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LIVONIA'S EARLY HISTORY

...NOTES AND RECOLLECTIONS OF THE SMITH FAMILY

Written for the Gazette by Lewis E. Smith of Rochester.

[Considerably Abridged]

...

George Smith, familiarly known as Col. Smith, the son of Oziel Smith, was born at Dorset, Vermont, March 3d, 1779, while his parents were moving from Scituate, R. I. to Clarendon, Rutland Co., Vt. He was the eldest son of Margret Walton Smith, the second wife of Oziel Smith. Her Walton relatives, among whom were Quakers, one of whom was driven through the streets of Boston in a cart, and whipped publicly, for her Quakerism, were of the better class of well-to-do inhabitants. Some of them held office under the British government at the commencement of the Revolution and remained friendly to the British, but the majority sided with the Colonies. She was a strong, healthy person, of natural practical intellect, amiable disposition, dark complexion, black eyes, and black hair. She died at Clarendon, Vt., June 10th, 1793, aged 89 years. The ancestors of George Smith on both sides were of English descent and were noted for their strong native talents and practical intellects, of which George seems to have inherited a goodly share. His elder half brother, Noah Smith, was the first settler on the farm which included the ancient fort in the north part of Livonia. He afterwards moved to Onondaga county, N.Y., where he died in advanced old age. There were three younger brothers, viz: Oziel jr., John, and Ward, and a sister, Nancy, who married Hezekiah Beecher in Livonia, where she died March 27, 1874, aged 81 years. Oziel died at Williamsville, Erie Co., N.Y., in December, 1885, from the effects of a rose cancer; John at Bellville, St. Clair Co., Ill., and Ward at Hiram, Portage Co., Ohio, all leaving children.

George Smith lived with his parents in Clarendon, working to clear and till the new farm. He said his attendance at school prior to his coming to Lima was three months, at age eleven, and about ten weeks at fourteen years of age, when his mother died. This left the family in an unsettled state, which in connection with his father's financial difficulties (caused mainly by the failure of his eldest son in trade), and the limited resources of a new and sparsely settled country, prevented his further attendance at school. When living at Lima he went one winter three miles through the woods to a private school in the southeast part of Avon, kept by Zebulon Rathbun, and afterwards, while working at the carpenter and joiners trade, he studied evenings. He used shavings, which he could reach with one hand, and threw them on the fire for a light, while he held his book in the other hand. He improved every opportunity of educating himself till he taught school in the winter. He subsequently studied surveying, which, in connection with farming, he made his principal business during the latter part of his life.

George Smith's father married a third wife, which did not prove most fortunate for the family, and his home lost much of its attraction and pleasure. In the winter of 1798 he came to Charlestown (now Lima) N. Y., in the employ of Joel Roberts, driving a team of two yoke of oxen and a horse heavily loaded with plow irons, chains and other agricultural implements, making the journey in twenty-two days, and arriving in February. Here he remained about a year, mainly employed in chopping over timber land by the job for

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clearing and cultivation in the summer and boiling potash in the winter. Then he hired out to work on boats and scows by rowing and poleing along the water way, then used in carrying produce to the east, and went back home for a visit. By exposure and hardship in his journey through malarious localities he incurred a severe attack of ague and fever, which came on every other day, and caused him much pain and suffering in his return to Lima. This compelled him to stop when and where the attacks came on, regardless of comfort or accommodations for the sick. These hardships exhausted his slim purse, and reduced him for a time to want and despondency.

He remained at Lima and pursued his former work, and also the carpenter's business, till the spring of 1801; then he came to Pittstown (now Livonia), Ontario county, N. Y., and engaged with John Woolcot to work at the carpenter and joiner's trade and the millwright business. Their first job was the erection of the first frame house in town for David Benton. The original frame is now (1889) standing about a mile south east of Livonia Center. In 1803 he worked all winter on the first court house of Genesee county at Batavia. He often spoke of the cold winter work, and of the pleasant social gatherings of young people in the evenings. The time set for the organization of Genesee county in being set off from Ontario county depended upon the completion of the court house and jail, hence the persistent winter work. In the fall of the same year he erected a saw mill for the Holland Land co. at Oak Orchard Falls, now Medina, N. Y. The nearest inhabited house was on the old Queenstown road nine miles distant, and about twenty-seven miles from Batavia. Here bears of the largest size known in this region, and deer and wolves and other wild game, were plenty. The Ridge road was not cut out at that time.

In Jan., 1807, he married Sally Woodruff, the daughter of Nathan Woodruff, who moved from Litchfield, Conn., to Pittstown and settled in the south side of Livonia Center in 1801. His family consisted of his wife, Sarah Bottsford Woodruff, his son, Nathan Jr., Abigail, who married John Woolcot, Sally, who married George Smith, and Hannah, who married Eli Stedman. Sally moved with the family and rode all the way on horseback, carrying a weaver's reed on her lap, which she afterwards made good use of in the new settlement. In 1821 she spun and wove the cloth for her husband's fine suit to wear in the legislature at Albany as the first representative from the new county of Livingston. I remember winding quills on a quillwheel for her to weave, when not working out doors, which all boys were then required to do as soon as able. She was tall, of fair complexion, with dark brown hair and blue eyes, of cheerful and benevolent disposition, and ever ready with sympathy and relief for the suffering of others. She had a strong constitution and good health naturally. She said she never knew a sick day until bitten by a rattlesnake when crossing a field in Livonia at the age of nineteen. I remember seeing the scar of the wound on her right ankle. She received immediate attention from the haymakers in the field, one of whom sucked the wound thoroughly, which was thought to have saved her life. He became violently sick in consequence. She said the side bitten was from head to foot partially paralyzed and numb for two weeks afterwards. Dr. Campbell was then called and used dry cupping over the wound and some internal remedies. The present cure by whiskey and ammonia seems not to have been known at that time. This poisoned her system, and caused regular swelling of the ankle bitten at the same time of the year. At first it soon disappeared, but yearly increased its continuance till both ankles swelled and so

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remained through the year. It finally resulted in an abscess on one ankle, which healed soon at first, then extended to both, as the season returned, with increased continuance, till they were constant on both ankles through the year. Thus her life became a constant struggle with disease and suffering, which ended only with her death February 17th, 1885, aged 51 years on her last birthday, Nov. 30th, 1884.

George and Sally Smith began house-keeping in March, 1807, in a log cabin built by him on sixteen and three-quarter acres of land purchased of Gideon Pitts and lying in the northeast corner of lot No. 88 in the town, and on the north side of the "Genesee Road," at the cost of \$168. He added thereto by subsequent purchases adjoining till he had over 100 acres, then sold about forty acres to George Pratt in the northeast corner of Lot No. 28. George and Sally Smith were both natural musicians, and sang in the choir of the first church organized in town by the Rev. Aaron C. Collins, Dec. 29, 1806. It was called the Second Congregational church of Pittstown. In 1813 it took the name of the First Presbyterian church of Livonia. On Feb. 20, 1809, George Smith purchased of Gen. William A. Mills of Mt. Morris eighty-two acres and eighty-seven rods for \$1,000, situated on the south east corner of lot 33, and lying on the south side of the Genesee road, where Capt. Turne kept a tavern in a double log house, and where Mr. Smith built the present dwelling about 1816. He made additional purchases till he had nearly 200 acres...

George Smith was not a politician in the common acceptation of that term, yet he early took an interest in the political questions of the day. In 1800 he took the only Republican newspaper taken in his neighborhood, which was published at Hartford, Conn. He became prominent in promulgating its doctrines, and gave his first vote in that year for Thos. Jefferson for President, and he voted at every succeeding Presidential election, including Grant's second election, and also at the fall election of 1873, about five weeks before his death. He selected the name of Livonia for the town when it was organized from a part of Pittstown, Ontario Co., Feb. 12, 1808, and was elected one of the assessors at the first election of its town officers. He was appointed justice of the peace by the governor in 1819, which office he held for eight years. He held the office of supervisor in 1820. On the organization of Livingston county in 1821, in which he took an active part, he was elected its first member of assembly, and elected again in 1823 in company of Hon. Geo. Hosmer of Avon, an eminent lawyer, and sat in the several sessions of 1824. He was appointed, under act of the legislature, as commissioner and surveyor to lay out a State road from Livonia south into Steuben county, and from time to time held the office of supervisor and various other town offices of responsibility, even at times while his party was in the minority...

George Smith early took an active interest in the organization and drill of a militia company under Capt. Turner, and was commissioned a sergeant therein. Afterwards, on April 10th, 1805, he was commissioned an ensign by Gov. Morgan Lewis in a company in a regiment of Ontario county, commanded by Lieutenant-Col. Wm. Wadsworth. On April 6th, 1807, he was appointed captain by Gov. Lewis of a company in the same regiment. On Feb. 11, 1811, he was appointed first major by Gov. Tompkins of the regiment in Ontario county commanded by Lieut.-Col. Joseph W. Lawrence. On the 22d of March, 1816, he was appointed lieutenant colonel of the 94th regiment of militia by Gov. Tompkins, and on August 26, 1817, was appointed colonel of the 94th regiment by Gov. DeWitt Clinton. He

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held the latter office two or three years, and then resigned. Early in 1812, while holding the office of major, he organized and drilled a company as its captain and on the declaration of war volunteered for the war. His services were accepted, but as his regiment was not called out he was assigned to the regiment commanded by Lieut.-Col. Peter Allen and ordered to the Niagara frontier. When they were ordered to attack Queenstown, he was detached from the regiment and ordered to take charge of the boats and transportation across the river. Adjutant Stanton, afterwards General Stanton, late of Wyoming county, was detached also and ordered to act as his assistant, but on landing across the river he became so eager for the fight that he deserted his post and marched with the landed troops to the battle. Col. Solomon Van Rensselaer was the commanding officer. Mr. Smith says: "The main body of our troops crossed over and attempted to ascend the hill before day, but were attacked and driven back, taking shelter under the banks of the river. In the engagement Co. Van Rensselaer was badly wounded. About sunrise Major Mullany, of the regular army, came up with about 100 men and attempted to cross over, but most of the men on the boats had been fired upon, and had deserted and left the boats. The soldiers at once manned the boats and started, but soon the rough and stormy current carried them half a mile below the village of Queenstown. The British, not aware that our forces were under the bank, and supposing the soldiers landing intended an attack on the village, left the heights, and hurried down and captured most of Mullany's men. Mullany and Dr. Lawton of Philadelphia and a soldier put off in a boat, exposed to the fire of the British. They safely landed on the American shore, their boat completely riddled with bullets, sinking five minutes afterward. At the same time our troops, led by Capt. Wool of the regular army, ascended the heights and took position without any opposition. Soon after Gen. Brock and his aide came up, rallied his troops and attacked our forces, but were repulsed, and Brock and his aide mortally wounded by a shot from a six-pound cannon fired from the American side of the river. A considerable number of the State militia, who volunteered to defend the lines, as it was called, refused to go into Canada, as not in the line of their duty, but would fight from this side. When the main body of the American forces had been landed across the river, Gen. Wadsworth, with a small force under orders, took boats for the purpose of supporting the movement and taking command of the attacking party. He directed Major Smith to raise the flag of his regiment and join his force. Maj. Smith stepped into one of the boats and unfurled the colors and carried them across the river, though continually fired upon by the enemy from a twenty-four pounder over the river with a precision which gave them some very narrow escapes. He had the honor of planting his flag on the British battery on its capture. Major Smith was sent out under Col. (afterwards Gen.) Winfield Scott to drive off the Indians who were firing from a piece of woods at our men. He said the charge of Scott in full uniform, on a spirited horse, was a grand sight.

On their return Maj. Smith saw an old soldier of the Revolution, then serving in Col Stranahan's regiment, trying to scalp an Indian, and ordered him to desist. The old hero said it had cost him a great deal of trouble to kill the Indian, for they had been dodging each other's shots for some time behind trees, and insisted that he ought to be permitted to have some remembrance of the redskin. He was allowed to take the Indian's blanket,

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consisting of two yards of blue broadcloth, which he put into his knapsack, and marched off.

Not being called to further official duty, Major Smith picked up the musket of a dead soldier and joined the ranks for further service. The American troops held possession till late in the day, when the British, with increased forces from Chippewa and Fort George, and with a large number of Indians, all in command of Gen. Sheaf, made an attack. Shortly before the attack, Gen. Wadsworth asked Col. Scott what was to be done, and the colonel answered promptly, "Issue your order, sir, and I'll do the best I can to carry it out." Our troops retreated to the river and capitulated. After the heights were retaken by the British, and our troops made prisoners, Maj. Smith was, with the others, taken to Fort George, and at the end of a week released on parole, when he returned home, riding his horse, which had been left this side of the river with Luther Moses, late of Lima, his intimate friend and military servant chosen from the ranks.

In 1818 George Smith and Esquire Philo Gibbs owned, and for years run [ran], a saw mill on the creek below Salsich's mill...In 1827 George Smith erected a furnace on the northwest corner of the homestead farm for making plows and mill irons and other castings, which was run in part by water from the creek, and by a treadwheel and horse in the dry season. This he carried on for years. He had a shop on the corner northwest of the graveyard, with a blacksmith forge in the east end and a room for woodwork in the west end. Here he wooded plows with natural crook handles taken from the trunk and roots of oak trees and sold the plows for five dollars each.

He married a second time, Dec. 23, 1843, to the widow Helena H. Slout of East Bloomfield, Ont. Co., N. Y., who died at Livonia, March 6, 1845, aged fifty-one years. George Smith was five feet eleven and one-half inches in height, of strong constitution and muscular frame, and had great physical strength. He said when a roof was ready for shingling, he would shoulder a bunch of 1,000 shingles, carry it up a ladder and lay it on the roof. He would lift and carry the greatest loads in his building business. In chopping he habitually used a six or seven-pound axe. When a young man a fighting bully in Livonia, named Lemon, threatened to give him a "dressing down," and forthwith made an unprovoked attack upon him. He caught the fellow by the arms, just below the shoulders, backed him up before a great log fire in an old-fashioned fire-place, and held him there till he begged to be released, and this ended the fight. About 1817, while riding horseback up the hill east of Conesus lake, a deer, crossing the road ahead, paused a moment to look at him. He instantly slid from his horse and seized a stone, which he threw, and broke the deer's skull, killing it on the spot. I remember seeing him bring the deer home on a bay horse which he rode in the army. He had dark complexion, black hair and eyes, was of a cheerful disposition, loved to tell and hear a good story, would stop work with his dozen or twenty men and have a good laugh over it, the with them work on with renewed energy, winning many and lasting friends among all classes. He had a strong, practical intellect, abhorred all shams and acts of dissimulation, and had little respect for lawyers who would take on either side for pay. One day during his official term as justice, as he was getting in hay under a threatening sky, he was reminded of a suit to be tried. He left the field, heard the testimony, and immediately declared judgment for the plaintiff; when the defendant's lawyer, with an expression of surprise on his face, said, "Your Honor, I was about to offer

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some remarks on the testimony and law in the case." He replied, "Never mind now; when I have more leisure we'll attend to that if you wish."

He early embraced the doctrine of the ultimate salvation of the whole human family, was for several years a member of the Universalist church, and died happily a firm believer in its doctrines, retaining his mental faculties to the last. He believed with the poet that "an honest man is the noblest work of God," and showed his faith by his works through a long and somewhat eventful life. He was ever the victim of his benevolence in idorsing [sic] and becoming surety for others. He would scold some about the delinquents, then pay his losses cheerfully, and work on, earning more money by his labor than any man of his time in Western New York. He always commanded the highest wages for planning and erecting public buildings, mills, milldams, and bridges, and works of difficult mechanical construction. He was always industrious and despised idleness. Unlike the bosses of the present day, who look on with gloved hands, he would direct and oversee his twenty men, and at the same time do as much if not more than any one of them. This habit lasted him through life. When in his ninety-fifth year he said his eyesight was so poor he could not read over fifty pages a day, and he wanted something to do, and did plan, "set out," and with the aid of a common laborer, frame and erect a small barn for his son in Rochester.

Though not a visionary, he had for years before his death occasional "visions," as he called them, and of which he spoke as they occurred. The vision appearing in the form of a scroll unfolding before him, on which was written, in large, plain letters, not always in the same words, but always to the same import, and which, night or day, with eyes open or closed, he could read, that an era was approaching when the civilized nations of the world would adopt substantially a republican form of government, and that the religious sects would all come to a like uniformity in belief and practice, and that this would begin in December, 1892.

He resided in Livonia until April, 1871, when he moved with his son, Lewis E. Smith, to Rochester, where he died December 9, 1873, aged 94 years, 9 months and 6 days. He became a member of the Masonic order early in life, was honored with prominent and responsible positions therein, and was buried at his early homestead in Livonia with the customary services of that fraternity.

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