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Ishmael Smith Research Report

Client: Guinea Town Residents Project File

Date: 24 July 2021

Subject: Race of Ishmael Smith (ca 1781-1822) of Gloucester County, New Jersey

Background: This study of Ishmael Smith began with the record memorializing the 13 February 1804 marriage of Ishmael Smith to Jane Guest, in Gloucester County, New Jersey. Several other records uncovered for an Ishmael Smith identified him as a person of color, wherein the marriage did not make a distinction. Were these the same Ishmael Smith, or not? A determination could not be made with the sources on hand. Subsequent research uncovered two additional records naming the subject. These sources were also analyzed. Neither refers to race. The chart below summarizes identifying information/evidence extrapolated from each source consulted (to date). The highlights indicate the latest records uncovered.

Life Event	Date	Parties	Race	Age	Residence/Locale
Marriage ¹	13 Feb 1804	Ishmael Smith-Jane Guest	---	---	Gloucester Co.
Manumission ²	24 Dec 1807	Ishmael Smith	Negro	26	Gloucester Co.
Death/Burial ³	14 Jul 1818	Ishmael Smith, brother	---	---	Gloucester Co.
Diary Entry ⁴	31 Jul 1819	Ishmael Smith and wife	Black	---	Gloucester Co.
Death/Burial ⁵	4 Aug 1819	Jane Smith	---	---	Gloucester Co.
Marriage ⁶	6 Feb 1820	Ishmael Smith-Comfort Farmer	Colour[ed]	---	Gloucester Co.
Death ⁷	21 Apr 1822	Ishmael Smith	Black	37	Philadelphia, PA

¹ "New Jersey County Marriages, 1682-1956," Gloucester County Register of Deeds, Marriages, 1795-1907, Vol. A, 1795-1815, p.90, Ishmael Smith-Jane Guest, 13 February 1804; digital collection, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939Z-1Z9S-LJ?i=74&cc=1803976&cat=239792> : accessed 15 June 2021).

² "United States, Indenture and Manumission Records, 1780-1939", database, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:ZYT-V-G4ZM> : 25 September 2020), Ishmael Smith, 1807.

³ Stewart, Frank, H., *Notes on Old Gloucester County, New Jersey, Vol. II, The Prospectus of the Columbian Herald* (Philadelphia: New Jersey society of Pennsylvania, 1917), 163; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 21 July 2021); locate through database of same title.

⁴ "Samuel Mickle Diaries," Frank H. Stewart Collection, Rowan University Archives and Special Collections, Glassboro, New Jersey, Volume 4, p.16.

⁵ Stewart, Frank, H., *Notes on Old Gloucester County, New Jersey, Vol. II, The Prospectus of the Columbian Herald* (Philadelphia: New Jersey society of Pennsylvania, 1917), 163; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 21 July 2021); locate through database of same title.

⁶ "New Jersey County Marriages, 1682-1956," Gloucester County Register of Deeds, Marriages, 1795-1907, Vol. B, 1815-1829, p.73-74, Ishmael Smith-Comfort Farmer, 6 February 1820; digital collection, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939Z-1Z9M-55?mode=g&i=230&cc=1803976> : accessed 15 June 2021).

⁷ "Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803-1915," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-DBBW-GG3?i=707&cc=1320976&personUrl=%2Fark%3A%2F61903%2F1%3A1%3AJ6ZQ-2JM> : 15 June 2021), 004009776 > image 708 of 1994, Ishmael Smith, April 21st, 1822; Philadelphia City Archives and Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

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Objective: To determine if the Ishmael Smith that married Jane Guest on 13 February 1804, in Gloucester County, New Jersey, was a person of color.

Limitations: 20 Hours

Summary of Findings

No applicable direct evidence has been uncovered in this study, but the culmination of indirect evidence unanimously agrees that the Ishmael Smith that married Jane Guest was indeed a person of color. The recently located report of Jane Smith’s death, which took place shortly after Black Ishmael Smith’s wife cut her own throat, made the critical difference in deciding the outcome. None of the sources contained information or evidence that conflicted with the other sources. As well, no Ishmael Smith appears on record in the area after 21 April 1822. It is also evident that Gloucester County’s numerous record keepers noted race when, as, or if, it was their choice.

Research Notes

1. Marriage record of Ishmael Smith to Jane Guest, 13 February 1804, Gloucester County, New Jersey

“New Jersey County Marriages, 1682-1956,” Gloucester County Register of Deeds, Marriages, 1795-1907, Vol. A, 1795-1815, p.90, Ishmael Smith-Jane Guest, 13 February 1804; digital collection, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939Z-179S-LJ?i=74&cc=1803976&cat=239792> : accessed 15 June 2021), United States, New Jersey > Gloucester County > Vital Records > Marriages, 1795-1907 > image 75, Ishmael Smith to Jane Guest, 13 February 1804.

Begin Extraction

“90

This Certifies that on Ishmael Smith & Jane Guest were
 Joined by me in the Bands of Matrimony on the 13th day of
 February 1804 – ...
 Charles Ogden J.P”

End Extraction

This is an original source, containing primary information that names Ishmael Smith, but is indirect because it does not answer the research question. This record establishes that Ishmael and Jane presented themselves to be of age (age 21 male, age 18 female) to marry or they had otherwise obtained permission to do so.⁸ This record also confirms that this Ishmael Smith is of general age to be Ishmael Smith, person of color.

2. Manumission of Ishmael Smith, 24 December 1807, Gloucester County, New Jersey

"United States, Indenture and Manumission Records, 1780-1939", database, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:ZYTV-G4ZM> : 25 September 2020), Ishmael Smith, 1807.

Begin Transcription

"Gloucester ss We do hereby Certify that on this twenty fourth day of
December in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred
and seven James Hurley of the Township of Newton in the County of
Gloucester brought before us two of the Justices of the peace of said County
and two of the Overseers of the poor of said Township his negro Slave
named Ishmael Smith who on View and examination appears to us
to be sound in mind and not under Bodily incapacity of
Obtaining a Support and also is not under twenty one Years of age
nor above forty. In Witness whereof we have hereunto set our hands
the Day and Year above written

	Robert Rowand }	Overseers of the poor
Record ^d 30 Decem ^r	Isaac Webster }	
<u>1807</u>	James Hopkins }	Justices of the Peace
<u>Ogden</u>	John Clement }	

I James Hurley of the Township of Newton in the County of
Gloucester in the State of New Jersey Yeoman do hereby set free
from bondage my negro Man named Ishmael Smith aged about twenty
Six Years and I do for myself my Heirs executors & administrators
Release unto the said Ishmael all my right and all claim whatsoever
as to his person or to any estate he may acquire hereby declaring
said Ishmael absolutely free without any interruption from me
or any person claiming under me. In witness whereof I have hereunto
set my hand and Seal the twenty fourth day of December in the Year of
our Lord one thousand eight Hundred and Seven 1807
Sealed and Delivered in James Hurley (seal)
the presence of
Thomas Redman Sr.

⁸Nelson, William, *Archives of the State of New Jersey, First Series, Vol. XXII, Documents Relating to the Colonial history of the State of New Jersey, Vol. XXII, Marriage Records, 1665-1800* (Paterson, NJ: The Press Printing and Publishing Co., 1900), p118 [CXVIII]; digital image, *Google Books* (https://books.googleusercontent.com/books/content?reg=AKW5QaeuFYkygeNOI0Jk_al1DtKozCmPEWhuXTqxeDZIw78G5l_Lxw9slo74K7ITE8rFhU8UDwocrBFdrika3pEoL-3lSrw8LCMeNTwB8laTnt1BZsWBs4ID7WnVWZobYJeUd2TFlutqKYmiDKUozAb65WFOcSBanIpJkhzE0hADjno_J-CvCB9hNTRXCRWkuSpwk96Uiahcd_XO9F_9oW4-c7RuFmFvvtGnPXKlgjV40oiVbZyLfwSj1UGmBxVMDGVkYaZCHB5W : accessed 21 July 2021).

Thomas Redman Jun.”

End transcription

This document is an original source containing primary information and offers indirect evidence that an Ishmael Smith, person of color, existed in time and place to be the Ishmael Smith who married Jane Guest on 13 February 1804.

“Negro man” Ishmael Smith was manumitted under New Jersey Slave Laws of 1798, which dictated the procedures that were followed in effecting his freedom (Section 21). Ishmael may have been exposed to education since the same law (Section 16) provided that slaves under the age of 21 be taught to read.⁹

At question was whether enslaved persons were legally permitted to marry in the state. While New Jersey did not specifically enact such a law, slave marriages were permitted in North Jersey¹⁰ and were also evidenced in South Jersey, of which Gloucester County is a part (see marriage and manumission records for James Still).^{11 12}

3. Death / Burial of Ishmael Smith’s Brother, July 14, 1818, Gloucester County, New Jersey

Stewart, Frank, H., *Notes on Old Gloucester County, New Jersey, Vol. II, The Prospectus of the Columbian Herald* (Philadelphia: New Jersey society of Pennsylvania, 1934), p.167 (163-177); digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 21 July 2021); locate through database of same title.

Frank H. Stewart (1873-1948), an ardent, local historian of the times, published entries from the “Coffin Book” of John Simmermon, Esq., of Woodbury, in his “Notes on Old Gloucester County, New Jersey, Vol. II. At that time (1934), Stewart *said* that the book was housed at the Gloucester County Historical Society in Woodbury. Follow up with the Society revealed that they housed 2 volumes (containing identical information) under that title but neither book includes the entries appearing in Stewart’s “Notes”. By their description, The Society’s holding sounds more like the later entries made by Albertus S. Simmermon (see page 163, “Notes”). The Society provided a copy of the title page from the coffin book. It bears a handwritten note advising researchers to refer to Stewart’s Notes... Vol. II for the 1807-1847 listings. It further informs that the (earlier) account book’s “whereabouts is unknown and no active members in the Society recall ever seeing it (1963).”¹³

⁹ Rutgers University, *New Jersey Laws on Slavery and Abolition*, “New Jersey Slave Laws of 1798,” *Rutgers* (<http://fas-history.rutgers.edu/clemens/NJLaw/slavelaw1798.html> : accessed 21 Jul 2021).

¹⁰ Gigantino, James, J., II, *The Ragged Road to Abolition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 128-129.

¹¹ “New Jersey County Marriages, 1682-1956,” Gloucester County Register of Deeds, Marriages, 1795-1907, Vol. A, 1795-1815, p.42, James Still-Mary Murry, 20 Oct 1798; digital collection, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939Z-1Z9S-LJ?i=74&cc=1803976&cat=239792> : accessed 21 July 2021),

United States, New Jersey > Gloucester County > Vital Records > Marriages, 1795-1907 > image 51, James Still to Mary Murry, 20 Oct 1798.

¹² “United States, Indenture and Manumission Records, 1780-1939”,

database, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:ZYT-KFKW2 : 25 September 2020>), James Still, 1800.

¹³ “Coffin Book of John Simmermon, July 28, 1832 to April 27, 1852,” Call #926.5GLO, Gloucester County Historical Society, Woodbury, New Jersey.

Rowan University also maintains a Frank H. Stewart collection. That archivist advised that the coffin “book is not listed in our catalogue,” but further noted that the University is “currently completely cataloging books in the Archives and Special Collections (a lengthy project) so will keep an eye out for it.”¹⁴

According to Stewart (p.163), the first entry in The “Coffin Book of John Simmermon” was made in 1807; the last in 1847. Stewart included a “guide” of sorts (p.163) for understanding the content:

- “Simmermons’ seem to have charged for the digging of many graves in the Strangers, Wards, and other small yards not under the control of religious societies.
- Charges as a rule, were dated the day of death or the next day.
- Where a name only appears, it means that person had died.
- If followed by child, mother, wife, etc., it means the relationship to the person charged.
- In some cases, the charge is made to the person who paid the bill where no close relationship existed.” [bullets mine]

Stewart’s pages are organized by year, under which the month – day is listed, to the right of which is listed information for persons corresponding with that date. The extraction for Ishmael Smith reads:

“1818 [p.166]
[p.167, left side column of page]
7-14—Ishmael Smith, brother.”

This source is derivative, its information secondary, and its evidence indirect in that it does not answer the research question. It does, however, inform that there was an Ishmael Smith in place and time to be the subject Ishmael Smith. This record may be the only link to Ishmael’s immediate family.

4. Diary entry concerning Black Ishmael Smith’s wife, 31 July 1819, Gloucester County, New Jersey

“*Samuel Mickle Diaries*,” Frank H. Stewart Collection, Rowan University Archives and Special Collections, Glassboro, New Jersey, Volume 4, p.16, citing entry for Black Ishmael Smith’s wife.

Begin Extraction

“127

Page 16
7th Mo. 1819

31. ... Black Ishmael Smith’s wife cut her own thr**t yesterday.”

End Extraction

The 31 July 1819 entry from Mickle’s actual diary concerning “Black Ishmael Smith’s wife,” is an original source. Its information is secondary because it’s unknown how Mickle came by the information. Its evidence is indirect in that it fails to identify Smith’s wife as Jane (Guest) Smith. It also does not indicate the extent or end result of his wife’s wound(s). A review of other entries contained in the derivative

¹⁴Sara A. Borden, Glassboro, e-mail, 22 July 2021, “Coffin Book of John Simmermon, 1807-1832”, Frank H. Stewart Collection, Rowan University Archives and Special Collections; privately held by A.N. McDonald, (anmcdonald@jalig.com), Woodbury, New Jersey.

volumes indicate that Mickle typically noted when someone died as a result of illness or accident. His entries were usually more descriptive concerning persons he was familiar with.¹⁵

This source does place “Black Ishmael Smith” and his wife in context (place and time) to be the same Ishmael Smith and Jane Guest that married on 13 February 1804. It also lends credence to the possibility that “Black Ishmael Smith” is the identical:

- “Negro man Ishmael Smith” manumitted by James Hurley on 24 December 1807,
- “Ishmael Smith, man of colour” that married Comfort Farmer on 6 February 1820,
- “Black Ishmael Smith” that died in the Prune Street Prison in Philadelphia on 21 April 1822.

With regard to the word “thr**t” as indicated in Mickle’s diary entry, there are only four 6 six letter English words beginning “thr” and ending with “t” in existence. They are -- threat, thrift, throat, and thrust.¹⁶

5. Death / Burial of Jane Smith, 4 August 1819, Gloucester County, New Jersey

Stewart, Frank, H., *Notes on Old Gloucester County, New Jersey, Vol. II, The Prospectus of the Columbian Herald* (Philadelphia: New Jersey society of Pennsylvania, 1934), p.167 (163-177); digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 21 July 2021); locate through database of same title.

See #3 (above) for a detailed analysis of this source. According to Stewart (p.163), the first entry in The “Coffin Book of John Simmermon” was made in 1807; the last in 1847. Stewart included a “guide” of sorts (p.163) for understanding the content:

- “Simmermons’ seem to have charged for the digging of many graves in the Strangers, Wards, and other small yards not under the control of religious societies.
- Charges as a rule, were dated the day of death or the next day.
- Where a name only appears, it means that person had died.
- If followed by child, mother, wife, etc., it means the relationship to the person charged.
- In some cases, the charge is made to the person who paid the bill where no close relationship existed.” [bullets mine]

The pages listing the information Stewart provided are organized by year, under which the month – day is listed, to the right of which is listed any information for persons corresponding with that date. The extracted information for Jane Smith reads:

“1819 [left side column of page]
[p.167, right side column of page]
8-4—Jane Smith, order of Jacob Glover.”

¹⁵ Ruthe Baker, transcriber. *The Diaries Of Samuel Mickle, 1792-1829, Volume II* (1991; reprint, Woodbury, New Jersey: Gloucester County Historical Society, 2003), 127.

¹⁶ Wordmakerinfo.com (<https://wordmaker.info/starting-ending/thr-t.html> : accessed 23 June 2021).

This source is derivative, its information secondary, and its evidence indirect in that it does not mention Ishmael Smith in relation to Jane Smith, or name either of them as people of color. It does provide evidence that a Jane Smith died a few days after Black Ishmael Smith's wife cut her own throat. It is also suggestive that Mickle knew she was still alive when he made the diary entry. If this Jane Smith is Ishmael's wife, the fact that Jacob Glover ordered (and was charged for) her burial, may indicate that Ishmael was not in position or location to make the necessary arrangements himself.

6. Marriage of Ishmael Smith to Comfort Farmer, 6 February 1820, Gloucester County, New Jersey

"New Jersey County Marriages, 1682-1956," Gloucester County Register of Deeds, Marriages, 1795-1907, Vol. B, 1815-1829, p.73-74, Ishmael Smith-Comfort Farmer, 6 February 1820; digital collection, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939Z-1Z9M-55?mode=g&i=230&cc=1803976> : accessed 15 June 2021),

United States, New Jersey > Gloucester County > Vital Records > Marriages, 1795-1907 > image 230-231, Ishmael Smith to Comfort Farmer, 6 February 1820.

Begin Extraction:

[Beginning with last entry page 73, continuing with first entry page 74]

"73

Be it remembered that on the Sixth day of February 1820 Came before me the subscriber a Justice of the Peace in & for the County of Gloucester

74
Ishmael Smith a man of Colour in the Town of Gloucester and Comfort Farmer of the same place and were joined together in the Holy bands of Matrimony by me

William Zane J.P"

End Extraction

This source is original, its information primary, and its evidence indirect in that it does not directly answer the research question. Viewed in context with the previously listed sources, it is entirely possible that this Ishmael Smith is the same person:

- who died in the Prune Street Prison on 21 April 1822
- whose wife cut her own throat on 30 July 1819
 - and subsequently died on 4 August 1819
- whose brother died on 14 July 1818
- who was manumitted on 24 Dec 1807, and
- who married Jane Guest on 13 Feb 1804

7. Death of Ishmael Smith, April 21st, 1822

"Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803-1915," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-DBBW-GG3?i=707&cc=1320976&personaUrl=%2Fark%3A%2F61903%2F1%3A1%3AJ6ZQ-2JM> : 15 June 2021),

004009776 > image 708 of 1994, Ishmael Smith, April 21st, 1822; Philadelphia City Archives and Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Begin Transcription:

[Half sheet of paper on which information (below) is handwritten, lain over a larger sheet of paper – could be the reverse side of another record – on which is penned “City Public Ground” and is positioned upside down]

“(Black)[vertically written in left page border] Ishmael Smith aged 37 years Died April 21st 1822
In the Prune St Prison of Nervous Fever.

Henry[?] Neill[?]
Enld [Entd for Entered?] Aprl 21st – 22”

End Transcription

This is an original source containing primary (date and place of death, burial place) and secondary (decedent’s age) information. Its evidence is indirect because it does not answer the requestion, but by the same token, it does not conflict with any of the other records naming Ishmael Smith. This is likely the same Ishmael Smith mentioned in the other records.

Nothing uncovered to date explains why Ishmael Smith was incarcerated. Circumstances surrounding his 1st(?) wife’s wounding and likely death, coupled with the report of his death in prison begs investigation, if only for the record. The two instances may not be connected.

The Prune Street prison, erected on the grounds of the Walnut Street Prison, was initially a workhouse that came to be used for the confinement of debtors.¹⁷ Frank H. Stewart’s “Notes”, contains the occasional news report of Gloucester County residents sent to the Philadelphia debtors’ jail; .¹⁸ though none were found that preceded Ishmael Smith’s death.

End of Research Notes.

Suggestions for Further Research:

Possible directions for further research include:

1. Pressing to discover more about the reason Ishmael Smith was incarcerated.
2. Pressing to discover more about Ishmael Smith’s brother, and family of origin.
3. Pressing to discover whether Ishmael Smith had offspring with either of his wives.
4. Pressing to discover more about Comfort Farmer Smith, Ishmael’s 2nd(?) wife.

¹⁷ Sharf, J. Thomas, and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 2609-1884, Vol. III* (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts & Co., 1884) 1827 (image 131); *Google Books* (<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=8uYkAAAYAAJ&pg=GBS.PA1702&hl=en> : accessed 22 July 2021).

¹⁸ Stewart, Frank, H., *Notes on Old Gloucester County, New Jersey, Vol. II, The Prospectus of the Columbian Herald* (Philadelphia: New Jersey society of Pennsylvania, 1934), p.56 (image 401 of 982); digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<https://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 23 July 2021); locate through database of same title.