

THE ROCK SMITH FAMILY
TO THE TENTH GENERATION

BY VALENTINE W. SMITH

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH AND GENEALOGICAL
RECORD OF THE FAMILY, BASED UPON THE
COLLECTION OF OLD, ORIGINAL FAMILY PAPERS
LEFT BY WILLIAM SMITH IN THE
OLD HOMESTEAD AT MERRICK
LONG ISLAND IN 1884



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MCMXXXVII

I

EARLY SETTING

The first record we find of John Smith, Sr. and John Smith, Jr., whom tradition claimed were our earliest known ancestors, is in Huntington's "History of Stamford, Conn.,"* published in 1868, where they are named as among a company of dissatisfied and restless men under the leadership of Rev. Richard Denton,[†] who had settled at Wethersfield, Connecticut.[‡] After being there a few years religious dissensions arose and they moved on to Stamford, then called Rip-powams, which place they were among the first to settle. Further, we find that in the summer of 1641, 276 acres of land were allotted to twenty-nine of the pioneer families, and at a meeting held December 7, 1641, allotments were made to thirteen additional families. In this second allotment John Smith, Senior and Junior, were each given two acres for home lots and three acres of woodland.

In the Stamford migration of 1644 it is apparent that many of the families who settled in Stamford came on to Hempstead after John Carman, Robert Fordham, and John Seaman had obtained a grant of land from the Indians for most of what became the Towns of Hempstead and North Hempstead in 1643. This grant was confirmed in 1644 by William Kieft, Dutch Governor General, and ratified in 1667 by Richard Nicholls, English Governor General.

Huntington's "History," page 25, lists fifty-nine pioneers who were in Stamford in 1642, and of these the following are known to have come over to Long Island in 1644 with Rev. Richard Denton:

Thomas Armatage
Samuel Clarke
Benjamin Coe
John Coe (son of Robert)
Robert Coe
John Ellison
John Fordham

Robert Fordham
Richard Gildersleeve
Robert Jackson
John Karman (Carman)
John Ogden
Henry Pierson
James Pyne (Pine)

Thurston Raynor
John Seaman
Simon Seiring
Thomas Sherman
John Smith, Sr.

John Smith, Jr.
Edmund Wood
Jeremiah Wood
Jonas Wood
Francis Yates

According to "Robert Coe, Puritan" by J. Gardner Bartlett,[§] and the "Beginnings of Conn." by Dr. Andrews,[¶] Robert Coe was one of the six church members who secured permission to withdraw from the Watertown, Massachusetts, church and form a new church at Wethersfield under a "New Covenant in Connecticut": he wanted a more Presbyterian form of church government. Soon, becoming dissatisfied with the Wethersfield church, he, with his adherents, removed to Stamford and later to Hempstead.

When Rev. Richard Denton and his parishoners arrived in Hempstead he set about at once to establish a church. The congregation of Christ Presbyterian Church of Hempstead claims succession to this first church and believes it to be the first Presbyterian church founded in America.

Long Island at this time was a part of New Netherlands under William Kieft, Governor and Captain General, with the seat of government at New Amsterdam on Manhattan Island. The Dutch were in definite control of the settlements at the mouth of the Hudson River, on Long Island, and along the seacoast to the south as far as Delaware Bay. Connecticut, while nominally a Dutch possession, was in a period of transition between Dutch and English domination, and little governmental authority was exercised by either of them; there was little redress from Indian depredations, which were of frequent occurrence.

By 1659 the British had forced the Dutch from the easterly part of Long Island to a point as far west as Seaford and possibly Merrick. Through a treaty of peace in 1664, the Dutch ceded New Netherlands to England, but on July 28, 1672, taking advantage of a war between England and France, they repossessed it and held it fourteen months and eighteen days before England recaptured it, thus ending Dutch dominion in America.

Charles II, King of England, granted the former Dutch holdings to his brother James, Duke of York, who renamed New Amsterdam New York, in honor of himself, and sold the coast line to the south

to Sir George Carteret, a Jersey nobleman, who established the Colony of New Jersey.

NOTES

* Huntington, Rev. Elijah Baldwin. History of Stamford, Conn. Stamford, 1868.

† Rev. Richard Denton is believed to have been a native of Yorkshire, England, and a graduate of Cambridge in 1623. He was minister at Colby Chapel, Halifax, England, before coming to America. He was at Watertown, Massachusetts in 1633 and is supposed to have been in Wethersfield the next year. He returned to England in 1659 and died there three years later. He left four sons, the line of descent of one of whom, Daniel Denton, is well defined through the succeeding generations.

‡ Wethersfield is a town on the west shore of the Connecticut River a few miles south of Hartford. It was settled in the autumn of 1634 by John Oldham and his associate adventurers, who came there by way of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

§ Bartlett, Joseph Gardner. Robert Coe, Puritan. Boston, 1911.

¶ Andrews, Charles McLean. The Beginnings of Connecticut, 1632-1662. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1934.

II

SETTLING ON LONG ISLAND

After coming to Long Island in 1644, John Smith, the junior of the two John Smiths, bought land first in the extreme westerly part of the Indian grant at Hungry Harbor, in the vicinity of Valley Stream; John Carman and Richard Denton remained in Hempstead; Richard Gildersleeve settled at Merrick; John Seaman and Robert Jackson settled in the more easterly part, at Seaford and Jerusalem (Wantagh); a Raynor went to Freeport and at least one of the Coes settled a short distance to the west. The Raynor homestead of the early days is still standing on the west side of Main Street, Freeport, across the road from the site of Raynor's mill, at the head of navigation in Freeport Creek.

Some of those who came from Stamford in 1644 seem to have continued on to the easterly part of Long Island. In "The First Book of Records of the Town of Southampton,"* page 48, under date of September 3, 1650, it says: "It is granted by the major part of this towne that Mr [John] Ogden and his company shall have Cow Neck and Iefferies Neck for their owne proper right..." On page 66, under date of October 7, 1650, are these entries: "It was ordered at the ... Court of Election ... that fiue men (shall for the present yeare), being chosen by the said court, to act and order all towne affaires, whatsoeuer, excepting matters of admitting of Inhabitants or giving of land, by the said court was chosen Mr Thomas Topping, Mr Thurston Raynor, Ionas Wood, Thomas Halsey, Mr Iosiah Stanborough..."

An entry in one of the oldest books of record in the State Library at Albany says that John Smith, Sr., of the first settlers, proceeded to Suffolk County and established the "Rock" Smith family there. Furman's "Antiquities"† says of the original John Smiths: "one originally settled between Rockaway and Hempstead ... and the other ... [went to] Brookhaven."

The localities in the Town of Hempstead selected by the families

named are on the southern edge of the mainland of Long Island with extensive areas of salt meadowland adjoining extending to the bays and creeks. Since the earliest settlers had all Long Island to select from, the question has been raised as to why they took the poorest land on the Island for their homes. While the land along the extreme south edge of the Island was sandy and poor, it was offset by other decided advantages. These people came practically empty handed; they had been on the go for ten years or more and here was an abundance of wood for their fires, water was but a few feet beneath the surface, and the creeks and bay, right at hand, abounded in fish, shell-fish, and wild fowl. If the land failed them the water would not. Then again, it was good policy to keep reasonably close together both for mutual help in their work and for protection from the Indians. While John James was Town Clerk of Hempstead, in 1657-8, under Peter Stuyvesant, Governor and Captain General of New Netherlands, a letter was received reporting that John Smith had so many "Hoggs" killed or hurt by the Indians that, unless such depredations could be stopped, it would make of the settlers a "poore" people. Another reason, romantic but unlikely, could be inferred for their selection of this particular part of the Island for permanent settlement. In the will of John James, dated March 13, 1660, the oldest document in the collection of old papers, he is described as of Cardiff, in the County of Glamorgan, in the Principality of Wales. The physical formation of the south side of the Town of Hempstead, as well as Brookhaven in Suffolk County, is not dissimilar to that in the vicinity of Cardiff, where the Severn River widens into Bristol Channel. The "flat plains of the Severn" referred to in a book entitled "Beauties of the Severn Valley" are described much as the localities here could be described.

It could possibly be that John James, with the Smiths, Gilder-sleeves, Seamans, Jacksons, Raynors, Coes, and others of the first settlers, came from the vicinity of Cardiff and that the southern waterfront of Long Island made an especial appeal to them. While such a solution has in it an element of possibility, its likelihood is remote, inasmuch as it seems to be a well-established fact of history that the group of settlers under the leadership of Rev. Richard Denton was a set of serious-minded English families from Yorkshire who had set out for the New World in quest of greater opportunity for religious peace and freedom of worship. In this they must have been disappointed, for in Wethersfield, if not indeed in Watertown in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, accounts of their religious broils and dissensions found their way into early history.

One historical comment on Rev. Richard Denton says: "He had ideals of his own which varied with others." Cotton Mather said of him: "Though he were a little man, yet he had a great soul;" and again: "I think he was blind of one eye; nevertheless, he was not the least among the seers of our Israel; he saw a very considerable proportion of those things which 'eye hath not seen.'"‡

NOTES

* The First Book of Records of the Town of Southampton. Sag-Harbor, Hunt, 1874.

† Furman, Gabriel. Antiquities of Long Island. New York, Bouton, 1874. p.192.

‡ Mather, Cotton. Magnalia Christi Americana. Hartford, Andrus, 1855. 2v. v.1, p.399.

III

JOHN JAMES - WILL

The name of John James does not appear in the list of the first settlers. That list seems to have been composed of heads of families, and from the terms of his will it is quite evident that he was a man without family connection living in the family of John Smith, Jr. (John Smith Rock).

His will, an unusual document, shows a regard, almost amounting to affection, in which he held his personal belongings, and gives evidence of careful thought in their testamentary distribution. It is worth reflecting upon even now, and is as follows:

In ye name of god Amen.* I, John James, Cardiffe in ye County of Glamorgan, in ye principality of Wales, being at present Sick in body: but blessed bee god I am of good & perfect memory, doe by these presents for ye well ordering of ye blessings of god bestowed upon mee for my releesse: I blesse his name for it & for his mercifull providence over mee all ye dayes of my liffe: In primis, my will is yt [i.e., that] my debts shall bee payd, wt [i.e., with] ye oates & other grain in my lodgeing of each a part, that is to say one hundred and seaven gilders, eighteen stivers unto Mr. Samuell Drisius Minister, of ye Church of Christ at Manhattans: Item, unto Mrs. Bridges, twentie one pound of Butter, dutch Weight; there is sufficient on my book to pay it: Item, I give and bequeath unto John Smith Rock Junior my fether bed & bolster & 2 blanckets, one red and another blew, to be given at ye death of his parents or on his day of marriage or when hee shall keep his house by his parent's Consent: Item, I give unto Hanna Smith, my Byble: and iff her Brother dye wt out issue my bed & Appurtenances: Item, I give & bequeath unto Joan Brudnell, sixe pounds sterling to bee payd in oates & other grain a month affter my decease: I doubt not but there will bee soe much overplus. When my

debts are payd, it is to buy her part of a house: Item, I give unto Thomas Jeacoks children $3\frac{1}{4}$ of trading cloth yt is on my bed to cloath them: Item, I bequeath unto Richard Stites one sheet for a Winding sheet: to Josiah Furman one sheet, to Goodwiffe Champion, one sheet, & ye other to make myself a winding sheet: Item, I bequeath unto William Scaddin, one english ell of Holland: to John Smith Rock ye remainder ffor his children: I bequeath unto John Beadle my doublet & black cloth breeches & 40 s[hillings] his ffather owes mee to keep him to scool: Item, I give to Mr hicks [sic], the use my bookes of Arithmeticke: Item, I give to Mr Gildersleeve my chair & ffree of all accounts between us: Item, I give my table & bench & cupboard to John Smith Rock & doe appoint him to bee executor of this my Last Will & Testament, and William Scaddin to assist him: Item, I give & bequeath my white blancket to Goodwiffe Simons liveing near ye Wall on Mr Drisius land at Manhatans. Shee is a Washer Wooman; pray send it saffely to her: Item, I desire my executor to see mee decently buried & to have so much wine or drams as may wt moderation bee drunk: Iff I have been too large in giveing, I leave to their discretion; if there bee anything over to give unto pious uses yt is to help repair ye meeting house & to give 20 s[hillings] to ye Chuch [sic] at Flatbush; & thus in Conclusion I Commend my poor soule into ye Merciffull hands of God, hoping to enioy ye Kingdome of heaven fforevermore. Dated at Hemstead ye 13th of March, 1660:

John James

Witnesses:

John Seaman

Richard Brudnill

NOTE

* The transcriptions included in this monograph of the documents in the collection of old papers are given exactly as originally written with these exceptions: some punctuation has been added where its omission would make the meaning obscure; modernized forms of

the spelling of some words have been used for the sake of clarity; and the abbreviations ye, yt, and wt, which were written in the original one letter above the other, have necessarily been alined horizontally. Ed.

V

THE DESIGNATION "ROCK"

In James Savage's "Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England," volume 4, page 119, we find:

John [Smith, Sr.] and John [Smith], Jr., of Stamford among the first settlers in 1641, both removed to Hempstead, L.I. The younger, in 1675, gave a deposition calling himself 60 years old, in which he says that formerly at Stamford they called him Rock John Smith for distinction.*

The deposition of the younger John Smith, being directly in line with the family tradition and, at the same time, taking into account the origin of the designation "Rock" by which the family had been known, gave rise to a most diligent search for any paper or record to substantiate or give a reason for such a deposition to have been made and under what circumstances. Although careful search was made through the oldest records in the County Clerk's Office in Jamaica, in the Library of the Long Island Historical Society, Brooklyn, to which I belong, The New York Public Library, and the Office of the Secretary of State, in Albany, no information bearing upon it could be obtained. A legend, to which allusion is made in the appendix, connects the origin of the "Rock" Smith designation with a house built in New England with a rock inside for a fireplace back.

The designation presumably applied to the early family as a whole. It is used in about twenty of the old papers and is found in individual names to the fourth generation, intermittently, but after that it seems to have fallen into disuse almost entirely. John Smith Rock, himself, in an agreement with members of his family, under date of May 20, 1690, and in his will dated May 10, 1695,[†] both voluminous documents, is named simply as John Smith; in other papers he made use of the "Rock."

Lieutenant Jonathan Smith, son of Rock John Smith, in one of the three military commissions issued to him, that from Richard, Earle of Bellomont, under date of January 23, 1698, is named as Jonathan Smith, alias Rock. Lieutenant Jonathan in a deed to his son, Jonathan Smith, Jr., dated March 20, 1720, and in his will of March 6, 1724, makes no mention of the Rock.

Jonathan Smith (third generation), son of Lieutenant Jonathan, in a deed to his son, John Smith, dated September 22, 1738, calls himself Jonathan Smith Rock, Sr., but signs it "Jonathan Smith." In the body of a will made the same day, he is described as "Jonathan Smith, Sen., alias Rock," but signs it "Jonathan Smith." In his final will of May 13, 1746, which is very long and very complicated, he makes no use of the designation Rock at all.

Gersham Smith (third generation), son of Lieutenant Jonathan Smith and brother of Jonathan Smith, in his will of October 19, 1736, describes himself as Gersham Rock Smith, but signed it "Gersham Smith." Neither his son Gersham, nor his grandson Adam Smith, in their full and explicit wills made use of the Rock in either the body of their wills or in the signatures.

In the sixth generation Raynor Smith, in the Gersham Smith line of descent, so called in the will of his father, Adam Smith, dated June 2, 1816, incorporated Rock in his own name and in that of his sons, Zophar, James, Thomas, Oliver, Charles, and William, children of his first marriage, which was to Ruth Whaley. Therefrom the line of descent of Raynor Rock Smith became the only branch of the family to which the historically distinctive designation is definitely attached.

NOTES

* For the sake of clarity the many abbreviated words in the source of this quotation have been spelled out. Ed.

† New York Historical Society. Collections. 1892. p.419-21.

VI

ROCK JOHN SMITH

Rock John Smith (first generation) purchased property first in the vicinity of Valley Stream, as has been noted. There is a deed from Ambros Sutton to John Smith Rock, dated December 16, 1661, which describes the property, only, as being on the Plains. There is another deed from Richard Ellison to John Rock Smith, dated February 10, 1667, in which the property conveyed is described as meadowland on the north side of a neck called Rockaway, adjacent to a place called Hungry Harbor. One of the bounds in this description is a bay that parts Hempstead and Jamaica.

Rock John Smith must have been an astute real estate operator. Those purchases at Hungry Harbor were followed by many more, for in deeds to his son, Lieutenant Jonathan Smith, dated, respectively, March 30, 1687 and October 28, 1698, and by requests in his will of May 10, 1695, he disposed of the following properties:

All his home lot in the tenour and occupancy of Jonathan Smith, bounded by John Smith's home lot on the north, easterly and southerly by the road and westerly by the home lot in the tenour of George Hewlett, containing two and one-half acres.

Two-thirds of fifty acres at Tanners Hook Point.

One hundred acres at Howsbay.

Twelve acres of meadows at Rockaway.

Five acres upon the Indian Lands at Rockaway.

Fourteen acres of meadowland at Coes Little Neck, with the upland belonging to it.

One-half of one and a half acres at the Half Moon.

One small lot east of Jonathan Smith's windmill in the Town of Hempstead.

John Smith reserved for himself a life-right in the fourteen acres at Coes Neck, which may have been his home at that time. It

was located in what is now the southwesterly part of Freeport.

Besides the properties given to his son, Jonathan, John Smith left these additional properties to his son, Joseph Smith:

Twelve acres of meadows at Rockaway.

Thirteen acres of meadows at Hicks Neck.

Ten acres of meadows at Coes Neck, with the upland belonging to it.

Three acres of land in the Holly.

One piece in the Old Field.

One piece at the windmill, adjoining Armitage's.

In addition to the two deeds and will, John Smith, on May 20, 1690, sixteen years before his death, executed a formal agreement of nearly a thousand words which was signed jointly by himself and his sons Joseph and Jonathan, his daughter Hannah Tredwell, and his sons-in-law Samuel Denton, Sr. and Francis Chappell. In this he agreed to make a division of his real and personal estate during his lifetime. He, however, made the following proviso, which he apparently exercised:

Whereas I John Smith senr. ... doe dispose of my stock & land & meadow unto my children equally upon the Conditions ffolowing (viz) that if I doe not alter it before I dye everyone to have such proportions of catle & land & medow; ye Catle to looke Carefully after them during My liffe, And to remaine liable either in whole or part to bee Cald in again ffor my use iff I stand in need or see Cause to Call them in; the land & medow alsoe upon the same tearmes ffor my children to enjoy as there [sic] own proper inheritance unless I see Cause or need to dispose of ye whole or any part of it before I dye. And my s[ai]d children shall Annually allow mee same Reasonable rent ffor ye s[ai]d Medowland & Catle if I see cause: ...

This agreement was witnessed by Jeremiah Hobart and Daniel Denton.

According to the agreement and the will, Rock John Smith's family consisted of the following:

Sons: John Smith [at that time deceased], Joseph, and Jonathan.

Daughters: Mary, wife of Samuel Denton; Martha Chappell; and Hannah Tredwell.

Grandchildren: Timothy and Richard Smith, sons of John Smith [deceased]; Anne and Mary Rushmore, and William and Stephen Chappell, children of Martha; and Sarah and Mary Smith, presumably daughters of John Smith [deceased].

In the will of Rock John Smith made five years after the agreement, Martha Chappell is referred to as deceased, and the granddaughter, Sarah Smith, had married William (?) Pine. John Smith apparently died in 1706 at the age of ninety-one. His will was proved April 3, 1706.

As interesting commentaries on Rock John Smith and throwing further light on him as a man, these two entries, selected from among many references to him in the early Hempstead Town Records, are given here.

At a Towne-meeting ye 13th of May [1659] It is ordered that John Smith rock is lycensed by general vote to keepe an ordenary and is allowed to sell meat drinck and Lodgeing for strangers w'th theire retinew; both for horse and man, and is to take such rates for his entertainment both of stranger as shalbee found Conciderable and Lawfull, And is to keepe such good ordre that it may not be offensive unto ye Lawes of God & this place.*

Bee it known unto all Men by these presents, That I Anna Wood the wife of John Wood formerly of Rode Island, Doe hereby give and bequeath unto John Smith of Hempstead (for Distinction Sake called Rock) my welbeloved Sonne Jonathan Wood (who will bee about ye twenty ninth of September next ensuing the date hereof ffoure years old) for his owne to live and abide with him or his heires untill hee come to bee twenty one yeares of age. And the said John Smith Doth likewise hereby Ingage himselfe and his heires to Deale wth her Son as with his owne And to provide for him during the time hee abideth wth him, meat, Drink, lodging and apparell Convenient and Sufficient for him, even as for his owne, And Doth likewise Ingage when his time is expired, to furnish him with two good suits of Apparrell fitted to his body, and to give him one Cowe at his going away, provided that hee abide with

him the full terme of the time above specified. But in case that ye said Anna Wood or her Husband shall see cause within a twelvemoneth and a Day from ye day of ye date hereof, to take away their Sonne from the said John Smith, they have their liberty so to do, Provided that they Defray and Discharge all such Charges and expences as the said John Smith hath been at in maintaining of him with food and Apparell or other necessities.

In witnese whereof both parties Do hereunto mutually subscribe their hands, this 21st day of August, in ye yeare of our Lord Christ one thousand Six hundred Sixty two, Stilo Novo.

In presence of

John Tredwell
Jonas Houldsworth

her
Anna X Wood
mark
John X Smith
his

This is a true Copie of ye Originall, both of them being written by mee

Jonas Houldsworth†

NOTES

* Records of the Towns of North and South Hempstead, Long Island, N.Y. Jamaica, Long Island Farmer Print, 1896. 8v. v.1, p.83-4.

†Op.cit. v.1, p.128-9.