

THE TWO BENJAMIN SMITHS OF RONKONKOMA, LONG ISLAND

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In eighteenth-century Brookhaven, nearly one in ten residents bore the surname "Smith." Sorting out these numerous families there presents quite a challenge. In addition to the problems presented by their sheer numbers, the process of tracing the various lines is hampered by a dearth of vital records and the repeated use of a handful of given names. This study will attempt to unravel the identities of two Benjamin Smiths and to explore the ancestry of each.

Two Benjamin Smiths, each born about 1740, resided in the Ronkonkoma Pond/Mooney Pond area of western Brookhaven Town. [Ronkonkoma Pond, now called Lake Ronkonkoma, lies in the center of Suffolk County, at the intersection of Islip, Smithtown and Brookhaven Towns. Mooney Pond is located approximately two miles east of Lake Ronkonkoma.] In Town records and early deeds, both Benjamin Smiths were referred to simply as "yeoman," and each could only sign his name with "his mark." They are both considered by some researchers to be descendants of Benjamin² Smith (b.ca.1655-d.aft.1720), the son of Arthur¹ Smith, "The Quaker," of Southold and Setauket. One of the two is occasionally referred to as "John's son."

A title search of the Ronkonkoma area has pinpointed where each Benjamin Smith lived. Benjamin Smith of "Ronkonkoma Pond" owned a 100-acre farm on the east side of Gatelot Avenue, south of Smith Road. This site is about one mile east of Lake Ronkonkoma. Benjamin Smith, of "Mooney Pond," lived one mile further east, on the west side of Cenacle Road. Mooney Pond, on the grounds of the Cenacle (a Catholic Convent), is now known as Cenacle Pond.

The study of these families has been greatly aided by the recent discovery of the 1782-1789 baptismal register of St. John's (Episcopal) Church, Oakdale, LI [NYG&B RECORD 121-3, July 1990:136]: