of John Muir's Birthplace www.djma.org.uk
- For Dunbar Society see www.historyshelf.org/shelf/index.php