

519 SMITH, BENJAMIN

Bookbinder

Charles City County

Bookbinder from Charles City County in 1756.

Benjamin Smith is known to have been a part of the Virginia print trade as a result of his enlistment in the militia force raised in the summer of 1756. The rolls taken for his company in both August 1756 and August 1757 record that he was a bookbinder from England.

After the July 1755 defeat of Gen. Edward Braddock near Fort Duquesne, the British forces he had brought to America retreated to Philadelphia to await a new commander with new orders. This left the small settlements of Virginia's western frontier vulnerable to recurring raids by the native peoples of the Ohio River Valley. In May 1756, in reaction to those raids, the General Assembly authorized Gov. Robert Dinwiddie to raise a provincial regiment of some 1500 men to defend those frontier settlements; he promoted George Washington to colonel and gave him command of this new force.

Benjamin Smith was one of the earliest enrollees, signing up for the force in Williamsburg in June 1756 – even before Dinwiddie had finalized Washington's orders on the regiment's formation. As a result of his prompt enlistment, Smith was assigned to the new force's 1st Company, which was commanded by Washington himself. Consequently, he is recorded in the company's muster lists – called size rolls from Washington being required to equalize the manpower in each of the sixteen companies raised – in August 1756 and August 1757. By the time of the latter roll, Smith's company had been a part of Washington's efforts to build a chain of forts along the western frontier, mostly in the Valley of Virginia, to stymie Indian activity until a new expedition could be launched against Fort Duquesne. Yet after that enumeration, Smith disappears from view. Washington's company was broken up and dispersed in late 1757 when the colonel took ill and returned to Mount Vernon.

Still, the two size rolls provide some basic information concerning Smith, beyond his trade. He had been born in England; was twenty-seven when he enrolled; stood 5 feet, 5 inches tall; and was of medium build and red complexion with brown hair. It appears that he was a resident of Charles City County, but was working in Suffolk when he enrolled, although a discrepancy between the two in their place reports could mark a reverse of that description.

Unfortunately, his extremely common name makes tracing this bookbinders life further essentially impossible, particularly as he does not appear anywhere in the bibliographic record of Virginia imprints.

Personal Data

Born: ca. 1729 in England.

Sources: Bockstruck, *Virginia's Colonial Soldiers*.