

A Letter to Cooper Davis Terry on the occasion of his induction into the National Society, Sons of the American Revolution

November 11, 2013 - Veterans Day

Dear Cooper,

My grandson, unlike you, I never knew my Grandfather. My father's parents divorced when he was a child and from then on he rejected his father and anything related to him. Although I had wondered on occasion what my grandfather was like and where he was from, it was not until you came to me with a school assignment to answer the question "Where do I come from"? I suspect that the question was intended to be a current day lesson in diversity and that expected responses would be the name of some foreign country. Here is my answer Cooper. At some past time everyone's parents came from somewhere other than the current foreign country they claim their heritage to be from. For you that claim is now. Your "Patria", or mother country, is American since you are as American as this country is American and the United States is the United States. Your genes as well as those of your Revolutionary War patriot Adam Rock Smith attest to this. Your heritage includes those who carried the burden of "Libertas", or liberty, when they came to this land; seeking Freedom, then winning Freedom, and for centuries thereafter protecting that Freedom.

As early as the 1630s your 10th Great Grandfather Thomas Terry, a pilgrim seeking Religious Freedom, was among the first English settlers in what is now New York. Another one of your Great Grandfathers, Lion Gardiner, was a major figure in the Pequot war that protected the Mayflower area settlers. Between the years 1755 and 1776 your 7th Great Grandfather Silas Graves fought in the French and Indian Wars and then served in the Revolutionary War. He served in both those wars as did George Washington and Marinus Willett, the commanding officer of the patriot we acknowledge today.

Adam Smith was born in 1761 to one of the numerous Smith families that inhabited the Hempstead area of Long Island since the 1630s. In order to identify different family branches, the Smiths often prefaced their family names. Our branch is the "Rock" Smiths. Official records indicate that Adam Rock Smith was a Private in the levies of Colonel Marinus Willet and that he served on the Mohawk Frontier during the years 1780 and 1781. Levies in New York were short-term units drawn from the militia, or local Minutemen, to bolster under strength continental regiments, or to do duty on the Mohawk frontier. What is true today was also true during the Revolutionary War. Young military privates endure the heaviest burdens of warfare and unless they otherwise distinguish themselves, history all but neglects them. All warriors contribute, so identifying the units and place that they served and the battles they experienced is a measure of the Patriot.

The Mohawk valley located in north western New York State was strategically important to Revolutionary war efforts since it contained a major westward transportation route and was a vital source of grain and foodstuffs for Continental troops. When the levies of Colonel Marinus Willet entered the conflict in the Mohawk Valley in 1781 the inhabitants had been subject to years of periodic raids

during which their crops and homes would be burned, local militia killed and inhabitants taken prisoner. From 1776 to 1780 the valley population declined from 10,000 to 3,000. The forces opposing Colonel Willett and his forces included British elements from Canada, Tories or original settlers loyal to the King, and Iroquois Indians.

The first encounter of Willett's levies with invading enemy forces took place at the Battle of Sharon Springs on July 10, 1781. The invading force of 300 men sacked a local town and took prisoners and livestock. Willett sent a decoy force to fire on the invading men when they set up a camp. The Tories followed them into an ambush comprised of about 250 Patriots. An estimated 50 enemy soldiers were killed or wounded and the rest fled. Because of this victory neighboring settlements were spared from additional raids.

On October 25, 1781 in the Battle of Johnstown Colonel Willett's forces engaged an enemy force of approximately 700. This battle was one of the last battles of the Revolutionary War and was notable because a large contingent of regular British army participated in this border raid. Although outnumbered, Willett's forces outmaneuvered the enemy, surrounded them and forced their retreat. During the battle 11 enemy were killed, 11 wounded and 32 were captured. The success of Willett's levies effectively secured the Mohawk valley from future combat actions.

Adam Rock Smith returned to Hempstead and was married in 1783. He had four sons and three daughters. His last will and testament identified his occupation as a farmer. There is limited evidence that he, along with firmer evidence that his son Raynor Rock Smith, served in the War of 1812. As a final tribute to this Patriot, the Long Island Chapter of the National Society, Sons of the American Revolution secured a Government issued gravestone for his burial site.

In the intervening years since Adam Smith a number of your ancestors served to insure your current freedom. You have ancestors who served in the Civil War. Your Great Grandfather, my dad Nelson D. Terry, served in the Navy during World War II in the South Pacific. As you are aware I entered the U. S. Navy in 1952 and served for 26 Years.

So Cooper, I thank you for asking the where do I come from question. I hope you learned something that will serve you well in the future and that you will stay true to your heritage. Remember the motto of the Sons of the American Revolution, Libertas et Patria, it is who you are and as of today who you now will represent.

Love, your Grandfather and Compatriot

John R.Terry