

JEMIMA

Hello – I’m Jemima – Jemima Smith. You don’t hear that name much, if ever, anymore. It was more common during the Puritan Era – the late 1500’s through the middle of the 1600’s. I was always proud to have this unusual name. It means “little dove” and is from the Bible. The Book of Job. Jemima was the eldest of Job’s 3 beautiful daughters. Those are the Bible’s words – not mine. Well anyway, this is my gravesite – right here next to my husband, Henry Clark Smith. I’ll tell you more about him a little later.

I want to show you my parents’ gravesites. My mother, Elizabeth (Morris) Terry, was the first one buried here in St. John’s cemetery in 1795. She was born in Huntington and moved here when she married my father in 1765. Her family was from the Huntington area, but that’s about all I know of them. But my father’s family however – wow – they go way back to the early 1600’s on the east end of this island. Here’s my father’s grave – Jeremiah Terry. He died in 1823 at the age of 84. He was born in Southold and both of his parents, Daniel Terry and Elizabeth Tuthill have a long history in the Southold town. Both the Terrys and the Tuthills came to the north fin of this fish shaped island in the early 1600s. Those surnames are still very prominent in that area. And there are other Terry family members buried here in St. John’s Cemetery. You’ll hear about some of them on the other side of the church.

Now I was born in March of 1772 on my parent’s homestead just east of here, in a community now known as Sayville. This whole area, about 50,000 acres, was referred to as “Islip Grange” which was named after Islip, England. William Nicoll, who came over in 1664 when he was 7 years old, purchased part of the Connetquot River and adjacent lands from the Secatogue Indians in 1683. And then it took him 14 years, but he acquired all of the big river, the Consequint as the Secatogue Indians called it, just west of here, its surrounding lands, part of Fire Island and the islands in the lagoon, what you now call the Great South Bay. That’s quite an accomplishment. Here – I have a map of the precincts of Islip Town and Islip Grange by the early 1700s. It is quite an interesting story. I encourage you to read about it sometime. It’s much too lengthy to talk about now.

There weren’t many settlers here when I was growing up. Under 600 people all together. My parents, and then Henry and I, got by on farming the land, raising livestock, fishing, and hunting. We also felled trees that were hauled to New York City to build houses and businesses. New York City was our new “capital (1785 – 1790) of the United States of America.” Can you imagine that. You know don’t you, that we had a great war and British soldiers occupied this area for years and even lived in this church. Ruined the floors and the stairs to the balcony with their boots, they did. We really had to do some work when they moved out. But it was worth it. We were now our own country and not British Colonies. And George Washington, our first president, even came here for a visit in 1790. I had just turned 18 years old! He passed right in front of this church and rested at the Greene’s homestead, just down the road here, to refresh himself and his horses.

Oh, I'm so sorry – I do go off on tangents, don't I. As I was about to tell you – we lived a simple, but hard life. The soil was mostly light and sandy and free from stones. We were able to grow grains like wheat, rye, oats, and flax, but mostly flint corn – I think you now call it “Indian Corn” – which we used to fatten our livestock – you know, the cattle, sheep, poultry and hogs. Oh, let me tell you a funny thing about our hogs. But I'll do that later. And we also grew some vegetables for our own use. Here's a list of some of the meals and foods we used to make. And the animals and fowl for hunting and our meals were abundant – rabbits, deer, skunks, squirrels, foxes, raccoons, ducks, geese, quail, grouse (delicious!) and heath-hens – you don't see the anymore! The Consequint River was overflowing with trout and the lagoon supplied us with plenty of clams and oysters and fish. We sent a lot to the New York market.

So, let me tell you about Henry Clark Smith. In addition to all the farming, fishing and hunting he did, my husband was an “overseer of roads” for Islip Grange, an important and time-consuming responsibility. The main roadway in Islip Grange was South Country Road, what you now call Montauk Highway and Main Street in some places, and was laid out in 1732. It began in Jamaica and extended all the way to the end of the south fin of this fish island. There have been realignments over the years, but the original road was plotted about one mile north of this island's south shore coastline and meandered through these parts, still going right in front of this church and cemetery. It was here long before Henry or me and always needed a lot of attending to. Henry and the others would fill in all those mud holes. It was just a dirt road then. The bridges over the river, creeks, and swamps were frequently in need of repair. And, I tell you, every time there was a big storm – oh! the mud and fallen trees and branches were awful. The hogs! Did you know that there was a Hog Act in these parts? Goes way back before I was born. It was against the law for people's hogs to run freely on the common lands. They had to be yoked and ringed, you know that thing you put in the pig's nose so he won't root, you know, did up the ground looking for food stuff. Well, any damage caused by runaway hogs was the responsibility of the owner and Henry had to make sure that this law was upheld.

Another feature of this area and elsewhere on this island you might find interesting is “lopped trees.” Have you ever heard of them? Yes, right here in Islip Grange we created living fences by lopping. I mentioned earlier that we would send a lot of trees to New York City for their building needs and that left us with a shortage of suitable timber for fences to mark our property borders. Well, the remaining stumps would send up shoots. These shoots were then bent over and planted a few feet from the stump in a line. Then blackberry bushes or just briars would attach themselves and fill in the spaces to form a hedge, sort of. This picture will give you an idea of what I'm describing, but these trees were allowed to grow upward.

Oh – and look – here is my pride and my joy – my little girl Elizabeth. (picture)
Here she is at her 100th birthday party and family reunion at her home in Amityville. Over 80 people there to celebrate with her. She was born at our home in Sayville on July 20th in 1794 and died on January 23rd, 1895 at the old homestead. Can you believe it – she was an only child but she died having 7 children, 19 grandchildren, 60 great-grandchildren, and 3

great-great-grandchildren. What a legacy. And she even named one of her sons after her daddy - "Henry Clark Smith" Jervis. She lived through 24 presidencies – from George Washington to Grover Cleveland. Even that special one – Abraham Lincoln.

Well that's my story. Jemima Terry Smith. Thank you all for listening.