

Stephen Simmons (1765-1835), from Conn. to Ill. A Revolutionary Soldier and his Family

STEPHEN SIMMONS, a pioneer resident of (what is now) Wabash Co., Illinois, applied for a pension in Sept. 1832 in these words.¹

"I am a native of Connecticut born in the County of Windham & town of Ashford in 1765. I have a record of my age at my place of residence. I substituted for John Baggor in the year 1781 some time in the summer and on my way to camp I went through Hartford and from there to Danbury which had been burned and I joined the army at Pitskills. I entered Col. Durgays Regiment in Capt. Stilwels or Stillmans Company. I do not remember the names of many of my field nor Staff Officers I remember Coln Swift Lieut Col Grosvenor and Capt Durgey One reason perhaps that I do not Remember more of my officers names is that I did not lie in Camp much but was the most part of my time on Scouts I requested my Orderly Seargeant to put me on Scouts which request was granted, the last scout I was on I was Commanded by Capt. Durgey between New York & Newark in east Jersey I returned to Camp the Army had moved to Winter quarters at Fiskill The snow was from two to three feet deep and when my time was out Lieutn Grosvenor gave me my Discharge But I do not know what has become of it After my return home my Father name was Able Simmons was Drafted I took his place and served two Months at Gratson fort the Commanders name was McClannel I think and his son was Adjutant the officers did not quarter in the garrison and it was seldom I saw them the adjutant to [sic] charge of the garrison I got my discharge in the Spring of 1782 What has become of it I cannot tell I am the youngest of my father's family there is none of them alive to my Knowledge I have wrote to Esqr Steel of N York and George Martin of Connecticut but have got no answer if they are dead there is none that I can prove my services by to my Knowledge My residence since has been 4 years in Con 21 in N York 10 in Ohio & Virginia and 15 in Illinois I hereby relinquish every claim whatever to a pension or annuity except the present and declare that my name is not on the pension roll of the agency of any State.

Stephen Simmons"

This pension file further shows that Simmons would be age 76 on 7 Nov. 1832 and that he had known his neighbors John Higgins and George W. Higgins, who vouched for him, for thirty to forty years. On 14 Aug. 1833, Stephen Simmons of Wabash County, Ill., was granted a pension of \$26.22/month for 7 months and 26 days of service in the Conn. line. He appears in Vol. VIII of Collections of the Conn. Hist. Soc., p. 94, as serving in the 1st Regt. under Col. Durkee from 3 July 1781 to 12 Dec. 1781. A notation in the records of pension payments (National Archives) gives his date of death as 24 Feb. 1835.

¹ Revolutionary War Pension File S32521, National Archives, Washington, DC

The family of Abel Simmons, Sr., is included in Simmons Family by Lorenzo A. Simmons (1930) but the ancestry suggested there is doubtful. It appears to have been based on an unpublished autobiographical statement of James Simmons (1821-1899) insofar as the Abel Simmons family is concerned. The Barbour Index of Conn. Vital Statistics does contain much on the descendants of Abel Simmons, however.²

Abel Simmons married Hannah Reed at Ashford, Conn., on 21 Dec. 1747.³ In 1757, he was one of those who bought a portion of the Stoddard tract then being sold by the heirs.⁴ Hannah Reed Simmons died at Ashford on 1 Dec. 1765⁵, less than a month after Stephen's birth. Abel apparently did not remarry until 22 May 1777 when he married Mercy Haven at Ashford.⁶ Abel Simmons was dead by 21 April 1807 and his estate (Ashford, 1807) provides a list of his heirs which included his widow, Mary (not Mercy), and the children as named below. Dates have been added from the Barbour Index and also supplementary information from the Simmons book[LAS]. Furthermore, the order has been revised here to correspond to the order of birth.

Children of Abel and Hannah (Reed) Simmons

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| i. "to heirs of Mrs. Chloe Hovey", deceased daughter | b. 13 July 1749, Ashford |
| ii. "to Mrs. Rebecca Hovey" | b. 13 June 1751, Ashford |
| iii. "to Abel Simmons, esqr." | b. 24 Oct. 1753, Stafford |
| m. Hannah Holmes, 5 Nov. 1774 d. 27 Dec. 1815 | |
| iv. "to Mr. Reuben Simmons" | b. 1756 |
| v. "to Mrs. Sarah Martin", dau. | b. 22 Feb. 1758 |
| m. George Martin, b. 16 Nov. 1753, son of George Martin and Sarah Durkee | |
| vi. "to Mrs. Betty Cady", dau. | b. 3 Sept. 1759, Ashford |
| birth record as Elizabeth; also called Betsy | |
| vii. "to Mrs. Hannah Steel", dau | b. 6 Sept. 1761, Ashford |
| m. Perez Steel, 7 June 1781 ⁷ | |
| viii. "to Mrs. Phebe Baker" | b. 29 Sept. 1763, Ashford |
| ix. "to Col. Stephen Simmons" | b. 7 Nov. 1765, Ashford |

Children of Abel and Mercy (Haven) Simmons

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| x. "to Miss Polly Simmons" | [b. 2 April 1780--LAS] |
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² Barbour Index records were transcribed from microfilm by Mrs. Jesse E. Bell of Eugene, Oregon.

³ Barbour Index

⁴ Bayles, Richard M., History of Windham County, Conn. (W.W. Preston & Co., N.Y., 1899), p. 998-999

⁵ Barbour Index

⁶ Barbour Index

⁷ Revolutionary War Pension File W28035, National Archives, Washington, DC. This file is of particular interest since two widows file (successively) well-substantiated claims on the pension of soldier Perez Steele, d. 28 Feb. 1836.

- xi. "to Roxy Simmons" [b. 1 Jan. 1782--LAS]
- xii. "to Lyman Simmons" [b. 29 Aug. 1783, d. July 1861,
Madrid, NY.
m. Marcia Fuller --LAS]
- xiii. "to Olive Babcock" [b. 9 Feb. 1785, m. George Babcock--
LAS]
- xiv. "to Leonard Simmons" [b. 15 Sept. 1787, d. ca. 1847 --LAS]
- xv. "to Mr. William Simmons" [b. 13 Sept. 1788,
m. Chloe Skinner, 25 Nov. 1801--
LAS]

STEPHEN SIMMONS, in his pension application, states that he stayed in Conn. for four years after his 1782 discharge. Perhaps he left about the time of his marriage to Mabel Hunt at Tolland, 12 Oct. 1786. Significant circumstantial evidence supports the view that Mabel was the daughter of Medad Hunt. Rev. Henry Prout (1810-1879), relying on information from Mrs. Steele, widow of Col. Stephen Steele who was a nephew of Stephen Simmons, stated this relationship in a newspaper historical column about 1869.⁸ Furthermore, Mabel named two sons Medad; the second one bore the full name Medad Hunt Simmons. Medad Hunt moved from Conn. to New York about the same time as Stephen Simmons (by 1790, to Albany Co. which became Greene Co.) and died in the Town of Windham, Greene County, NY, in 1814. He died intestate and his administrators were Sarah Hunt (surely the widow), Daniel Gunn who had married his daughter Sallie, and Jehiel Tuttle, who had married his daughter Hannah.⁹ His wife has not been further identified, but some ancestry of this Medad Hunt (b. 2 Jan. 1742/3 and dead by 18 April 1814), son of Simeon Hunt has been published.¹⁰ No list of heirs remains in his estate file. Capt. Medad Hunt, as he was called, kept an Inn or Tavern. The first one was built in 1788. He was a carpenter or joiner by profession and built a much better Public House between 1795 and 1805.¹¹

During his residence in the present area of Greene Co., NY, Stephen Simmons was a land agent of the Robert Livingston Patentees. He built and sold cabins and land, encouraging others to come to the area.¹² Simmons "was Col. of the local Windham militia that met for practice purposes on the flats beyond the old Ormsbee homes, near the end of 'West Settlement' which became Ashland when separated from Windham Township in 1848".¹³ In 1790, he was one of the

⁸ from the Windham Journal, Windham, Greene Co., NY and reprinted in Prout, Henry Hedges, Old Times in Windham, (Hope Farm Press, Cornwallville, NY, 1970)

⁹ This identification has not been proven, but is as given by Alfred Kappel in "Early Settlers and Notables of Ashland, Greene County", Yesteryears, vol. 14 (Spring 1971).

¹⁰ Wyman, T. B., Genealogy of the Name and Family of Hunt.

¹¹ Prout. These comments are from an appendix of notes by Mary S. Wooley, published here as an appendix with her map of Windham.

¹² Woolley, Mary S., Windham, Greene Co., NY. letter of 7 May 1973. She is a student of the history and homes of her county.

¹³ Woolley.

commissioners for construction of the Cairo-Windham turnpike. "Lacking a kettle large enough to cook for his workmen, he went to Catskill, bought one and carried it home on his back".¹⁴ In 1797, Stephen Simmons was one of the school commissioners in Woodstock.¹⁵ In 1801, Stephen Simmons (with others) was appointed to cause a "gaol" to be built. Legislative records show payments from 1801-1804. He was also a Justice of the Peace and elected to the Legislature.¹⁶ Prout relates the following:

"Simmons... was present, it would appear, in the kitchen of the house built and occupied by Jedediah Hubbard, when a dance, then a very common way of spending an evening, was going on. It was probably before the organization of the Presbyterian Society in 1803-- indeed much earlier-- for there was present in the room adjoining the kitchen a gentlemen who in the early years occasionally preached here -- the Rev. Mr. Townsend. Very naturally, as music and dancing went on, the good man's excitement increased, till rising in his indignation, and opening the door, he thrust his head among the gay crowd, exclaiming, 'fire! fire! fire!' This was met by Simmons in mad-cap hilarity, shouting, 'water! water! water!' and the musical uproar ceased not."¹⁷

The Simmons family appears in the 1800 census of Greene Co., NY, with 2 males under 10, 1 male 18-26, 1 male 26-44, 2 females under 10, 1 female 10-16, and 1 female 26-44.¹⁸ It is not known when the Simmons family left NY. If later census records indicating that his son Medad was born in Virginia are correct, perhaps he moved back and forth. His pension application, however, indicates that he considered himself to have left NY about 1807. I have no record of his Virginia residence, but his daughter Hannah and son-in-law William H. Ridgely lived in VA before they moved to Illinois.¹⁹ Marriage records of two (perhaps three) of his children have been located in Scioto Co., Ohio, indicating his residence there about 1810. The Simmons family came to Illinois in 1817. William Ridgely "became a ship carpenter at Baltimore, but in March, 1817, came to Illinois and settled near Mt. Carmel, a pioneer of that locality. His wife was born in the Empire State, and was a daughter of Stephen Simmons, who when a small boy emigrated from his native England to America. At the age of fifteen, he entered the Colonial Army and for meritorious conduct in the struggle for independence was promoted to the rank of Colonel. William Ridgely assisted Stephen Simmons to build the first vessel ever constructed in Portsmouth, Ohio. The parents of our subject [Abel Ridgely, son of William] came to Illinois on a keel-boat, landing at old Palmyra, a place not now in existence."²⁰ Stephen Simmons brought a family "of four children, Stephen, Medad and two daughters" and settled on the west half of the northwest quarter of section 1, town 1N, range 13W. About 1820, he laid out the town of Mt.

¹⁴ History of Greene Co., 1884.

¹⁵ Sylvester, N. B., History of Ulster Co., New York, (1884) p. 319-320.

¹⁶ History of Greene Co., 1884.

¹⁷ Prout, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁸ The male age 18-26 is not identified in the family to be presented here.

¹⁹ Olds, Dan W., William Henry Ridgely (1786 - 1859), his ancestors and descendants, (1969).

²⁰ Portrait and Biographical Record of Effingham, Jasper, and Richland Counties, Illinois (Lake Publishing Co., Chicago, 1893) p. 315.

Pleasant, Ill. He had a horse mill at a place now know as Clark's Corners.²¹ [These notes exemplify both the strengths and the weakness of county histories of this type.]

Palmyra was located where Crawfish Creek empties into the Wabash River. Until Wabash County was formed in 1827, the area was part of Edwards County. The 1818 state census records of Edwards County is no longer extant. The 1820 census of Edward County lists a Stephen Simmons (possibly not our man) and the listing in the 1830 census shows 1 male age 60-70, 1 female age 10-15, and 1 female age 60-70.

During the period 1821-23, Stephen Simmons appears in the court records of Edwards County. On 1 Aug. 1821, Hezekiah Clark was summoned to answer unto Stephen P(?) Simmons in a plea of debt damage under \$100. The decision was in favor of Simmons, but the case was appealed and more witnesses were called in October. Clark had died in Sept. 1821, and in 1822 Betsey Clark, his widow, sued Stephen Simmons and Medad Simmons for taking or burning her timber. One record refers to "Col. Simmons".

According to records from the Simmons Bible,²² Mabel Simmons died 18 Jan. 1831 in her 64th year and Stephen Simmons died 24 Feb. 1835 in Wabash Co., Ill., age 72 years (This age is clearly wrong.) Their graves are unknown.

Children of Stephen and Mabel (Hunt) Simmons

i. an infant	b. 4 Aug. 1787	d. 5 Aug. 1787
ii. Medad Simmons	b. 21 July 1788	d. 20 Sept. 1789
iii. Lora Martin Simmons	b. 24 Jan. 1790	d. -- June 1814
iv. Stephen ---- Simmons	b. 13 Sept. 1791	d.
v. Hannah Reed Simmons	b. 20 Jan. 1791	d. 13 June 1853
vi. Orenda Parker Simmons	b. 29 April 1794	d.
vii. Medad Hunt Simmons	b. 20(?) Dec. 1795	d. 17 May 1870

The Bible record above does list the birth of some of the Ridgely children, including Abel Ridgely, b. 15 Feb. 1820. It also has the marriage of William Ridgely to Hannah Reed Simmons on 20 Oct 1810 in the State of Ohio. The marriage can be verified from the Scioto Co., Ohio, records

²¹ History of Edwards, Lawrence and Wabash Counties, Ill. (McDonough Co., Philadelphia), 1883 ²¹

²² A Bible apparently first owned by Stephen Simmons, then his son Medad Simmons, then by Medad's daughter Mary Jane (Simmons) Miller. The Bible was printed in Philadelphia by William Hancock for Mathew Carey, No. 122 Market Street, in 1804.