

New JSS Family Details with Some Inaccuracies Corrected

This is a new look at four JSS family members all of whom obviously influenced his life and yet whose lives have been either been partially presented or in some cases inaccurately presented in previous writings.

SETH SMITH: JSS paternal grandfather

Here is a summary of the highlights of his life:

- Aug. 21, 1736: Born in South Hadley which became part of Granby Massachusetts
- 1761: Married his first wife, Thankful Burt¹
- 1763: Had his own property and was listed as a head of family in Granby²
- Apr. 21, 1767: Birth of son Jedediah, father of JSS
- 1772: First wife Thankful died
- June 8, 1773: Married second wife, Eunice Clark in Granby
- 1773: Moved his family to Brattleboro, VT obtaining land deed from New York sources³
- 1774: His brother Israel moved to VT with his family and the two brothers' parents⁴
- Oct. 18, 1775: Appointed Lieutenant Colonel in VT militia⁵
- Jan. 4, 1776: Appointment confirmed by VT Committee of Safety⁶
- Apr. 25, 1777: One of the signers of instructions from VT land owners to the New York Convention in support of New York land claims
- Aug. 1777: Battle of Bennington (see below)
- Dec. 17, 1781: Indicted by court in Windham County VT for Treason due to his activities in support of the claims of land owners in VT who obtained their land deeds from New York sources⁷
- Jan. 21, 1782: Presented petition to New York Governor regarding VT land claims from New York⁸
- Jan. 28, 1782: Presented petition from VT land owners with New York claims to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia⁹
- Feb 11, 1782: Presented petition to New York legislature to intervene in the VT land disputes¹⁰
- Feb. 23, 1782: VT General Assembly discharged the indictment for treason¹¹
- Summer/Fall 1782: Moved to Spencertown, New York¹²
- Sept. 12, 1786: Obtained a grant of 780 acres in Jericho, later Bainbridge, New York as a "Vermont sufferer". His brother, Israel, also received a land grant.¹³
- 1787/9 to 1820: Lived in Granby, Massachusetts¹⁴
- Oct. 18, 1820: Died at age 84 in Granby

Seth Smith and the Battle of Bennington. The cited source for VT militia Colonel Seth Smith being in the battle is a history of the Dickerman family¹⁵, which says that Seth was in church on Sunday when he first heard about a British force heading toward Bennington. He then rounded up some volunteers from Brattleboro, left the next day and arrived in time to participate in the battle.

It should be noted that Chloe, the daughter of Israel Smith who described her Uncle Seth in her diary¹⁶, does not mention any involvement in the Battle of Bennington. Dickerman history states that Seth's

daughter, Thankful, “often spoke of her father’s connection with the Revolutionary army, and though a young girl, remembered the battle of Bennington and spoke of it frequently.”¹⁷ Unfortunately, this summary confirms that Seth was in the militia but only implies a connection with Bennington.

The Dickerman summary is not accurate for two reasons. First, a current effort to identify all of the participants in the Bennington battle by Michael Gabriel of Kutztown University reports that he has found no record confirming Seth Smith being in the battle. Second, and more important, the Battle of Bennington was fought on August 16, 1777, which was a Saturday. Seth Smith could not have heard about it in church on Sunday and then left the next day and arrived just in time to fight in the battle. If this were to be true, it would have taken him six days to travel the approximately fifty miles from Brattleboro to the battle site near Bennington. The Dickerman story is not supported by the facts.

JABIN STRONG: JSS maternal grandfather

Highlights of his life:

- Descended from Elder John Strong who settled Northampton Massachusetts
- Aug. 12, 1734: Born In Lebanon Connecticut¹⁸
- 1758: on muster roll of Colonel Nathan Whiting’s Regiment from CT in French and Indian War¹⁹
- Married Betsey Curtis and moved to Chatham, later known as East Hampton, Connecticut, where he was a farmer
- “He traveled largely through the west when it was a wilderness filled with Indians, and went accidentally over Niagara Falls without being killed.”²⁰
- May 8- Dec. 19, 1775: Sergeant in 10th company of Colonel Benjamin Hinman’s Regiment at the siege of Boston²¹
- 1779-81: Captain of a company of teamsters in the Connecticut militia with twelve teams and living in Glastonbury, CT²²
- 1782: 1st wife, Sarah Betsy Curtis, died
- May 27, 1791: Married Ruth Hunter in Glastonbury.²³
- 1800 census: living in Glastonbury, CT
- 1810 census: Living in Chatham, CT
- 1816: Died in Chatham²⁴

There is no doubt that Jabin served in the French and Indian War. The record of his involvement in 1758 is clear, so it is reasonable to assume that the traveling throughout the west refers to his war experiences marching to Canada in 1758. I agree with Howard who correctly says that there is no record of the plunge over Niagara Falls and that it was “a wonderful story to conjure up for grandchildren.” I disagree with Howard’s speculations about his involvement with Major Israel Putnam in 1764 for the Pontiac Rebellion for which there is no record. As indicated above, he also served in the Revolutionary War in 1775 and 1779 to 1781.

There is no record that Jabin ever lived anywhere but Connecticut and no indication that he or any of his family ever lived in Spencertown, New York. Barbour incorrectly states that Jabin Strong obtained land in Bainbridge as a Vermont sufferer because there is no record that he lived in Vermont and is not on any list of the Vermont sufferers or any listing of one who obtained a land grant.²⁵ Other than his war

experiences, he seems to have lived his entire life in Chatham and Glastonbury, Connecticut working on his farm.²⁶

JEDEDIAH SR.

1. Place of marriage to Sally Strong. Robert West Howard²⁷, Stella D. Hare²⁸ and Matthew Smith²⁹ state that the couple was married in Spencertown, New York, which is located in Columbia County. Barton Barbour states that Jedediah married Sally Strong in Spencertown in 1795.³⁰ However, by that year Sally had already had two children. Since Sally Strong's father never lived there, some other explanation needs to be given as to how Sally would be there. Matthew Smith explains this by having the family of her brother Cyrus, who he incorrectly calls John Cyrus, moving there with Seth Smith's family sometime before 1789.³¹ The problem is that Cyrus did not marry until 1804 and the marriage took place in Bainbridge and not Spencertown. Traveling with Cyrus is not credible as the way to get Sally to Spencertown. It is also not credible to have Sally traveling west with her future husband when they could have married in Connecticut before they traveled westward.

There is no written record of Sally or Jedediah getting married in Spencertown. The only clear family reference to Spencertown is from Jedediah's cousin, Chloe but she only mentions her uncle, not her cousin, living there. The family history researchers on ancestry.com support the marriage taking place in Chatham, CT rather than Spencertown, NY. Based on Revolutionary War pension records and the 1800 census, Jabin Strong lived in Glastonbury at that time, although he does not show up there in the 1790 census, or anywhere else for that matter. Without a better explanation of placing Sally at Spencertown, the weight of evidence clearly supports her father's hometown as the place for the marriage. Based on the date of birth of their first child³² and the 1790 census, 1790 is the appropriate year.

2. Jedediah living in Spencertown. Jedediah Sr. lived in Spencertown with his father from 1782 until they both left about 1787. There is no credible evidence that Jedediah lived in Spencertown after his father left. Both Howard and Stella D. Hare, a descendant of Jedediah Sr., believe that a 1790 census with the name of Zedediah Smith living in Spencertown is enough to support that it was really Jedediah living there. More weight in my view should be given to two other items. First is an entry found in a section on early settlers of Bainbridge which has Jedediah Smith, from "the New England states," along with Cyrus Strong, coming to Bainbridge in 1795.³³ Second, the 1790 census for Glastonbury, Connecticut has a Jedediah Smith living there with a wife. Jedediah did not live in Spencertown in 1790 because he was in Glastonbury and did not move his family to the west until after his marriage to Sally in Connecticut and the birth of three of his children. It is logical to believe that after Jedediah returned to Granby with his father in 1787 he was close enough in proximity to Chatham to have met Sally and her family and that they got married in Connecticut.
3. Moving to Jericho or Bainbridge. The best evidence suggests that Jedediah moved his family to Bainbridge in late 1794 or early 1795, after the birth of his son Ralph on September 11, 1794. The History of Chenango County states that "Jedediah Smith, who came in from the New

England States in company with Cyrus Strong” came to Bainbridge “as early as 1795.” The way the names of the early settlers are arranged in chronological order in that history makes it clear that Jedediah and Cyrus were not among the early settlers.³⁴

Barbour incorrectly suggests that Jabin Strong and Jedediah Sr. may have served in the same New York regiment in the Revolutionary War as another basis for their land grants in Bainbridge.³⁵ A Strong land grant in Bainbridge did not exist. The Smith land grant came from Seth Smith’s presence in Vermont and not from his Revolutionary War service, whatever it may have been. Jedediah Sr., being born in 1767, was too young to serve in the Revolutionary War until 1781 and his father did not move to New York until 1782 when the war was almost over. The evidence for New York service does not exist and contradicts the known facts about the two men.

RALPH SMITH AND THE BATTLE OF LAKE ERIE

The presence of Jedediah Strong Smith’s brother Ralph in the Battle of Lake Erie seems to be accepted by all of those who have written about the background of JSS except for Dale Morgan, Maurice Sullivan and Harvey L. Carter.³⁶ The fact that these three eminent historians did not repeat the War of 1812 story should make one cautious in terms of accepting at face value a family tradition that was introduced in a manuscript history of the Smith family by Ezra Delos Smith, a grandson of Ralph.³⁷

The Ezra D. Smith manuscript contains the following information regarding the Battle of Lake Erie.

- Ralph was in the New York militia
- Oliver Hazard Perry called on the New York militia to act as riflemen for his fleet and that Ralph went with the others in his unit
- After the battle when the victorious fleet arrived at Ashtabula, Ohio, Ralph and some other militiamen “swam ashore and walked home”
- Ralph’s son-in-law tried to get him a pension but it was rejected
- JSS had previously been employed on a merchant vessel on Lake Erie so he went along with Ralph on one of Perry’s vessels. The implication is that JSS was sort of an aide to Ralph.

The notion of Ralph Smith serving in the New York militia when he lived in Pennsylvania does not ring true. North East Township, Pennsylvania is less than twenty miles from the site of Commodore Perry’s command center and ship building operation at Erie Village and Presque Isle in Erie County. If anything, Ralph should have been with a Pennsylvania militia company rather than one from New York. Placing Ralph in the New York militia is the first reason to be suspicious of this tale.

The records of Chenango County, where the Jedediah Sr. family lived in New York prior to 1811, show that the militia companies of that county were with General William Hull in his ill-fated expedition into Canada in 1812, and then in 1813 were at Sackett’s Harbor, but at no time were they with Commodore Perry on Lake Erie.³⁸ Therefore, even if Ralph went with the Chenango County militia, they did not go to Lake Erie. A search of the Pennsylvania archives reveals that there is no record of Ralph Smith being in the Pennsylvania militia during the War of 1812.³⁹ There is also no record of Ralph Smith being among the list of 557 men serving on board the nine vessels that constituted Perry’s fleet.⁴⁰ The lack of any credible record of service during the War of 1812 is evidenced by the rejection of the 1855 pension application of Ralph Smith by the U.S. Pension Office.

The story that Ralph and some of his friends swam ashore and went home before they were formally discharged, thus leaving no record behind, seems like a fabrication. No compelling reason is given as to why Ralph and his companions were under such a necessity for leaving. Ralph's actions, as described by his grandson, certainly amount to a form of desertion. It is hard to see why that kind of risk would be taken by him or his comrades after a successful battle.

Because of his age, Jedediah Strong Smith's participation in the Lake Erie battle only rings true if his brother actually served there. If Ralph's presence in the battle falls apart so does Jedediah's. Just as with Ralph, there is no evidence of Jedediah being in the Lake Erie battle. That is not to say that the story of Jedediah serving on a merchant vessel on the lakes is untrue. Indeed, if there are family records showing that Jedediah served on the lakes based on a shipping manifest written by him⁴¹, the fact that he was not in the battle does not detract from those other experiences on the lakes prior to enlisting with the Ashley/Henry enterprise.

¹ Roderick H. Burnham. *Genealogical Records of Henry and Ulalia Burt*. Warwick, N.Y.: Elizabeth Burt, 1892: 53. Thankful Burt was the daughter of Seaborn Burt who was born at sea as his parents were returning from captivity in Canada as a result of the Deerfield massacre.

² Sylvester Judd. *History of Hadley*. Northampton, Ma: Metcalf & Co., 1863: 411.

³ The estimated year of Seth Smith's move to Brattleboro is based on three points. First, his remarriage to Eunice Clark in June of 1773; Second, the statement in Moving West (see end note #4) that Israel arrived in Brattleboro in 1774, after Seth, who was "already a well established citizen there;" Third, the statement in the *Annals of Brattleboro* that Seth became a member of first church in Brattleboro between 1770 and 1786.

⁴ Moving West: Thirteen Generations of a Smith Family.

http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~heathsmith/smith/ancestors_gen5.htm. Israel Smith was the brother of Seth and the great grandfather of President Rutherford B. Hayes.

⁵ Walter Hill Crockett. *Vermont: The Green Mountain State*. Vol. 1. New York: Century House Co., 1921: 482.

⁶ Benjamin H. Hall. *History of Eastern Vermont*. New York: D. Appleton, 1858: 771.

⁷ *History of Eastern Vermont*, 414-415. Smith was indicated for "conspiring and attempting an invasion, insurrection and public rebellion" against the state and for "attempting the alteration and subversion" of its government.

⁸ *History of Eastern Vermont*, 417.

⁹ *History of Eastern Vermont*, 417; E. P. Walton. *Records of the Governor and Council of the State of Vermont*. Montpelier: J & J.M. Poland, 1874: 372-374.

¹⁰ *History of Eastern Vermont*, 416.

¹¹ *History of Eastern Vermont*, 419. The release of the treason indictment had two conditions. First, that he would agree to appear in court to answer any other charges that might be brought against him, and second, that he would take an oath of allegiance to Vermont. He must have accepted these conditions.

¹² The estimated year of the move to Spencertown is based on: 1) December 4, 1782 list of all of the heads of families in Brattleboro which does not include Seth Smith but does include his brother Israel; 2) an entry in the diary of his niece, Chloe Smith Hayes, which states very clearly that he lived there; 3) the statement by Micah Townsend in a petition to the Assembly of Vermont where he names his accuser as "Seth Smith of the State of New York." *Records of Governor and Council of the State of Vermont*, vol. 3, 331.

¹³ In 1786, the State of New York granted the entire township consisting of about 48,000 acres in the Town of Bainbridge for the Vermont sufferers and allotted those lands to over 100 inhabitants of southern Vermont to recompense them for "losses and sufferings". Among those that received a land grant were Seth and Israel Smith.

¹⁴ It is reasonable to speculate that Seth moved away from Spencertown after his land claims had been settled with the best deal he could get from the State of New York. There is no evidence that Seth Smith ever moved to Bainbridge despite his grant of land. His niece's statement about Seth does not mention Bainbridge as a place he lived. Seth Smith is listed as living in Granby in the census rolls for 1790, 1800, 1810 and 1820.

¹⁵ Edward Dwight Dickerman and George Sherwood Dickerman. *Families of Dickerman Ancestry, Descendants of Thomas Dickerman, an Early Settler of Dorchester, Massachusetts*. New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse and Taylor Press, 1897:243-4.

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- ¹⁶ James W. Hook. *Lieutenant Samuel Smith and His Children and One Line of Descendants*. New Haven, CT: James W. Hook, 1905: 58-60.
- ¹⁷ Families of Dickerman, 243-4.
- ¹⁸ Benjamin W. Dwight. *Descendants of Elder John Strong of Northampton, Mass.* 1871: 858.
- ¹⁹ *Rolls of Connecticut Men in the French and Indian War, 1755-1762*. Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 2903-5: 50. Muster Roll 1758, for the reduction of Canada.
- ²⁰ *Families of Dickerman*, 243.
- ²¹ Henry P. Johnson. *Record of Connecticut Men in the War of the Revolution, 1775-1783*. Hartford: Adjutant General of CT, 1889: 62.
- ²² Johnson, 628.
- ²³ Frederick W. Bailey. *Early Connecticut Marriages, Prior to 1800*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1997: 107.
- ²⁴ Benjamin W Dwight, 892.
- ²⁵ Barton H. Barbour. *Jedediah Smith: No Ordinary Mountain Man*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009: 15.
- ²⁶ Because Glastonbury and Chatham were adjoining towns in the 18th century, it is possible that Jabin lived in the same house but was designated as being in the two different towns in the different census years.
- ²⁷ Robert West Howard, I, 55.
- ²⁸ Howard, 55.
- ²⁹ Mathew Smith. The Ancestors of Jedediah Strong Smith. *Pacific Historian*. Vol. 22, No. 3: 229.
- ³⁰ Barbour, 15
- ³¹ Mathew Smith, 229.
- ³² Jedediah Sr.'s oldest child, Sally, was born on Oct. 8, 1791.
- ³³ James H. Smith. *History of Chenango and Madison Counties, New York*. Syracuse: D. Mason & Co., 1880: 165.
- ³⁴ James H. Smith, 165.
- ³⁵ Barbour, 15.
- ³⁶ Dale Morgan. *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*; Maurice S. Sullivan. *The Travels of Jedediah Smith*; Harvey L. Carter. *Jedediah Smith, in Mountain Men and Fur Traders of the Far West*. Lincoln: Univ of Nebraska Press, 1982: 91-108.
- ³⁷ Robert West Howard. The Back East Background of Jedediah Strong Smith, II. *Pacific Historian*, Summer 1968: 18.
- ³⁸ Hiram C. Clark. *History of Chenango County*. Norwich, N.Y.: Thompson & Pratt, 1850: 107-113.
- ³⁹ This author did the search in May of 2011.
- ⁴⁰ List of Men. www.battleoflakeerie-bicentennial.com. This list may not be complete but it is the only one available.
- ⁴¹ Howard, II, 19, footnote #56.