

## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR ANCESTORS ...

# CAPTAIN IN THE FRENCH & INDIAN WAR

## Jeremiah Smith (1711 – 1787)

— *Bradley Rymph*

### VISITS TO GORE, VIRGINIA, & LOST RIVER, WEST VIRGINIA:

October 17, 2010

October 9, 2011 (with José Baquiran, Albert  
and Edna Mae Rymph)

January 26, 2013

February 22, 2014

Local tradition once relayed that Captain **Jeremiah Smith** was the first white settler west of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. In fact, two men, Owen Thomas and Isaac Thomas, were probably the first two settlers in the region, known as the Back Creek Valley, when they put down roots as farmers in the 1730s.

Regional historian Wilmer Kerns believes that Smith, a native of New Jersey, began living as a squatter on Owen's land sometime in the years following. Over time, the Thomases receded from historical view. Smith, however, attained regional historical prominence — as a frontiersman, a road builder, an Indian fighter, and a land developer.

Smith may have made several trips to the Back Creek Valley, before he settled there in the mid-1730s. In 1736, while living as a squatter on Owen Thomas' 806 acres, he assisted a Col. James Wood in surveying land belonging to Isaac Thomas.

In 1749, Thomas, 6th Lord Fairfax, made his initial land grants in the upper Back Creek Valley. At that time, Lord Fairfax split Owen Thomas' original tract between Owen's widow, Sarah, and Smith. Lord Fairfax had ordered new surveys of the lands of both Sarah Thomas and Isaac Thomas. Fairfax

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*Back Creek Road, outside of Gore, Virginia, in fall 2010. In the mid-1700s, Jeremiah Smith became the primary owner of lands that are now along this road, building his home within view of it.*

claimed that the old surveys were longer and narrower than was allowed under colonial Virginia law and took up too much of the bottom land along both Back Creek and Isaac's Creek to the north, which flowed into Back Creek. Fairfax reclaimed what he said was excess acreage, and sold Sarah's land (formerly Owen's land) to Smith.

Eventually, Jeremiah Smith's land holdings grew to exceed 1,000 acres. He used squatters rights to claim 450 acres in 1750 when he and several neighbors petitioned Lord Fairfax to grant him property. In petitioning for the land, Smith and his neighbors claimed that Smith's original tract was so "Hilley" and "Stoney" that most of it

*Historical marker in Lost River, West Virginia, commemorating the Battle of Lost River led by Capt. Jeremiah Smith as part of the French and Indian War.*



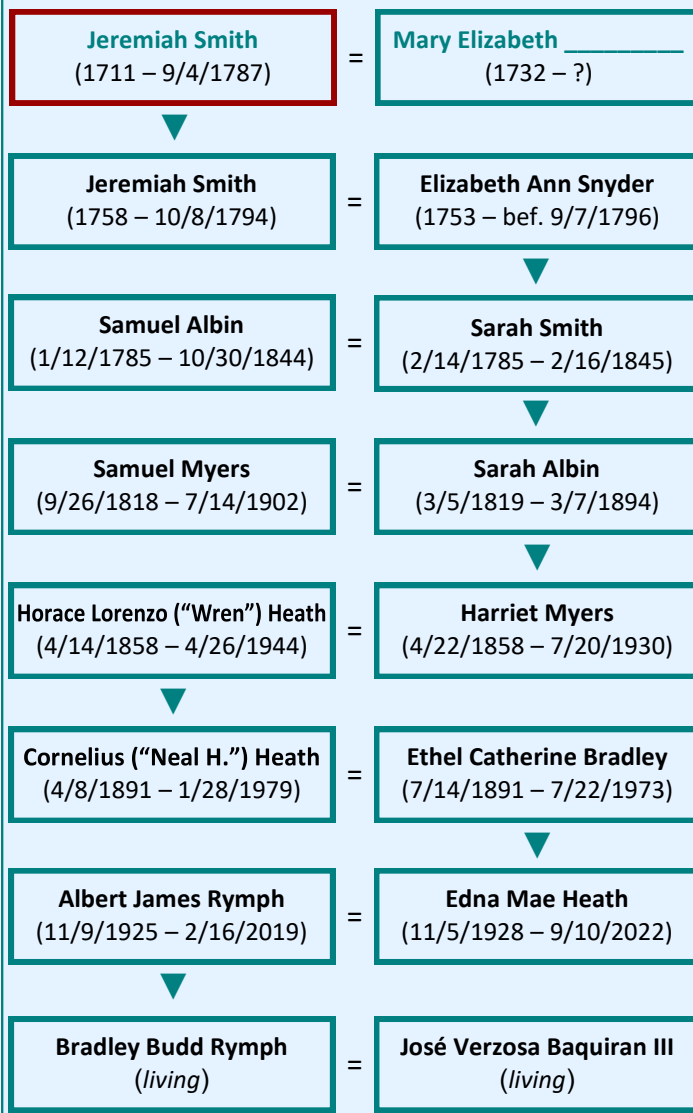
was unillable. In the years that followed, Smith received an additional 263 acres through land grants in 1754 and 1762.

In 1742, the Orange County Court (Frederick County had not yet been created from Orange County) ordered Smith and another man to “view and lay” a road between a mill near modern-day Winchester, Virginia, and a prominent home near modern-day Capon Bridge, West Virginia. This road, in essence, became the forerunner of U.S. 50. Smith built a home for him and his family along the road. He strategically situated it on sloped land from which he could see any Indians that came down to Back Creek Valley — either from Great North Mountain to the east or Little Timber Ridge to the west. (The house still stands today as the front portion of an existing farmhouse; it is considered to be one of the oldest houses in Frederick County.)

In 1756, about 50 Indian warriors, led by a French officer, crossed the Allegheny Mountains and began preying on the frontier settlers. Lord Fairfax called a meeting of local militia captains, but the meeting proved indecisive. Smith then decided himself to raise a company of 20 men, who marched under his command to intercept the Indians.

## HOW WE'RE RELATED

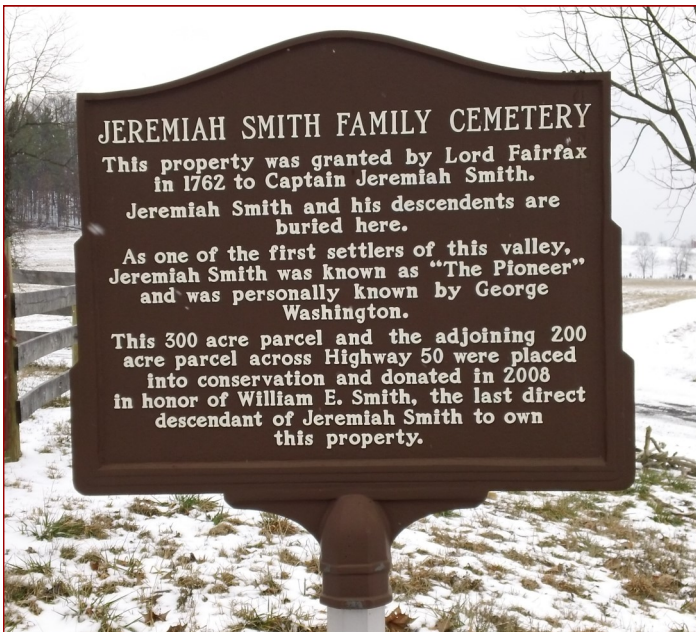
*Jeremiah Smith was my great-great-great-great-great-grandfather through my mother, Edna Mae (Heath) Rymph.*



Capt. Smith and his men eventually collided with the French and Indian forces near Lost River in what is now Hardy County, West Virginia. Fighting between the two sides was fierce. Tradition relates that Smith’s forces killed five of the French and Indian fighters, with Smith himself presumably slaying the French captain. As the story



Burial site of Jeremiah Smith (large obelisk in top photo) and members of his family, on his farmland outside of Gore, Virginia.



goes, the slain captain was found to be carrying detailed plans for attacking Fort Frederick in Maryland and blowing up its powder magazines.

## TO LEARN MORE

Farish, Mitchell. "Birth of American Frontier Culture: English, Welsh, and Scots." ([people.virginia.edu/~mgf2j/english.html](http://people.virginia.edu/~mgf2j/english.html))

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O'Connor, Adrian. "Capt. Smith Was One of the 1st to Tame Early Western Frontier." *Winchester Star*. (reprinted on [worldconnect.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=uncle\\_bud&id=I07285](http://worldconnect.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=uncle_bud&id=I07285))

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