



An 1811 wood engraving shows members of the Religious Society of Friends gathering for a meeting.

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**OUR
PATRIOTS**

TIMOTHY SMITH, Quaker, Teamster, Patriot

By Ellen E. Stanley

The Patriot Timothy Smith was a lifelong member of the Religious Society of Friends, a religious group informally known as Quakers. His commitment to pacifism, one of the tenets of Quakerism, was put to the test when the Revolutionary War started in 1775. Believing that war and conflict were against God's wishes, Quakers disowned some of Smith's extended family members for bearing arms or supporting war measures. At age 32, Smith decided to remain faithful to his religion while demonstrating allegiance to the Patriot cause by joining the Continental Army in a non-combatant role: as a teamster responsible for transporting vital supplies to military forces.

Early Life and Marriage

Timothy Smith, the son of Anthony and Lydia Willets Smith, was born January 25, 1747, in Monmouth, N.J., according to the date given in the official minutes of the Little Egg Harbor Quaker Monthly Meeting. He was a sixth-generation colonist. An ancestor, William Smith, arrived in Boston from Gloucestershire, England, in 1635. Though this ancestor was most likely not a Quaker, Timothy Smith's father was. The family moved to Shrewsbury, N.J., and in 1767, records show that Smith was a witness to a Quaker marriage there.

Smith married Sarah Willets, a fifth-generation colonist, around 1768–1770, probably in Shrewsbury. They were second cousins, and their extended families had known each other for several generations. Sarah's family had been practicing Quakers since 1665, when her ancestor Mary Willet became a Quaker minister in Jericho, N.Y. It is plausible that Smith and Sarah had known each other their whole lives, as both grew up in the same Quaker community.

Sometime in the 1770s, they moved to Burlington County in New Jersey, and they had seven children: Richard and Micajah were born before the Revolutionary War broke out; Anthony was born in 1777; and Timothy, Daniel, Sarah and James were all born in the 1780s.

Wagons to the Rescue

When the Revolutionary War began, one of General George Washington's enormous challenges involved transportation—specifically, how to deliver guns, ammunition, food and other essential supplies to his troops. Some travel between the Colonies took place by water along the Atlantic seaboard, but when it came to overland travel, there were no major roads in the Colonies, and the roads that did exist were in poor condition.

One solution came in the form of the Conestoga wagon, which originated in southeastern Pennsylvania in the early 18th century. English and German (Pennsylvania Dutch) immigrants used the wagon-building skills they'd brought with them to develop a vehicle suitable for America's primitive roads. The Conestoga—carefully crafted with a curved body and outward slanting ends—was able to withstand constant jostling over rutted Colonial roads and rocky terrain. The wagon's large wheels allowed these rugged vehicles to cross deep streams while keeping cargo dry. Pulled by teams of four to seven horses, the wagon bed could haul as much as five tons of cargo, which had to include fodder for the horses, a considerable part of the load. (Learn more about these “ships of inland commerce” in the July/August 2018 issue.)

Though these hardy wagons were an important part of the transportation puzzle, there were few skilled teamsters to drive them or wheelwrights and blacksmiths to maintain them. Attempts to use Continental Army infantrymen failed, as those soldiers lacked the skills

needed to drive the wagons and care for the horses. To solve the issue, General Washington approved a proposal to enlist teamsters for the duration of the war, creating a professional organization to deliver supplies in a timely manner. A Wagon Department, subordinate to the Quartermaster General, was created in 1777 with full responsibility for overland transportation.

On September 15, 1779, Smith joined Captain Israel Burrows' Team Brigade, part of the Wagon Department. Burrows' Brigade consisted of eight four-horse wagons maintained in Trenton, N.J. In 1780, Smith enlisted again for six to nine months. By 1780, according to historian Erna Risch in her book, *Supplying Washington's Army* (University of Michigan Library, 1981), “the Wagon Department had 11 deputy wagonmasters general, 108 men specifically enlisted as wagonmasters, three soldiers serving as wagonmasters, 156 enlisted wagoners, 104 wagoners taken from among the soldiery, and 272 hired wagoners.”

Post-War Life

Not much is known about Smith's day-to-day service as a teamster, but after the war, he and his family lived in Burlington County until they moved to Washington County, Pa., in 1789. The Smiths and their seven children were enumerated in the U.S. census of 1790 in Franklin Township, Fayette County, Pa. In 1794, they moved to Redstone Township in Fayette County, where land records indicate Smith bought and sold large land holdings. Sarah died there in 1803.

Five years after Sarah's death, the Quaker Redstone Monthly Meeting granted Smith permission to return to Shrewsbury and marry Hannah Williams, who was 15 years his junior. It is likely that they knew each other when Smith lived in Shrewsbury, as they attended the same Quaker meetings. He stayed in Shrewsbury for two years, and they were married there in 1810 in a Quaker ceremony. After the marriage, Smith sold his properties in Fayette County, and they moved to Cumberland Township, Greene County, Pa., where records show he purchased around 400 acres between 1810 and 1822.

Smith died in Greene County in 1822 at age 75. On April 19, 1822, executors Daniel Smith and Job Garey filed the inventory of his considerable estate, which included a horse, cattle, books and a bookcase, a desk and other furnishings. The inventory also showed stock in the Monongahela Bank as well as debts owed to him.

After he died, Hannah went to live with one of Smith's sons by his first marriage, Micajah, and his wife Esther in Gladesville, WVa. Hannah died there in 1842 and is buried near the couple in the Gladesville graveyard. ☉

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