

Gideon and Elizabeth Smith of Buffaloe Farm

by

Nancy M. Neuman

Imagine my excitement when I discovered my 3rd great grandparents Gideon and Elizabeth Smith once lived in Lewisburg. I had no idea. When I began to research my Smith ancestors I knew almost nothing about them. I did know that my great grandfather Samuel Smith was born in Mill Hall, but was stymied sorting my Sam Smith from all the others. Then I took a new look at a small certificate dated September 9, 1783 that hangs in a frame on my dining room wall. The document, which may be a letter of transfer, is signed by Rev. Robert Cooper, minister of Middle Springs Presbyterian Church, Cumberland County. He writes that Gideon and Elizabeth Smith attended the church from 1781 to 1783 and are of good character. Church minutes show payment to Gideon for carpentry work, but Rev. Cooper's parish records are lost. Otherwise I might have found valuable information about the Smith's marriage and baptisms of their older children.

In a chance conversation with Tom Groninger, I dropped the name Gideon Smith. I knew Tom had published his family genealogy and thought he might help me get started. He gave me much more. Tom said his ancestors sold a farm in Lewisburg to a Gideon Smith in 1795. Off I went to the Northumberland County courthouse basement where old deed books are stored in a former dungeon. I found the deed recorded August 21, 1795. Gideon and Elizabeth Smith bought "Buffaloe Farm" at the confluence of Buffalo and Little Buffalo Creeks from Leonard and Jacob Groninger for £599, five shillings.

The Smiths actually settled on the farm in White Deer Township (now Kelly) about four years earlier. In 1791, Gideon rented pew number 28 with

Robert Fruit at Buffalo Crossroads Church. Tax rolls for White Deer (1793-1811) show him in 1793 with 280 acres, 2 horses, 3 cows, no servants, no slaves,

That the Bearer Gideon Smith & Elizabeth his wife have been residents in this Congregation for about the space of two years preceding the date, came well recommended, & have in all respects conducted in a regular & Christian manner, have been members in full communion, and are now free from the least imputation of any thing scandalous as certified at Middle Spring, in Cumberland County, this 9th Day of Aug. 1783. by Rob^t Cooper Min.

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and 1 freeman. In 1796 his property included a log house, double barn and still house; by 1811 the Smiths lived in a stone house on Buffalo Creek.

After two years pursuing Gideon from one county to another and disproving misinformation that took me on exhausting detours, I finally confirmed his identity as my ancestor. That was hard enough, but it took me a decade of investigation until I was confident I had found Elizabeth.

Gideon Smith was born in West Fallowfield (now Highland) Township, Chester County on May 28, 1752, the third son of James Smith (1719-1785) and Sarah Wilson (1724-1812). James emigrated in 1720 from Northern Ireland to Chester County with his parents John and Susannah Smith, who eventually had 15 children. In his will James left two plantations to his older sons James and John, and ordered them to pay their brother Gideon £100.

Gideon left home and really didn't settle down until he brought his family to Lewisburg. His 1833 Revolutionary War pension application shows his active war service in Chester. Then he moved "to follow his trade" as carpenter in Cumberland and Philadelphia, and kept going. He lived in Lancaster, York, Northumberland, and Centre counties. Because of county formation, his records are also in Franklin, Union, and Clinton counties.

In 1778 he bought property in Lurgan Township, Cumberland County (now Franklin). He was married to Susannah Armstrong, his first cousin, daughter of his father's sister Susannah and her husband Thomas Armstrong. She died August 4, 1779 at age 20. Her tombstone at Fagg's Manor Presbyterian Church shows her as "relict" of Gideon Smith. Because "relict" usually means "widow," the authoritative 1906 biography of the Smith family shows Gideon as dead before 1779, leaving his descendants the task of recreating a life they know existed.

Gideon married Elizabeth about 1781. Born in 1758, her story, like his, was unknown. Her maiden name disappeared with her marriage, and Gideon did not mention his family in his pension application. I found several genealogies that misidentify her, requiring me to prove they were wrong before I could prove I was right. Using naming patterns, wills, deeds and other documents, I finally proved my theory that she was the youngest child of William Boyd (1707-1762) of Sadsbury, Chester County and his second wife Elizabeth Cowan of Salisbury, Lancaster County. Elizabeth Cowan's father was David Cowan, who emigrated in 1720 from Northern Ireland to Lancaster. Her mother Mary Fleming was a daughter of William Fleming and Mary Moore of Chester County.

In 1787 when Gideon sold his property in Lurgan Township at a financial loss, the Smiths were living in Salisbury, Lancaster, probably with Elizabeth's mother. The 1790 census shows them in York County with four boys under age 10. Their names and approximate years of birth are: Gideon Wilson (1782), William Boyd (1783), John (1786), Samuel (1788). Four more

children were born in White Deer: Elizabeth (1791), Susannah Sally (1793), my ancestor Thomas Armstrong (1794), and Jane Ann (1798).

Did family and church associations lead the Smiths to Buffalo Valley? Like Gideon and Elizabeth, their neighbors came from Ulster Scot Presbyterian families who originated in Chester County. Ann Futhey, the wife of Samuel Dale, was among them. The Smith and Futhey families lived in West Fallowfield Township. Ann Futhey Dale and Gideon's sister Martha were sisters in law. Martha Smith married Ann's brother Samuel Futhey. The families of John Linn and his wife Ann Fleming migrated from Chester to Cumberland where they belonged to Middle Springs Presbyterian Church. Ann Fleming Linn and Elizabeth Boyd Smith were cousins; their great grandparents were William Fleming and Mary Moore. Ann's grandfather James Fleming was the brother of Elizabeth's grandmother Mary Fleming Cowan.

In 1790 Gideon's maternal uncle Gideon Wilson died, leaving his farm in Chester County to his widow, ordering that it pass to his nephew Gideon Smith upon her death. In 1807 that farm became his, but rather than return to their home county, Gideon and Elizabeth filed a power of attorney giving Gideon's brother John the authority to sell the farm.

In 1810 they sold 101 acres of Buffaloe Farm to John Sterner for £759, and in 1814 they sold 201 acres to William Young for \$8,041. Their mortgage to Leonard Groninger was recorded as fully paid January 23, 1815, and in April they bought 109 acres of the Hays land on the Officer's Tract in Bald Eagle Township, Centre County (now Clinton) for \$2,616.

Why did they leave Union County? In his journal, Flavel Roan mentions good times at "Giddy" Smith's. But when he asked Giddy to sign the petition for a new county, Giddy remarked "there are too many Federalists on the petition." Did politics have anything to do with his decision to move? Or was it a chance to provide a nest egg for his old age by selling his property and buying cheaper land? Perhaps Gideon preferred to keep moving farther into the frontier.

Two sons were now gone. Gideon Wilson died in November 1813, one of the first recorded deaths in Union County. William Boyd (“Boyd Smith”), who died in 1833, moved to Lycoming County about 1812. He married Mary Thompson, daughter of Captain James Thompson, an early settler in White Deer.

The remaining children moved to Bald Eagle. Daughter Elizabeth died in 1823. Her tombstone shows her as “relict” of her husband George Brown, which explains the use of “relict” by Gideon on his first wife’s grave. George Brown outlived Elizabeth for many years. Descendants of their daughter Mary Catherine Brown Bossert still live in Clinton County. Susannah Sally, who died in 1848, married Samuel Hays, a son of Lt. James Hays and Sarah Brown. Lt. Hays was granted land in the Officer’s Tract for his service in Pontiac’s War (1763-1766). Jane Ann married John Elder and moved to Richmond, Virginia where she died in 1855. Samuel was living in 1840 when Gideon wrote his will, but his location and date of death are unknown. John, who died in 1860, married Elizabeth Lusk. The farmhouses of John and his son John David Lusk Smith still stand on Route 150 in Bald Eagle Township.

My 2nd great grandfather Thomas Armstrong married Beulah Templeton, daughter of William Templeton and Beulah Gustine. The first saddler in Mill Hall, “Armstrong Smith” and his family joined an exodus of north central Pennsylvania residents to the Midwest in the late 1840s. He died in Lansing Iowa in 1874. My great grandfather Samuel O. Smith, Lieutenant in Company B, 27th Iowa Infantry, survived “mortal” wounds in the Civil War. He was left for dead on a battlefield in Pleasant Hill Louisiana, taken prisoner, recovered, and exchanged back to his company. At age 18 Samuel adopted the middle name Oscar to make his name less common. He married Sarah Hazeltine, daughter of Edwin and Polly Abbott Hazeltine, who was living in Lansing with her sister Chloe Frothingham. In 1876 Samuel and Sarah moved to the Hazeltine farm in Busti, New York where they raised my grandmother Emma Gertrude Smith.



Samuel O. Smith

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Elizabeth Smith died May 22, 1836; Gideon died March 31, 1841. They are buried where they lived on the Hays tract, now part of the Hays Fearon cemetery, in Beech Creek. A brick ruin adjacent to the cemetery was the home of daughter Susannah and Samuel Hays. The Smiths are buried next to their daughter Elizabeth and close to the Hays family. The land they owned in Lewisburg is now on US Federal Penitentiary property east of the covered bridge at Buffalo and Little Buffalo Creeks.

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